TEACH ONE REACH ONE

Effective
Children's Ministry

Chapter 1 – Defining Children's Ministry

Christians often have wildly divergent views of what constitutes an effective children's ministry. Many of these viewpoints can result in a children's ministry that does little to help children grow spiritually or to support parents in their Christian parenting efforts. It does not have to be that way. Understanding children and what they need to grow spiritually can help Christians create effective ministries for them.

The expectations of children in general can vary greatly by culture. In some countries today, about 20% of children are employed to earn money to help support their families[1]. In other cultures, young people are not expected to contribute to family survival and may not seek employment until their late teen or early adult years. Education is considered a right for children in many countries, with almost every child attending free schools. In other areas, even government sponsored schools require money for uniforms and supplies that many families do not have. These children are often uneducated or leave school at very young ages because they cannot afford the required basic school supplies.

Expectations of children who attend church can also vary from congregation to congregation. Some congregations view their children as primarily a distraction for the adults attending. They consider children's ministry a way to amuse little ones while leaving the adults free to study the Bible or worship. Other locations may understand the importance of children and a ministry for them, but are using methods and materials that are ineffective. A few Christians even think it is a waste of time to attempt to teach children anything meaningful about God until they are adolescents, because they do not understand the potential of children to learn and understand difficult concepts.

In reality, the childhood years are often the most formative in a person's faith journey. Many believe a young person's worldview is basically in place before the teen years[2]. Often, young people reach the age of accountability and are baptized to become a Christian during late childhood or early adolescence. In fact, the vast majority of Christians make the decision to become a Christian before adulthood[3]. Children's ministry should be a top priority for churches, since it is possibly the most influential period of an individual's spiritual formation.

For children to build strong spiritual foundations and reach their godly potential, we need to understand how children learn. We need to examine educational best practices and spiritual growth research. Churches and ministries need to take the time and effort to minister to children in the most effective ways possible. Much of this book will examine

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[1] International Labour Organization, "Child Labour."
[2] Strayer University, "When Americans Become Christians."
[3] National Association of Evangelicals, "When Americans Become Christians."

topics like human growth and development and educational best practices to see how understanding them can make ministries to children more effective.

> **Godly Potential** is the potential God gives each child spiritually, cognitively, emotionally, and physically, as well as special gifts or talents. Each child's potential is different, but children need the help of others to actually reach their godly potential.

Fundamentals of Children's Ministry
The ultimate goal of any ministry to children should be to help those precious little ones have everything they need to become faithful, productive Christians when they are older. To achieve this goal your ministry should find ways to provide children with:
- **Bible Knowledge**. Children need to be exposed to a variety of Bible stories and scripture passages. They need to begin understanding who God is and what He wants from them and for them during their lifetime.
- **Application Principles.** Children need to learn that God has placed lessons within Bible stories that He wants His people to learn. They should begin learning how to find these application principles in a Bible story and how to apply them to their lives now and in the future.
- **Christian Life Skills.** Older children should begin learning the skills needed to do the things God wants them to do. These practical skills are necessary to put God's commands and principles into action in their lives.
- **Gift Discovery, Development and Use.** God has given each child one or more gifts to use to do the good works He has prepared for them in advance. Children need help identifying, developing and beginning to use their gifts to serve God.
- **Servant Leadership Skills.** Not every child will grow up to be a ministry leader or elder. Many children will, however, become leaders in their occupations, neighborhoods, families and other groups. Hopefully every child will grow up equipped to lead others to Christ. By helping children develop godly servant leadership skills, they will be better prepared to effectively lead others in the opportunities God gives them.

Analyzing Local Needs
Whether you are beginning a new ministry to children or hoping to make a current one more effective, the process begins with analyzing the current situation for the children in your area. Who are these children? What are their home environments? What struggles do their families face? What additional special challenges do the children in your area encounter? What is the faith background and experience of their families? What are their parents teaching them at home about God and the Bible?

When working with children, you also have to understand their individual family dynamic. Children do not have the same freedoms most teens have in choosing whether or not to attend church. Parents often make those choices for children. Even though parents may choose to involve their children in your ministry without attending church themselves, you will need to establish some sort of rapport with them if you want to effectively minister to their children. That rapport often begins with listening to parents and attempting to understand their hopes and fears for their children.

It is tempting to think you already know everything about the children in your area. It may seem an unnecessary waste of resources to have conversations with parents you already know or who may never attend your church or allow their children to be involved in your ministry. Unfortunately, our assumptions may be very inaccurate. Generalization biases can cause us to take what we have observed about one or two families and inaccurately assume every family in our area has those same dynamics[4]. This is one of the reasons ministries can seem out of touch with the realities of those to whom they minister.

When looking for general statistics about the issues facing a population of a particular area, most people look for government statistics. Unfortunately, government statistics on children are often difficult to find. Either they are not measured, or children are part of a larger age grouping that includes teens. Often the most accurate and helpful way to find out about the children your ministry will serve is to survey the parents in your area.

Written surveys can be helpful, but one-on-one and small group interviews can give you more information and allow for important follow up questions and conversations. Convincing parents to participate can be difficult. They may not believe you will really hear their concerns or they may believe you will use the information to embarrass, rather than help their families. Your ministry may have to build trust in the community to have the access you need to crucial information and ultimately to serve the children in your area[5].

Building Trust
Often, your ministry has to work to build trust before the parents in your area will be willing to allow you to fully minister to their children. With Christian parents, this trust can occur naturally if your ministry provides quality Bible classes and ministry events, keeps promises, and establishes relationships with children and their parents based on mutual respect. Consistently and actively demonstrating your love and concern for their children will also encourage parents to have faith in your ministry.

Community parents may be suspicious of your ministry at first. There are many reasons this wariness of your ministry exists. You may need to do things to begin building relationships with them in more secular ways to gain their trust. Community parents may

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[4] Logically Fallacious, "Hasty Generalization."
[5] See Appendix 1: Conducting a Ministry Survey

not want to participate in overtly Christian activities at first. Many, however, will come to your facilities to receive help with the felt needs they or their children have. These events will introduce families to your facility. Parents may also be more willing to learn about your ministry during conversations you have with them while meeting some of their family's felt needs.

> **Felt Needs** are needs experienced consciously that may relate to a sense of deprivation in those areas. Felt needs often include material goods (such as food, water, clothing and shelter) as well as needs for support services (like healthcare or tutoring).

Establishing a Feedback Cycle
Ministries to children can have rapidly changing dynamics. The data you gathered from the parents of children served by your ministry and in your community a year ago may no longer be accurate. It is important for your ministry to establish a regular feedback cycle. You may choose to go back to the parents you originally questioned and survey them again. Or you may add data from new families in the area. You can use some of the same questions you did initially or add new ones to get better information on a particular community need or aspect of your ministry.

It is important to remember that many families base their decisions about church attendance almost entirely on the perceived level of quality of the ministry to their children. If parents have concerns about your ministry, they may never express them to anyone. They are more likely to send their children to your classes and activities less frequently, or begin taking their children elsewhere. Having periodic feedback opportunities can help you identify potential issues and address them before they begin to more negatively impact your ministry and the children you serve. They can also alert you to new ministry opportunities you may miss without the feedback of parents.

Identifying Existing Resources
Once you have a more accurate picture of the children in your area, their families and their issues, it can be helpful to understand the access children already have to other ministries and secular services to address their felt needs. Many ministries to children have found the most effective way to encourage parents to send their children to Bible classes is to also address the felt needs of the parents or their children. If other groups in your area are already meeting those needs successfully, it may be wiser to find a different felt need with which many families are still struggling.

You can find available services for children in your area by asking local families or doing your own research. Often school administrators can give you a list of popular community resources for children in your area. If they will speak to you, school administrators can also inform you of the needs their students may have that are not currently met by local schools and organizations.

Before you jump into a new ministry for children or add a new aspect to your current ministry, we need to discuss volunteer recruitment, training and retention. Volunteers are critical to ministries to children perhaps more than in any other ministry. Before making any ministry decisions, you will need to know whether or not you will be able to minister in those ways effectively with your volunteers. In the next chapter, we will explore the basics of using volunteers in ministering to children.

Discussion Questions
1. Are there available statistics about the children in your area or the problems they may face? If so, what are they?
2. What questions should you include on a parent survey that will give you the information your ministry needs?
3. What information is the local school administration willing to share with you regarding the needs and services for children in your area?
4. Analyzing the information you have gathered, what are the top three felt needs children in your area have that could possibly enhance your ministry to them?

Chapter 2 – Children's Ministry Volunteers

Most ministries have volunteers who perform the tasks associated with that ministry. While all ministry volunteers are important, those involved in children's ministry are critical to its success. Children need more adult assistance performing some of the tasks required to participate in Bible classes and activities. There are also safety issues with younger children, who need adults to help them clearly understand how to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

Groups that license and supervise childcare and educational institutions have developed what they consider to be the minimum safe ratios of adults to children[6]. Understandably, older children need fewer adults helping them than infants or younger children. The recommended adult to child ratio for each age group is as follows:
- **Birth to 2 years:** one adult for every three children
- **Ages 2-3 years:** one adult for every four children
- **Ages 4-8 years:** one adult for every six children
- **Ages 9-12 years:** one adult for every eight children

If at all possible, you should plan on having a minimum of two unrelated adults in every grouping of children. Even if the group size only requires one adult, having that extra adult provides another layer of assistance for both emergencies and regular classroom needs.

Aside from safety considerations, it is not necessary to have a large number of people to begin ministering to children. Many very effective ministries have started with only a handful of volunteers. In fact, it is perhaps better to begin a ministry to children with a handful of loving, dedicated Christians rather than having a large group of volunteers who are only serving because they were pressured to help and have no real interest in ministering to children.

Recruiting Volunteers
Ministries to children often find they spend a great deal of time in recruiting new volunteers to either cover expansion or more commonly, to replace volunteers who have left the ministry. This recruitment time could be lessened if leaders were more intentional in their recruitment of volunteers. The methods many use are ineffective or result in volunteers who are not placed in optimum roles for their talents, training and interests.

It is important that any leader recruiting children's ministry volunteers has the tools necessary to be effective in this task. These tools include both the knowledge of recruitment best practices and the policies and procedures to ensure potential volunteers are appropriately prepared to fulfill their roles.

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[6] National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. "Recommended Adult to Child Ratios."

Volunteer Recruitment Best Practices
Recruitment of volunteers for a children's ministry will be more difficult if you do not use best practices. These are not difficult to understand or implement, but can be more time consuming than the recruitment methods many leaders often use. Using recruitment best practices will actually save time, as volunteer retention often improves when these practices are used.

- **Approach potential volunteers personally.** General congregational announcements are often ineffective. Personal conversations give an opportunity for both parties to ask important questions. One on one conversations also make the potential volunteer aware that your ministry is specifically interested in his or her particular gifts and talents. General announcements often result in people who are unsure whether or not your ministry could actually use the type of assistance they can provide.
- **Develop volunteer roles based on specific gifts and talents.** To save time, many ministries to children often combine several gifts and talents into one larger role. Often volunteers are only gifted in one or two of those areas. A Bible class teacher, for example, may be asked to not only plan and teach the Bible lesson, but also decorate the room, purchase supplies, prepare activities, handle any technical equipment they may need and more. A volunteer may be an excellent Bible class teacher, but have no artistic or technical talents or abilities. When volunteers are being asked to do things for which they are not gifted, they can become frustrated and produce less than optimum results in those areas. Although it may seem more time consuming to break each role into smaller tasks requiring only one or two gifts, it can actually save you time and improve the effectiveness of your ministry.
- **Place volunteers in roles that are the best match for the gifts God has given them, any training or experience they may have and their interests.** Placing people in roles for which they are not gifted usually results in a high turnover of volunteers. Taking the extra time to match volunteers to the tasks which God has prepared them to do will make future recruiting less difficult and in most cases volunteers will continue serving your ministry for long periods of time. As you go through this process, remember to look for special skills, training or experience people may have in special segments of ministry to children like tutoring, working with orphans, teaching children with special needs, etc. Finding people with these special gifts may give you an idea of the specific groups of children God wants your ministry to serve first.
- **Assist people with gift discovery and development in order to recruit them or place them in appropriate roles.** Many Christians are unaware of the gifts God has given them to serve Him. They may be reluctant to volunteer in an area where they are gifted, because they honestly are unaware they have that particular gift. Having them complete a gift survey that focuses more on talents and interests can often uncover these hidden gifts or talents.[7]

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[7] See Appendix 2 Gift Identification Survey

- **Accommodate the preferences of volunteers whenever possible.** People who work with children often have particular age groups they prefer. This may be because of their training, experience or personalities. It is important to honor these requests if possible. Placing a volunteer who is unprepared to teach infants, for example, teaching babies instead of their preference of older children, can cause a variety of issues for the volunteer, the children and ultimately your ministry. It is also important to consider the breaks the volunteer requests when scheduling their volunteer time. Regularly ignoring specific requests for certain periods of time in which they are relieved of their volunteer duties can cause volunteers to stop serving permanently.
- **Give volunteers an accurate representation of their responsibilities and the time that will be required to do them properly.** Volunteers will become frustrated if they find you have misrepresented their responsibilities or the amount of time it will take to do them well. Or they may only give the specific amount of time they were told their volunteer role will require, which may result in the tasks being inadequately completed. You may want to consider giving a range that includes the minimum expectations as well as the additional ways they can serve the children if they are willing to invest additional time and effort in their ministry role.

Volunteer Screening
Unfortunately, there are occasionally people who offer to volunteer for children's ministry because they want to take advantage of children and hurt them in some way. These predators want to use children for their own sinful purposes. They often volunteer to serve in ministries because they believe Christians are less likely to run background checks and will give them easy, unsupervised or unmonitored access to children. When these predators encounter a rigorous screening process, they will often quickly move on to another organization.

It may be tempting to skip the screening process with volunteers you have known for some time. Unfortunately, we do not always know people as well as we think we do. Ministers and long time, trusted volunteers all over the world have been caught preying on children. Thankfully, the numbers of these predators are relatively small, but for the sake of the children served by your ministry, it is important to screen everyone who will have any contact with them.

Your screening of volunteers should require potential volunteers to complete an application with contact information, education, past church affiliations, and any applicable work or volunteer experiences. They should also be required to sign a statement that they have never been arrested or convicted of a crime against a minor under the age of eighteen.

If your volunteers are visiting or moving from the United States or other countries where it is possible to run a criminal records check, they should have their results sent to you directly by the agency conducting the search. Wealthy predators will often travel to other countries to prey on young people. They may choose to pose as a temporary or permanent volunteer in your ministry. While criminal records checks only show convictions for felonies, they are inexpensive and serve as a deterrent to predators.

Whether or not you can access a criminal records check on your volunteers, you should ask them to provide personal references you can contact. If they have moved from another area as an adult, at least one of those references should be someone in their previous location. Preferably, they should also provide at least one reference who has seen them work with children in the past as either a volunteer or an employee.

When checking references, it is important to specifically ask the reference for one way in which the potential volunteer could improve. Many people are uncomfortable sharing negative information about someone. If you ask a more generic question about problem areas, you will often get an answer that is not helpful and may be hiding information you need to know. Asking for a specific area needing improvement, however, often yields information about potential problems the person may cause as a volunteer.

Any potentially negative information you discover when checking references may not be that the person will harm children. It could also be about their abilities to work well with others, their dependability, their lack of Bible knowledge or other information that could impact your ministry in some way. Often this knowledge will allow you to train or provide tools that can help the potential volunteer compensate for his or her weaknesses. Otherwise, you may not find out about potential issues until they have already negatively impacted your ministry.

Volunteer Training
Once you have identified and screened potential volunteers, it is important to provide both initial and periodic training for them. Training allows you to communicate to volunteers detailed expectations for various aspects of their volunteer service. It can also give them skills training they may need to perform their role more effectively. At times, volunteers may experience specific challenges or problems that can be addressed with additional training in those areas.

Volunteer training can occur in both formal and informal settings, and even virtually. If you only have one or two volunteers in your ministry, you may prefer for training to be more conversational over a cup of coffee or a meal. For larger groups of volunteers, it is often easier to have workshops or other more formal types of training. If you and your volunteers have the resources, you can set up virtual training videos and study units they can access online at their convenience.

Many ministries require anyone volunteering in children's ministry to attend the basic classroom training, whether or not they will actually be teaching. This is in part so every volunteer understands the expectations of your ministry and can communicate them clearly when children or parents have questions.

Providing all of this training takes several hours. You may prefer to cover the basics in an initial training session for volunteers. Eventually this training will be repeated for any new volunteers. Depending on the size of your ministry and your resources, you can video the initial training session for subsequent volunteers to watch before beginning their roles.

Some of the other possible training topics listed below could be addressed in regular shorter training sessions or even in newsletters or emails. You may want to establish a procedure to make sure every volunteer has received the training your ministry believes is mandatory for its volunteers.

This list contains general training topics many ministries provide for volunteers. Within each topic, additional areas of training may be suggested. Depending upon the amount of time available for training, these subtopics could be broken off into shorter training units.

- **Safety, policies and procedures.** This session should include any safety rules and policies your ministry has established for both children and volunteers[8]. Many ministries also provide basic or advanced first aid training. Depending upon the scope of your ministry and local ordinances, specific types of first aid training may be mandated by local statutes or governing bodies. While classroom management is a separate training topic, your safety training should include your ministry's policies for handling children who are disrupting lessons, bothering other children or endangering themselves or others.
- **Planning an effective Bible class.** This session should include topics like setting learning goals and objectives, framing guiding questions, creating an engaging learning environment, curriculum guidance, volunteer spiritual nourishment and growth and anything else that would be needed for creating an effective Bible class.
- **Teaching impactful Bible lessons.** This session should include topics like studying the Bible in order to teach a lesson, storytelling techniques for both Bible stories and personal faith stories, using scripture in Bible lessons, adding cultural and archaeological facts, teaching application principles, encouraging scripture memorization and more.
- **Managing classroom behavior.** This session should address how to manage student behavior to maximize learning and spiritual growth. Topics should include managing classroom behavior (specifically addressing both appropriate and inappropriate options), creating a healthy learning environment and a review of student and volunteer safety policies and procedures.

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[8] See Appendix 3: Suggested Safety Policies for Children's Ministry

- **Creating and using effective Bible class activities.** This session should cover the basics of designing and using activities for Bible classes that incorporate educational best practices. Topics should include analyzing suggested activities, adapting activities and creating original activities.
- **Exploring specific types of Bible class activities.** These could be shorter separate sessions for each type of activity or one longer session covering multiple activities. You may want to include training on using educational best practices to develop and use Bible class activities like drama, arts and crafts, project based learning, games, service projects and learning excursions.
- **Engaging parents and other adults in the spiritual education of young people.** This session is a more advanced one that gives volunteers the tools to encourage parents and other Christian adults in your congregation to become more engaged in the spiritual education of children. It should include topics like encouraging parents to teach their children the Bible at home, mentoring young people, developing a meaningful Christian community for children and more.
- **Mentoring Christian parents.** This session is a more advanced one for volunteers who are asked Christian parenting questions by the parents of their students. It should give them tips and tools for not only encouraging parents, but also helping them navigate the Christian parenting issues with which they may struggle.

While this training list seems overwhelming, it is critical to train volunteers well if you want to have the most effective ministry possible. Use a variety of teachers and tools (like this book) to help you plan and teach sessions. Take advantage of free online resources like those on the Teach One Reach One Ministries website.[9] Encourage volunteers to attend training by making it a time of encouragement and fellowship as well as a chance to learn how to minister to children more effectively.

Volunteer Assessment
Most volunteers in children's ministry can teach children the Bible for decades without ever having their classes observed or assessed by ministry or church leaders. Leaders assume Bible class teachers are teaching children the Bible accurately and in ways that are impacting their students in spiritually positive ways.

Unless a parent complains to someone about a particular incident or issue, most leaders have no idea what is actually occurring in their Bible classes for children. They assume the curriculum is being followed as written, when in many cases it is not. Leaders believe teachers are teaching the same basic Christian theology to children, when they may be introducing ideas that are not an accurate reflection of scripture. Volunteers may also be interacting with students in ways that are more harmful than helpful to them. In extreme cases, volunteers may even be endangering the children in their care.

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[9] www.teachonereachone.org

It is crucial that each of the volunteers who teaches the children served by your ministry is regularly assessed while teaching. This process should not make them feel stressed or unappreciated. It does not inherently indicate a distrust of them or their skills. Assessment should be considered by everyone as a tool for making your ministry to children as effective as it can possibly be.

Your assessment should include teacher preparation as well as the various aspects of a Bible class in your ministry[10]. Classes and teachers should be assessed on a regular basis - at least annually. It is often less stressful for a volunteer if the person assessing is in and out of the classroom on a regular basis. The items can be assessed without the need for bringing in the formal assessment tool and marking on it throughout the class time. This more informal assessment may take longer, but over time may give you a clearer idea of strengths and weaknesses.

Volunteers should understand that the assessment is not merely about their teaching skills. Assessing a Bible class can also give you information about your curriculum, student knowledge, the activities and resources you are using and even student behavior and attitudes. Sometimes what you think will happen when planning or purchasing a curriculum, for example, is very different from what happens when it is used with your specific Bible students. Assessment allows you to see the strengths and weaknesses of your ministry as well as individual volunteers.

It is important to note that unlike a business, this assessment is not meant to reward or punish your volunteers. Rather it gives you information about the areas where one or more volunteers may need special training or mentoring, as well as aspects of your overall ministry that may need to change. Volunteers should feel encouraged after an assessment is completed. (The only exception would be if you discovered the volunteer is hurting or endangering the children.)

Any weaknesses you observe should be addressed with love and kindness. Not everyone has had the same experience and training to teach children. Even master teachers can have a lesson that is a failure. While some weaknesses may need to be addressed individually, many can be improved by providing additional guidance, resources or training to all of your volunteers.

The important thing to remember is that, as with many skills, teachers should improve over time with more training, guidance and practice. If you have a volunteer who does not improve or shows no interest in becoming a more effective teacher, you may have to find another role in your ministry for that person. Your Bible students' spiritual growth is your top priority. You cannot place a volunteer's ego over the needs of the children.

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[10] See Appendix 4: Classroom Assessment Tool

Any volunteer whom you believe should be reassigned, should be met with in private. If you feel uncomfortable, ask an elder or minister for advice in handling the conversation. Often though, people who are not able to fill a volunteer role well are secretly relieved when offered a chance to do something else. You want the volunteer to feel loved and valued as your Christian sister or brother even if you believe it is in the best interest of the children to have them taught by someone else.

Volunteer Encouragement and Retention
People usually volunteer for children's ministry roles because they love children and are passionate about teaching them about God. Unfortunately, it is easy for leaders to forget that even the most dedicated volunteer needs occasional encouragement. In the New Testament, the writers of the epistles spent time encouraging their Christian brothers and sisters. They understood how crucial encouragement is to effective, long term ministry.

Often the best encouragement for volunteers in children's ministry comes from the children themselves. Watching children become excited as they learn about God, understand what God wants them to do or remember things they have been previously taught is very encouraging to someone who is teaching.

Volunteers also appreciate when children are excited to see them, give them hugs or thank them at the end of class. Try to encourage students to show appreciation to their teachers, especially by thanking them at the end of class. You may also want to provide opportunities for students and their parents to send notes of encouragement and appreciation to your volunteers.

Leaders often believe it is necessary to give small gifts of appreciation to volunteers. While volunteers appreciate a piece of chocolate or a flower, most would be even more encouraged by a personalized conversation or note of appreciation. When every volunteer is given the same little gift and note, it can feel impersonal to some people and may not have the same impact as a more personalized form of encouragement.

Positive feedback is a great way to encourage volunteers. Tell them about the specific things they have done well in their class or the children they have influenced in a positive way. Share with them the stories you hear of children or parents who have made positive changes or shown growth because of their efforts. Let them know you are sharing with other volunteers some of the things they are doing in class because you believe it can help in other classes, too.

Children's ministries often fail to retain volunteers, because the volunteers believe their efforts are not making a positive difference. Often this discouragement comes from little incidents or from a lack of positive feedback or appreciation over a long period of time. Volunteers can also become discouraged when they believe their ideas and concerns are not heard by leaders.

Few volunteers expect leaders to incorporate every idea they have or agree with all of their concerns. They do, however, expect to be heard when they choose to share them with leaders. To feel heard, a volunteer wants leaders to actively listen to them and ask appropriate questions. They want to know what will be done with the information they have shared - who else will hear their thoughts and how a decision will be made as to whether or not your ministry will pursue the conversation further.

If leaders decide they do not want to use the idea or do not agree with the concern, volunteers want to understand why that decision was made if at all possible. When volunteers take the time to share something with leaders and receive no feedback on the conversation, they will feel unheard and frustrated. This frustration can lead to a larger group of volunteers who become frustrated and can spread to parents and even the children in some cases. If it happens to the same volunteers more than once, they will most likely stop volunteering to serve in your ministry.

Recruiting, training, assessing and encouraging volunteers takes time and effort. When volunteer management is done well, however, it can help make your ministry as effective as possible. Look closely at a children's ministry that is failing to reach its potential and volunteer management has often been neglected.

Now that you have volunteers ready to serve, it is important to have a strong foundation for the framework of your ministry to children and their families. In the next chapter, we will explore some of the basics of an effective ministry to children.

Discussion Questions
1. Describe six best practices for volunteer recruiting.
2. Why is volunteer screening necessary?
3. What are some methods of volunteer screening?
4. What are some important topics to cover in volunteer training?
5. Why is it important to regularly assess volunteers when they are teaching?
6. What are some important ways to encourage children's ministry volunteers?

Chapter 3 – Establishing a Ministry to Children

Ministries to children are often established quickly to address an immediate need. Those beginning the ministry, may not have had the time to address some important foundational aspects of an effective ministry to children. Whether you are hoping to make an existing ministry more effective or beginning a new one, taking the time to complete these foundational tasks will increase the effectiveness of your ministry over time.

Strategic Plan
God should direct your ministry, but the Bible teaches us that we need plans and advisors to be successful.[11] A strategic plan is an attempt to lay a course for your ministry. God may choose to alter the course or the timing of the various aspects of your plan. Without a strategic plan, however, your ministry may never be as effective as it might have been. A strategic plan makes it easier to see where God is leading your ministry, because of the ways He interacts with your plan.

Creating a strategic plan takes time and the efforts of your entire ministry team. You will need to have at least two or three meetings of those working on the strategic plan. Each meeting can take several hours. Some work can be done between meetings to make the meetings more efficient. These strategic planning meetings should include your ministry leadership team, key volunteers and a few parents.

A strategic plan consists of several parts, which are examined at length below.

Ministry Analysis
For existing ministries, you will be carefully examining everything you are currently doing. New ministries will be looking at the resources you have to begin your ministry. Surveying parents and volunteers is your best source of information. If you are ministering to older children, you may also want to get their feedback. You can use the information you gathered from the survey in the first chapter or create a new set of questions.[12]

Volunteers should be asked questions about their experiences with your ministry. What are their feelings about volunteering for your ministry? Are there frustrations they have about certain aspects of your ministry like resources, volunteer support, curriculum, etc.? How well do they believe your ministry is serving children and their families? Do they have concerns or praise? Do they see opportunities for growth?

Once you have all of the data you have gathered compiled, you will want to analyze it. In addition to the feedback from others, those participating in the strategic planning process

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[11] Proverbs 15:22
[12] See Appendix 1: Conducting a Ministry Survey

should add their thoughts and ideas to each area below. Feedback should be placed in one of four categories:

1. **Strengths**. What is your ministry currently doing well? If you are beginning a new ministry, what are the resources you can use in ministering to children? Both current and new ministries should include assets like volunteers, curriculum, facilities, etc. - if they are indeed a strength.
2. **Weaknesses.** What are the areas of your ministry that need improvement? For new ministries, what resources are still missing that you will need to be effective? Weaknesses can be minor or major things. At this point in the plan, do not worry about how many items are in this area or if you will be able to attain these resources or correct these issues in the near future.
3. **Threats.** This list will be very short for most ministries. It should include things like natural disasters that can occur in your area and any outside dynamic that could impact the number of volunteers or families in your area. This often includes factories or any entity that employs a large number of people, who would go elsewhere to find work, should the local source of employment close. Hopefully, these things will never happen, but you need to have thought through some strategies to prepare for potentially catastrophic events.
4. **Opportunities.** This is the most enjoyable part of strategic planning. What are all of those great ideas everyone has for strengthening or expanding your ministry? Encourage everyone to share their ideas - no matter how impractical they may seem. This is especially important if you find several people have had the same "impractical" idea that continues to bother them. This may be a sign the Holy Spirit is trying to urge your group to minister to a particular new group of children or add something that will help children build stronger faith foundations and grow to their godly potential. It may not be, but those areas need to be starred and examined carefully at a later point in the strategic planning process.

Core Beliefs
Core beliefs are the values through which all of your ministry decisions should be filtered. Of course, they should be biblical and matched to an applicable scripture. These beliefs should be revisited frequently to ensure your ministry is staying on course. Without these core beliefs, many Christian organizations find themselves becoming secular within a few years, retaining only the Christian label.

Your core beliefs should reflect a desire to help the children in your ministry build strong faith foundations. Most ministries also include a statement about the connection between baptism and becoming a Christian. You want to list any other critical beliefs upon which your ministry is founded.

The Problem
There are obviously a lot of problems that can keep children from having the strong spiritual foundations they will need to live a Christian life. There are also a number of

problems facing children that are keeping them from living a healthy, full life. Your ministry can not solve every problem facing the children in your area.

Your ministry team needs to choose a focus. Will you only provide classes and activities that teach children the Bible and what God wants from them and for them? Will you address a felt need of children in your area as a way to serve them and introduce them to God? If so, which problem is your ministry best equipped to address?

As your volunteer base grows, you may choose to address additional problems. Be careful to grow with God and not get ahead of His plans for your ministry. When your ministry tries to do too much too quickly, you will find that your ministry is quickly overextended and not as effective as it could be.

Your Mission
Your mission is based on the pieces of the problem your ministry has decided to address. The mission statement should only be one or two sentences. It is an easy way to explain to others what your ministry is attempting to do to serve the children in your area.

Setting Goals
Once you have captured your strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, you are ready to begin setting goals for your ministry. Your goals should be as specific and measurable as possible. Later you will add dates by which you hope they will be completed. [13] While God ultimately will control the success and timing of these goals, goal setting is crucial for your ministry.

Having goals encourages everyone associated with your ministry to focus on the same priorities. Ministry goals also provide ways to have more productive conversations about how well the goal is being met. Without written measurable goals, people will define success or failure in very different ways. This can lead to conflicts and eventually undermine your ministry. Goals and the action plans attached to them will help ministries be as effective as possible, because everyone knows what needs to be accomplished and their individual role in achieving the goal.

Setting Priorities
Your ministry should only focus on three to four goals at any one time. If you attempt to accomplish more than that, your efforts will be scattered and it is unlikely any goal will be completed well and in a timely fashion.

When you created your goals, you probably had more than four goals. That is wonderful! Your ministry team is obviously passionate about reaching the children in your area. If you were tempted to discourage goals that seemed too ambitious, go back now and add them

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[13] See Appendix 5: Setting Ministry Goals

to your list. God can do anything and it is important to not attempt to limit Him because of our doubts and fears.

At this point, your team needs to prioritize your goals. Which goals will have the greatest positive impact on your ministry? Are there any goals that can be completed quickly and with a limited number of volunteers? Are there goals correcting deficiencies that are currently putting the children to whom you minister at risk of danger? These are the types of goals that should generally have top priority.

Goals that seem overly ambitious at this stage of your ministry, can be placed towards the bottom of your priority list. The remaining goals will require some analysis and possibly negotiation within your ministry team. Factoring in your resources and the amount needed to complete a goal, in comparison to the projected benefits to your ministry, can aid you in the process of establishing priorities.

It is crucial that your team constantly reminds each other that your ministry is ultimately God's ministry. It is important to pray continually throughout this process for God's guidance. Pay attention when it seems God is using circumstances, people or scripture to alter your goals or priorities in some way. Remember God's wisdom and timing are perfect. Forcing your will on a ministry rarely works well when it does not match God's will. You will find over time that those goals you thought failed were actually much more successful than you could have ever imagined when completed the way God wanted them to be and in His timing for them.

Action Plans
Once your goals have been prioritized, it is time to create action plans for each one of them. An action plan contains every small step that will need to be completed in order to achieve the goal. Be careful to make the steps as small as possible. This will make it more likely each step can be completed by someone who is gifted in that area. It also keeps any one person from being overwhelmed with the amount of work they must complete. Action plans allow multiple people to work simultaneously at times on completing the same goal in an effective and efficient manner.

Action plans should also have dates when each step will be completed. These dates should be based on when you would like the goal to be achieved. You will also need the input of the people completing each step. Only they know how much time they can realistically give to completing their assignment within the targeted time frame.

Due dates should be somewhat flexible. Volunteers can have unexpected demands on their time. God may have perfect timing that is different from what you had planned. It is important to balance those aspects with the concept that Satan may also be attempting to keep your ministry from achieving a goal that will improve your ministry to the children in

your area. Knowing the difference requires wisdom, discernment and prayer for God's guidance.

If a volunteer responsible for completing a step continually misses deadlines, the dates give you an opportunity to gracefully give the task to someone else to complete. The gifts and talents of your volunteers and their availability will help determine whether you will give the task to someone new or encourage the current volunteer to complete their assignment.

Reviewing the Strategic Plan
As one goal is completed, move the next goal on your prioritized list of goals onto the active goal list. Bear in mind, God may use circumstances or people to change the priorities of your goals or the timing it takes to complete them. Your ministry team should periodically review your strategic plan and make changes as necessary to reflect current needs and opportunities.

Community Outreach
Once you have your volunteers and your strategic plan in place, it is time to find children whom you can serve with your ministry. Often those first children will already attend your church. For your ministry to grow though, you will need to find additional children from the community to attend your classes and events.

Often the easiest way to find children to whom you can minister is by encouraging your current Bible students and adults who attend your congregation to invite children and families to attend your classes and events. Parents may be more willing to send their child to a special event first. They may be more reluctant to allow their child to attend a regular Bible class, possibly implying a long term commitment they are not yet ready to make.

Another way to attract new children to your ministry is to offer somewhat secular activities that address a felt need. Often these secular activities can still be tied to Bible lessons and begin transitioning families from your community ministry to your regular Bible classes and church activities.

Ministries to children have used a variety of activities to meet needs in the community and introduce children and families to their church. Often these activities help children with academic needs. This may be tutoring in school subjects with which local children are struggling, or giving children an early edge in a new language or technology. Other ministries to children have found parents are eager for their children to learn English and will gladly enroll them in programs teaching English that also include instruction from the Bible.

Other children's ministries have had success offering opportunities to participate in a drama or learn acapella singing. Day camps and sleep away camps can also be a great way

to introduce children to your ministry. In some areas, children's ministries go into the individual neighborhoods near their church building and have neighborhood Bible classes in the backyards of members for a week at a time during the summer months.

In communities where parents may be especially cautious about any involvement with Christians or churches, providing needed items like school supplies, clothing or food can create an opening for building relationships. It's important to remember the more suspicious the local community is of Christians, your church or your ministry, the longer it may take to develop a full scale ministry involving children from the community.

Families who have children with special needs are not welcome in many churches. If your church can provide the loving volunteers to teach their children about God, they will often be excited to attend your church. Struggling single parents and other families who feel marginalized in some way are also thankful to have a church who shows their love for them in active ways. Parents - especially those who are struggling - may welcome parenting seminars to help them cope with their parenting issues.

If your community outreach efforts do not automatically bring children and their families to your building during regular Sunday classes and services, it is important to have a plan for transitioning them from the outside events to attending worship services and Bible classes. Ministry volunteers will have to be very intentional about inviting families to worship or to attend Bible class. If your church is having a special service, this is often a great time to invite community families to attend.

Often ministries created to meet a felt need in the community as a bridge to the church ultimately become secular. Your ministry needs to constantly remind volunteers to engage children and their parents in conversations that include invitations to specific church activities like worship, Bible classes or individual Bible studies. Without a constant focus on the spiritual needs of the children and their families, your ministry will struggle to reach its full potential.

Discussion Questions
1. What are the four categories in a ministry analysis and what is included under each category?
2. What are the core beliefs in a strategic plan?
3. What are some core beliefs you believe a children's ministry should have?
4. How are the problem and the mission related?
5. What is the best way to set goals? How should they be prioritized?
6. What are action plans?
7. What are some common ways children's ministries practice community outreach?

Chapter 4 – Developmental Stages of Childhood

There is one more area we need to examine before you actually begin ministering to children. As you have probably noticed, there are a lot of differences between an infant and a twelve year old child. Each developmental stage of childhood needs slightly different things from their Bible classes and activities. It is important to understand what those developmental stages are and how they impact learning and behavior.

Since children's Bible classes involve learning, it is important to understand the intellectual development of children. When considering the stages of cognitive development, many prefer the work of Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist. Piaget divided children into four distinct stages of cognitive development.[14]

1. **Sensorimotor.** Ages birth to two years old. The main cognitive achievement of this age group is to realize that an object still exists when it is hidden or removed from the room. It is the ability to understand, for example, that when their mother is out of their line of sight, she has not disappeared forever or ceased to exist. By the end of this stage, most children realize mother will eventually return and are not as distraught when she leaves. Obviously, there are many other things children learn from birth to age two - including walking and talking.
2. **Preoperational.** Ages 2-7 years. During this period of cognitive development, children begin to understand that symbols - like words or pictures - represent real objects. They tend to have a somewhat egocentric view of the world, even though this is also often a very open, loving and generous stage of development. Once again, much more is learned during these years - including early reading, writing and other academic basics.
3. **Concrete Operational.** Ages 7-11 years. During this stage of cognitive development, children begin to be able to think through things in their mind instead of needing physical items to help them solve problems or understand things. They also begin to understand that changing the appearance of something does not necessarily change its base number, weight or mass. For example three pencils placed separately are the same as three pencils that are bound together with a rubber band. Once again, much more is learned during these years as children often make large gains in knowledge in a variety of areas.
4. **Formal Operational.** Ages 11 years and older. During this period, children can begin understanding abstract concepts like hope or compassion. They can also formulate hypotheses and test them for accuracy. Although they are still accumulating new knowledge and life experiences, one could argue this is the stage when more adult type thinking begins to occur.

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[14] Guarino, "Jean Piaget's 4 Stages of Cognitive Development Explained."

Although Piaget's stages are considered somewhat universal, the ages in which a particular child transitions from one stage to the next can be impacted by culture, environment and intellectual ability. The order in which they occur, however, remains constant.

In addition to cognitive development, a child's spiritual development is impacted by other aspects of their growth and development. From birth, for example, children need lots of love, physical affection and encouragement. Children who are denied these things at any stage in their childhood - or worse yet experience traumatic, instead of loving interactions with parents or caretakers - may find it difficult to understand or believe concepts like "God is love".

Each age group also has specific things they need from those attempting to not only teach them about God, but also help them to develop the hearts, words and actions that God wants them to have. If children do not receive these things during the critical times of their childhood development, they may find it more difficult to do so later in life.

Developmental Levels and Spiritual Growth
When looking at cognitive and other types of childhood development, it is fairly easy to make connections to what children in the various stages may also be achieving in their spiritual development.

1. **Sensorimotor.** Ages birth to 2 years. Children this age need lots of love, physical affection and encouragement. They need dependable caretakers who meet their needs for food, rest, and their other basic needs. These basics provide their earliest understanding of God's love for them. They are capable of listening to worship and praise songs and may try to hum or sing along. They can listen to stories from a baby or children's story Bible. By the end of this period, they can often point to a Bible when asked and answer simple questions about God, Jesus and other basic topics. Many can fold their hands to pray and understand praying is talking to God. More verbal children may repeat rote prayers or say a few words of their own in a prayer. During the later half of this stage, children can begin to sign or say "please" and "thank you" appropriately, understand commands to be gentle with something fragile and express love spontaneously.

2. **Preoperational.** Ages 2-7 years. Children this age can understand and (in the later ages) retell basic Bible stories. They can also begin memorizing simple scriptures and Bible facts. While they may not be able to find application principles in Bible stories independently, the older ages in this stage can understand that God wants us to learn things from Bible stories that help us be more godly. This is the age range when children begin to understand concepts like sharing and are often very generous. They begin playing together after an earlier period of parallel play. These early friendships often need adult guidance - especially when conflicts occur. Children should be taught how to settle conflict in godly ways, avoiding physical violence and hurtful words. Children in this age group are still concrete learners and take things literally. It is important to be aware of this tendency and explain Bible

stories, application principles or vocabulary that is more abstract in ways that concrete learners can better understand.

3. **Concrete Operational.** Ages 7-11 years. Children this age are still concrete thinkers, although many are beginning to move towards a beginning understanding of abstract concepts - especially in the later years of this stage. They should be exposed to a wide variety of Bible stories and other scriptures. Children who have been exposed to Bible stories consistently should be able to retell and answer questions about a number of basic and even some more obscure Bible stories. Many children this age are able to memorize longer passages of scripture. Application principles are more understandable at this age and some children can begin to identify application principles within Bible stories without adult assistance. Children this age can begin understanding the connection between what they read in the Bible and what God wants them to do in their lives. They can participate in discussions about making daily choices that reflect what they are learning from the Bible. They are beginning to understand the concept of sin. More mature children may reach the age of accountability towards the end of this stage and want to be baptized to become a Christian.

4. **Formal Operational.** Ages 11 years and older. Most children will reach the age of accountability during this stage. Some may make the decision to become a Christian easily, while others may struggle for many years with the decision. As they move towards the teen and adult years, most young people are capable of the same spiritual activities as adults and understand the basic principles of Christianity. They should be making godly choices with minimal adult assistance if they have had consistent spiritual education and training throughout childhood. Some children are capable of beginning attempts at sharing their faith with others during this stage.

Developmental Levels and Bible Classes for Children
Bible classes for children often reflect the stages we have examined and the capabilities of most children at a particular age. Most children's ministries tend to group ages together in ways that are similar to the ages in Piaget's stages. Each stage has some unique aspects to its Bible lessons and activities.

1. **Infant classes.** Ages birth to 2 years. These Bible classes often repeat the same lesson each class for 6-12 weeks. The lessons are often very basic and concrete like the story of creation and Noah's ark. Many classes have an object for each point in the lesson and provide one of those objects for each child in the class to manipulate in some way as the point is taught. By the end of this stage, children can often repeat key words and phrases and copy the gestures that go with the lesson.

2. **Toddler classes.** Ages 2-4 years. Children in these Bible classes begin having a different Bible story in each class period. The stories are told very simply without all of the details that might be shared in classes with older children. Children this age need lots of movement and have an attention span of about six to fifteen minutes.

Activities are ideally changed every five to fifteen minutes and if possible children should move to different areas of the classroom as activities change.

3. **Preschool classes.** Ages 4-6 years. Children in these ages may not be reading yet, but have longer attention spans and are capable of more advanced activities that involve skills like cutting and gluing. Because their attention spans are longer, they are capable of listening to added details in Bible stories. They can also begin answering simple questions about the Bible stories they have been told. Children this age are usually capable of memorizing basic Bible facts with practice and even some basic short scriptures. They may have memorized the words and tunes of familiar worship songs. While they still need to move around periodically, most are capable of sitting quietly during a lesson or as an activity is explained. This age group needs activities that help them experience and understand various aspects of God's creation and the Bible stories they are being taught. Activities should be hands-on, experiential, meaningful and memorable.

4. **Early elementary classes.** Ages 6-8 years. While these students are reading, they may not all be reading fluently yet. It is still best if an adult does any necessary reading during class. Because these children attend school, they are generally capable of the same behaviors that are expected in the local schools. They are able to understand application principles and begin to understand they should apply God's commands and principles to the choices they make. They need lots of hands-on, experiential, meaningful, memorable activities with their Bible lessons.

5. **Upper elementary classes.** Ages 9-12 years. Children are approaching or have reached the age of accountability. In addition to Bible stories and application principles, they need to understand the Fall, God's plan for redemption and the Gospel message. Young people in this age group should also be taught how one becomes a Christian and about more abstract concepts like repentance, forgiveness and grace. Some children are even capable of having beginning faith sharing conversations with peers towards the end of this stage. Although the topics are more advanced than in Bible classes for younger ages, these children still need plenty of hands-on, engaging, meaningful activities as part of their lessons. They are also capable of project based learning activities and appreciate learning excursions and service projects as learning activities.

Grouping Bible Classes Developmentally
At times, a ministry to children may be too small to allow each age or developmental stage to have a separate class. This may be a result of not having enough space or volunteers. Sometimes, it is because there may be only one or two children who attend regularly in a particular developmental stage.

When grouping together children at multiple developmental levels, it is crucial to keep one rule in mind. Children who are not school age should never be grouped with children who are in school. When they are grouped together, one or both groups will struggle to learn what God wants them to know in that environment.

It is also unsafe for younger children to be grouped with much older children. The young ones may find it difficult to communicate when they are being hurt in some way by an older child. This rule is particularly important in environments where you are ministering to children who have experienced trauma.

Understanding the developmental levels of childhood and how they impact activities and Bible classes is an important ingredient in designing an effective ministry for children. In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at other important aspects of planning Bible classes for children.

Discussion Questions
1. What are the developmental levels proposed by Piaget?
2. What are the characteristics of a child in each of Piaget's developmental levels?
3. How is spiritual growth impacted in each of Piaget's developmental levels?
4. What are the characteristics of a Bible class for children in standard groupings that incorporate some of Piaget's theory?
5. If your ministry must group together multiple developmental levels, what is a crucial rule to remember? Why is it important?

Chapter 5 – Planning a Bible Education Ministry for Children

Most ministries to children offer Bible classes as well as other activities that serve various purposes. Although individual Bible classes for children will vary slightly because of the developmental needs we discussed in the last chapter, there are additional factors that will impact all of your Bible classes for children.

It may be tempting to treat each Bible class as a separate entity from the other Bible classes for children. It is important to remember, however, that many children will spend their entire childhood in your ministry. You will need a plan to make sure a child, who has attended your Bible classes from birth until their teen years, has been given what they need to develop a strong spiritual foundation.

The most effective way to accomplish this is to have an overall plan that indicates what children will be taught in each Bible class. This plan should include Bible stories as well as additional components of a strong faith or spiritual foundation.

If your ministry is already serving children, it is often best to start by analyzing what you are currently teaching. What does each child learn in a particular class or at a specific ministry event? Once you have gathered the information about what you are currently doing, you need to analyze it.

Are there obvious gaps where children in your ministry never hear particular Bible stories or explore certain critical concepts? You may also want to shift certain lessons and concepts from one age group to another, where the children may be developmentally better suited to learn those particular lessons.

It may take some trial and error to create a plan that includes everything you believe is crucial in the most effective manor. A shift in the needs and abilities of the children you serve may mean you also need to realign your plan to meet their needs. In fact, it is probably best to gather volunteers and even a few parents annually to assess how well your plan is preparing children for their next faith steps. This will allow you to make needed adjustments before an entire generation of children may be impacted by any issues in your original plan.

Elements of a Strong Faith Foundation
Children need a variety of things to be covered in their Bible lessons to help them build a strong faith foundation. While they are hopefully receiving the bulk of their spiritual teaching and training at home, many are not. Your ministry will not be able to provide classes and events for the total amount of time children need to spend in their faith training each week. You can, however, provide exposure to many of the things they need to strengthen their faith in your Bible classes and ministry events and programs.

Bible Knowledge
If your students do not know what God wants them to learn from scripture, they will have a difficult time living a faithful, productive Christian life. There are many stories and parables in the Bible. There are also thousands of scriptures that are found outside of the context of a story. Depending upon how one breaks down the stories of the Bible, there are between two hundred and five hundred of them -encompassing over seventy-five percent of scripture.[15] Yet, it appears that only a fraction of these stories are covered in most ministries to children.

Children who receive little Bible teaching at home are entering their teen years with the knowledge of a very small percentage of what is in the Bible. Your ministry needs a plan that will not only attempt to expose children to more scripture, but also assign particular stories and scriptures to be taught in specific classes. This will also lessen the chances your Bible students will become bored hearing the same ten or twenty Bible stories over and over again for several years.

Bible Themes and the Historical Nature of the Bible
Children can begin to understand some of the bigger themes found in scripture. Often these themes should be taught multiple times over the years. Your ministry needs a plan for when children will be taught the overarching plan God has for us that is woven throughout the Bible. You also need to know that at some points they will be taught other themes in the Bible like love, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, etc.

Older children can begin to understand how all of the people and the places in the Bible are connected. It is important for your ministry to know how each class will address these connections. Some students may even be able to understand basic discussions of foreshadowing and prophecy in the Bible. The vast majority of the stories in the Bible are historical events (parables are the possible exception). This should be reinforced by helping children understand how these Bible stories fit into the cultures and historical events they will be taught in school. It is also helpful to introduce children to archaeological finds and primary source documents that underscore the historical nature of the stories in the Bible.

Culture
There is a cultural aspect to the Bible that leaves many children confused. They may be totally unfamiliar with items like oil lamps or occupations like shepherds. Without a knowledge and understanding of these cultural aspects found in scripture, many of the stories will lose their full meaning and richness. Your ministry may decide to address these cultural aspects in Bible classes by using photos and reproductions or having students participate in experiences. Cultural knowledge can also be taught on learning excursions to museums with artifacts from the cultures and time periods found in the Bible. You may

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[15] Walsh. *The Art of Storytelling*, p.12.

also find certain agricultural, fishing or other similar experiences can help children better understand some of the cultural aspects in scripture.

Application Principles
Young children should be taught that God told stories in the Bible so that we will learn from them. Often, one of the things God wants us to learn is a way He wants us to think or act. Older children can be taught how to begin to find these application principles for themselves. In a later chapter, we will discuss teaching application principles in more depth.

Spiritual Disciplines
Children need to begin developing good habits incorporating some of the spiritual disciplines in their daily lives. Your ministry should have a plan for how often prayer, Bible study, meditating on scripture and scripture memorization are addressed. Although they can be encouraged through teaching and Bible class activities, additional activities can also address the various elements. Your ministry may find having mentors and providing other resources to encourage independent practice of some of the spiritual disciplines increases the effectiveness of encouraging children to connect with God away from your Bible classes and activities.

Christian Life Skills
Children may understand what God wants them to do, but have no idea how to actually do those things. Your ministry can provide opportunities for children to learn skills, like godly conflict resolution, that will make it easier for them to obey God. These learning opportunities can be during Bible classes or during special activities that give them extra time to learn and practice the skills.

Gift Discovery, Development and Use
With children, it is easiest to help them discover the talents God has given them to serve Him. Helping children to begin to understand the good works God may have in store for them, can also allow them to begin to see their place in God's Kingdom. Children often love to help and serve, so this is an ideal time to begin this process with them. Consider having ministry events where older Christians bring in supplies to allow children to experiment with various possible talents in an attempt to find the gifts God may have given them. As the adults work with the children, encourage them to share the many ways they have used their talents to serve God over the years. Do not forget to bring in people with talents like organizational or other skills we may not normally consider as gifts from God. God can use every gift He has given a child. Your ministry should do whatever it can to help children identify their gifts and encourage them to begin developing and using their gifts to serve others and share their faith.

Community
Children need to develop a strong sense of connection to their church family. The power of these strong connections can encourage children, teens and adults to attend when they might otherwise have decided to miss Bible classes, worship or ministry events. It is important to understand children need strong connections with peers, but also with the adults in your church. Those adults can be incredibly impactful on the spiritual lives of young people in a number of ways. Avoid the temptation to continually separate the children from the adults. Rather, find ways to encourage meaningful interactions between the adults and children in your church - whether or not those adults volunteer in children's ministry. Community can be built during anything your ministry does for children. The healthiest community will be created when your ministry is intentional about developing it.

Mentoring
Although children may not have the same mentoring needs as teenagers, they can still benefit from having a godly mentor. Mentors for children will probably spend more time just building a relationship with the child. They may want to attend the child's special events or go on outings. As the relationship grows, there may also be opportunities for mentors to listen and give godly advice.

Once you have developed a plan for your ministry and how each Bible class and activity will play a role in that plan, it is crucial to develop a regular assessment cycle. Whether you use surveys, classroom observations or other assessment tools, it is important to make sure the plan is implemented. If even one Bible class teacher chooses to ignore your ministry's plan, the children may have important gaps in what they need for a strong faith foundation.

Discussion Questions
1. Why is it important to have an overall plan for what children will learn in your ministry?
2. Why is it important to know which Bible classes will cover specific Bible stories and concepts?
3. What are some of the important elements of a child's faith or spiritual foundation?
4. How can each of those areas be addressed in a Bible class or ministry to children?
5. If you are beginning a new ministry or are currently ministering to children, develop a plan showing the various classes and events and what children should learn during each.

Chapter 6 – Effective Bible Lessons for Children

Bible classes and the lessons taught there are the spiritual core of any ministry to children. It is important to spend as much time as necessary to make these classes as effective as they can possibly be. Although this chapter will introduce the various elements of a Bible class, subsequent chapters will explore many of them in greater detail.

Classroom Environment
The tone for any class is set as students enter the room. Is the environment inviting and interesting? Do students feel welcomed? Does the environment make them excited about learning more about God?

The ideal is for each class to have a dedicated space that they can decorate appropriately. In many cases, however, Bible classes for children must share space with other groups and may not be allowed to decorate anything. While these limitations can be frustrating, you can still do things to make children feel loved and engaged when they enter your classroom.

If you can decorate, make your classroom colorful and cheerful. Do not cover every inch of space with decorations. Too much sensory input can be overwhelming for some children, especially if they have special needs. If you are not allowed to decorate, consider bringing in interesting items each week you can allow students to explore. They may be items you will use in your lesson or perhaps items that help students explore a theme like "God is amazing!", while they wait for everyone to arrive.

It is important that any toys, photos or illustrations that represent people are culturally accurate and diverse. Depictions of people in the Bible should reflect what people of that nationality looked like during those times. The Ethiopian Eunuch, for example, was from Ethiopia. He should look Ethiopian in any depiction you may choose to use of him.

There are multiple nationalities represented in the Bible. In some cases, we have depictions created during their lifetimes. Use these whenever possible. They are often found on coins and stone engravings. Few are of the Israelites, because they believed it was sinful to make an image of a person. In those cases, use the most accurate painting or drawing you can find.

Our world is also culturally diverse. Whether or not the area in which you minister is diverse, children need to learn that our world is full of people who do not all look the same. They need to understand God loves us all equally and reflecting God's love accurately means loving everyone.

If you use toys, photos or depictions of modern people, try to use those that will expose children to a variety of ethnicities and realities. Look for items with a variety of skin tones

and remember to include people with special needs. Avoid using pictures of people today dressed in folk or historical clothing. Children may have a hard time differentiating between the clothing someone in another culture may wear on a special holiday versus their daily clothing. If someone of any ethnicity happens to visit your classes, they should see images that look like them - especially if they are a minority in the community in which you serve.

Of course, the way volunteers interact with the children you serve has the greatest impact on how students will feel as they enter your Bible classes. Each child should be greeted warmly, by name. New students should be introduced to other students and paired with someone who will help them navigate your routine and facilities. An effort should be made to help students discover the things they have in common and to share their hearts with each other.

Take care to train teachers to pay close attention to interactions between students. Children should not be allowed to exclude each other or to say things that are unkind - even if they claim it is harmless "teasing". Some children will naturally be closer to each other. This can be because they attend the same school or have similar interests or personalities. That is to be expected. They need to learn, however, that those who perhaps do not have as many things in common with them should not be hurt by their words or actions or by being excluded.

Curriculum
The plan you created in the previous chapter will include which specific Bible stories and concepts will be covered in a particular Bible class. Depending upon the age groupings of your classes, children may be in the same class for multiple years. There should be a curriculum plan for each year a child could possibly be in a particular class.

If a Bible class is for children aged ten to twelve (for example) and they will be in that class for three school years, there should be a three year curriculum for that class that can then repeat in subsequent years. As children age into that particular class, they may enter at any year of the three year cycle. They will be taught the other two years in the cycle as they remain in that class.

Your curriculum may be purchased or borrowed in some areas. In many ministries, however, you will be creating your own curriculum. This is a difficult and time consuming process. Teachers should be as involved as possible, as they often know the children in their classes and their needs better than others might.

If you have any professional educators in your church, they can give you crucial guidance as to educational best practices regarding topics like questioning students and developing appropriate activities. Later chapters will provide as much guidance as possible in these areas, but it is impossible to cover every option you may consider.

In the appendices at the back of this book, you can find a curriculum evaluation tool. This document can help you assess any curriculum you may have and identify areas that may need adapting in some way.[16]

Once you have a curriculum plan, it is important to develop each individual lesson. Many Bible stories have multiple possible lessons within them. They also have important facts or ties to other events or people in the Bible. Bible stories also have application principles and important scriptures to memorize.

Learning Objectives
With all of those possibilities and often a very limited amount of time, you will need to pick your priorities. What are the three to five most important things you want the children in that class to learn and remember from each lesson? These are your learning objectives.

Write them down. Review them as you prepare the lesson and immediately before teaching it. This will help you remember to emphasize those things when you are teaching. If your Bible students are struggling with one of the objectives, try slowing down and explaining it in a different way. If this does not seem to help comprehension, you will need to address this again at another time.

It is tempting to avoid creating learning objectives. It may seem tedious or you may believe it is obvious what children should learn from the lesson. Teaching, however, is not an exact science. Students can make points or ask questions that cause you to discuss things you had never considered when planning the lesson. You can even distract yourself while you are teaching as new thoughts come into your brain. With learning objectives, you will be more focused or - if the distraction was important - know what you need to cover in a future lesson because it was omitted.

Guiding Question
Your Bible students need their own version of learning objectives. Called a guiding question, it is a question you will pose to students at the beginning and the end of your Bible lesson. Based on the most important learning objectives for the lesson, the guiding question should be written where students see it as they enter the class.

You may choose to point out or even read the guiding question at the beginning of class. Do not ask for answers at this point. Rather ask students to be thinking about the question and how they would answer it as they go through the lesson and activity.

At the end of class, ask students to answer the question verbally. Or you may find a way of assessing individual comprehension and growth by finding fun ways for each student to

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[16] See Appendix 6 Curriculum Evaluation Tool

give you their answer more privately. Make it seem more like a quest than a test. If children enjoy the guiding question, they will be more focused and potentially learn more from the Bible lesson and activity.

Storytelling Techniques
The heart of any Bible lesson is the story from the Bible that is being taught. How that story is told can engage children or lead them to believe the Bible is full of boring old stories. Telling Bible stories in ways that will lead to children wanting to read the Bible independently begins with preparation.

Reading the Bible story from scripture several times before attempting to tell it is extremely important. Stories in the Bible often have many details that can be missed or remembered incorrectly without a careful preparatory reading. You may even want to write down a few details so you will not forget them when telling the story to your students.

As you continue to prepare, choose a few verses from the account you want to read directly from the Bible. The Bible is a book translated from other languages. The translations you have may sound a bit awkward compared to the books your students may normally read.

Reading verses to them directly from scripture can help them become accustomed to the unique words and phrasing of the Bible. Explaining those verses in ways they can understand will improve their comprehension. With continued practice, they will become more comfortable in reading the Bible independently.

Now look at the Bible story once again. Most Bible stories are written to be told to others. It may not be necessary to change very much other than making the vocabulary a little easier for children to understand. Some Bible stories, however, may have genealogy lists or other parts that are not necessary when telling the story to children.

Next look for things you can describe in more detail. What are the sights, sounds, smells and possibly even tastes the people in the story are experiencing? This is a great way to help introduce your Bible students to the cultural aspects of the story that may be unfamiliar to them.

Instead of just saying the bridesmaids in the parable held oil lamps for example, describe them. Talk about their size and how they were made of clay. Mention that they had designs of some sort etched on them. Explain how they worked.

Next look for all of the dialogue and movement in the Bible story. Who were the people that were speaking? What might their voices have sounded like? Find a different voice you can use when each person speaks as you tell the story. Did the people in the story move in some way? Make those motions as you tell the story.

Decide if costumes or props will engage your Bible students in the story more quickly. Sometimes, they can add to the atmosphere. You may want to bring in items mentioned in the story to show the children as you talk about them while telling the story. Later they can explore the items to enhance their comprehension and memory.

Do not forget smells. The sense of smell is one of the strongest memory cues our brain uses. Whenever someone makes a sacrifice, you can use a small portable grill nearby and grill a small, inexpensive piece of meat. Animal sacrifices would have had a similar odor. Some stories mention herbs, spices and foods that also have fragrances of their own. Giving children the opportunity to smell those odors as you tell the story should help them remember it more clearly later.

Finally, consider how you will voice the narrative parts of the story. It is crucial that you tell the story with an enthusiastic mindset and tone of voice. Your Bible students should know you are excited to tell them an amazing story from the Bible God wants them to know. Modulate your voice as you tell the narrative. Get softer and more animated with anticipation, fear or other appropriate emotions in the story. Get louder when the story is becoming more exciting. Think of your voice as singing a song and use the same vocal dynamics when telling Bible stories.

If you want to become a master teller of Bible stories, you will need to practice telling the story with all of the extra elements you have added. The more you practice, the more comfortable you will become and the more engaging your telling of the Bible story will be. By the time you are ready to tell the Bible story to a class of students, you should have memorized the story.

If you do not have the time to do a full storytelling preparation or are concerned about forgetting details, read the story as if you were reading a picture book to a young child. You will still use many of the same details as in storytelling, but it will not be necessary to actually memorize the story.

Preparing to tell a Bible story properly takes more time than just glancing at it and telling it in a perfunctory manner. The difference the extra preparation makes for your Bible students, however, can be profound. They are much more likely to become engaged with the story and pay attention to the details. Their comprehension and memory of the story can also be enhanced using these storytelling techniques.

Using Video in Bible Lessons
The use of video either to teach the Bible story or for some other part of the lesson is highly problematic. Today's children are more media savvy than previous generations. Even young children often know how to film and edit video. As a result, they are often a critical audience. If they perceive the video has poor production values, they will often become

distracted. If the video is old enough where clothing, language or quality seems dated, children may dismiss the content as outdated as well.

Children are also overexposed to video. Many have learned they can stop paying attention and no one will notice - unlike when an actual teacher is teaching a lesson. Videos also do not allow for questions in the moment, call and response and other forms of dynamic teaching.

The best use of video is usually a short clip of under three minutes. These clips should show or explain something preferably in an unique or unusual way. For example, if a teacher has a lesson about a Bible story on the Sea of Galilee, a short video clip of the actual Sea of Galilee can help students picture the setting better. Likewise, video clips demonstrating how something is done can be helpful. This is especially true if the activity is unfamiliar to students - like weaving fabric for a lesson on Tabitha - and you will not have the ability for the children in the class to actually participate in the activity themselves.

Helping Children Remember
No matter how well you tell a story or teach a lesson, it does not help the children who heard it, if they do not remember it. Understanding children and memory can help you design lessons and tell Bible stories in ways that will help children remember important information from them for years to come.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about learning and memory is that there are two basic types of memory. Short term memory allows you to repeat things immediately after you have heard them. It helps you complete multi step directions. Long term memory is where information is stored that we can access when needed, potentially, for the rest of our lives.

The difficulty when teaching a child important facts or concepts from the Bible is finding ways to help them move the information from their short term memory into their long term memory. If we fail to do this, children will not have the information they need to live a Christian life in their brains, where they can access it quickly and easily.

There are some basic ways to move information from short to long term memory. The most obvious is repetition. The more a bit of information is repeated, the more likely it is to be moved into long term memory. The way the repetitions are done can impact the effectiveness of them. Studies have shown that spacing the repetitions is more effective than cramming numerous repetitions into one small period of time.[17] Repetition forces the brain to practice retrieving the information you are trying to move into long term memory. Spacing the repetitions forces the brain to work harder to find the needed information.

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[17] Troyer, "Spaced Repetition."

That extra work encourages the brain to move the information into long term memory for easier retrieval.

Another way to help children remember important spiritual information is to give them strong cues attached to the things you want them to remember. Cues are the brain's way of more quickly finding needed information stored in long term memory. There are a variety of cues you can provide children to help them remember key facts and concepts.

The Bible itself provides many cues. A cross, for example, encourages most Christians to think of Jesus on the cross. A rainbow brings back memories of the Bible story of Noah and the Ark. You can encourage these cues by mentioning that whenever they see a specific object, they should remember a particular Bible story or concept.

As mentioned earlier, of the strongest memory cues is smell.[18] Specific odors can remind us of events many decades earlier. When children can smell grilled meat every time you teach Bible stories involving animal sacrifice, for example, it can mean they will remember the Bible lessons connected to that smell every time they smell grilled meat.

Memory hooks are another way to help the brain organize and store information so it is easier to retrieve at a later date.[19] The Bible uses several memory hooks. Psalm 119 for example is an acrostic in Hebrew. Each stanza is begun with a letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 136 uses another memory hook. After every new thought, the writer repeats the phrase, "The Lord endures forever." You can create a similar memory hook by using a phrase that fits with the story and repeating it at regular intervals in the story. Have students say the phrase with you. Or you can create a call and response phrase that is repeated throughout the story, when children repeat a certain phrase every time you give them a cue to say it.

It is important to not use the same memory hooks for every Bible story. If you do, they will no longer help the brains of your Bible students organize and retrieve the individual stories because the memory hooks are identical. You can use a similar memory hook technique, but be careful to alter the wording with each story.

Interleaving is another useful strategy in helping children remember key spiritual information. The process of interleaving involves asking children to remember information they learned previously and combine or connect it with information they learned recently. Combining the two forces the brain to make stronger connections to those memories,

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[18] Fifth Sense. "Psychology and Smell."
[19] Oats, "Storytelling: A Natural Mnemonic: A Study of a Storytelling Method to Positively Influence Student Recall of Instruction."

making them easier to retrieve. Students may struggle to remember the older information, but the very act of struggling will make that same information easier to retrieve in the future.[20]

The memorization of passages of scripture by children is not as popular as it once was. This is unfortunate, because having Bible passages stored in long term memory can make them easily accessible to children later when they need that information in real life situations. Although it may seem easier to give children only a verse of scripture to memorize, short passages are actually less likely to be stored in long term memory than longer sections of scripture. A single verse can be repeated quickly and then told to a teacher, but it is as quickly forgotten. Longer passages of scripture require that spaced repetition mentioned earlier if a child is to quote it accurately in class. Those repetitions help move the longer passage to long term memory, making it more accessible and potentially helpful to the child.

You have created an engaging environment and prepared an effective Bible lesson. In the next chapter, we will discuss how to effectively teach the application principles that can be learned from a Bible story.

Discussion Questions
1. What are several ways to create a classroom environment that will make students eager to enter your class?
2. What are learning objectives?
3. Choose any Bible story and write three to five learning objectives for it.
4. What is a guiding question?
5. Choose any Bible story and write a guiding question for it.
6. Why is it important to tell a Bible story in an engaging fashion?
7. What are some storytelling techniques that can help engage students and enhance their comprehension and memory of a Bible story?
8. Choose any BIble story and tell it using the storytelling techniques outlined in this chapter.

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[20] Sriram. "The Neuroscience Behind Productive Struggle."

Chapter 7 – Effective Application Lessons for Children

In some ways, application lessons are the heart of an effective children's Bible class. God placed certain stories in the Bible because He wants us to learn specific things from them. Sometimes it is information about God himself or the history of God interacting with humans.

Bible stories also have other lessons hidden within them. It may be a reminder to obey one or more of God's commands. At times, a Bible story helps us understand the principles behind God's commands. Often, it is a way for us to understand how God wants us to live our lives or the consequences of trying to live life without God at the center.

These application principles are not always obvious - especially to children. Even in the New Testament parables, when Jesus often carefully explains the meaning, his explanation may be too abstract for young children to understand.

Historically, application lessons or activities are a part of a children's Bible lesson. Unfortunately, the way they are often presented does not make the connection back to the Bible lesson clear to young minds. We need to use methods in teaching application lessons that help students clearly understand and implement them in their daily lives. We also need to underscore the application principle's connection to a particular Bible story and teach children how to find the application principles independently in the scriptures they may read.

Finding Application Principles

If you are writing your own Bible lessons, you may struggle finding the application principles in a Bible story yourself. It can help to think about the actions of the people in the Bible story. What did they do that was godly? What mistakes did they make that led to sinful behaviors?

Once you have written down the answers to those two questions, analyze the list carefully. How can your Bible students learn from these choices made by the people in the story? Is there a particular choice that seems to be the focal point of the story? How do the choices the people made and the attitudes they appear to have connect to commands God has given them and perhaps us, too? If the command was a specific order tied to a particular circumstance, is there an underlying heart issue that could also be applied today?

Once you have finished this exercise, you may find that you have several application principles within a particular Bible study. Children, especially younger ones, will be overwhelmed if you attempt to teach them every principle you found. Instead pick only one or two to focus on as you teach this particular Bible lesson.

If your Bible students are younger, you may want to choose the most basic application principle. If your students have heard the story many times, consider choosing an application principle that may be more obscure or abstract. The application principles in the Bible are often repeated numerous times. The application principles you do not choose to teach in a particular lesson can be taught later in the context of a different Bible lesson.

The application principles taught in each class, should be gathered and assessed. Are there principles children in your ministry are not being currently taught? Is there too much emphasis placed on some application principles and not enough on others? Having a ministry plan for the instruction of application principles will make it less likely the children who complete their time in your ministry have gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the application principles God wants them to know.

Teaching Application Principles
Some Bible class teachers teach the application principle in a similar fashion to the morals at the end of Aesop's fables. While this may help summarize the application principle from the story, it does not provide your Bible students with all of the information they need.

Other Bible class teachers have a separate segment in their lesson or even a second class period addressing the application principle. While this provides more helpful information to children, there is often confusion about whether or not the application segment is connected to the original Bible story.

When introducing the application principle during a Bible lesson, it can be helpful to remind your students that God gave us Bible stories to help us learn and remember important things. For younger children, you may want to repeat this concept every time. Older children will be more likely to remember the concept after a few weeks, but it will still help to remind them that you will now be learning about the things God wants us to remember and use from the Bible story.

Begin by telling your Bible students the principle you have decided to teach them from the Bible lesson. Older students may realize there are multiple possibilities for many Bible stories. Acknowledge their observation, but explain that the time you have to teach them only allows you to teach one principle thoroughly.

When teaching the application principle to students, express it several different ways in the course of your lesson. Students process things in different ways and have different levels of Bible knowledge. Teaching the same principle in multiple ways makes it more likely every student will understand it.

A crucial part of teaching an application principle often involves taking it from the setting of the original Bible story into the world your students experience daily. It is important to remember that the daily world of the children in your class will be slightly or vastly different

from the experiences you may have each day as an adult. You will need to think about how the principle should impact the attitudes and behaviors in the daily world of each of your students.

This may require you to know a little more about your students. Not every child has a sibling, for example. Children have different environments in which they may be educated, varied home environments and different ways of spending leisure time. The examples you give, should incorporate these differences, so every child understands how to apply it. If you are unsure, older children may be able to give you help in finding ways to apply the principle in their experiences.

Planning Activities for Application Lessons
Some of the behaviors and attitudes God wants children to learn from Bible stories, may be new to them. God may be asking them to behave in ways that are different from the choices they normally make. Even though they are young, some children may have already developed bad habits. Younger children may not have developed to the point where any particular behavior in a specific area is natural to them.

It is important to give them help practicing some of these new behaviors they have now learned God wants from them. Often, playing a game where they are given choices between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors will help them understand God's expectations more thoroughly.

Older children may benefit from role playing. Giving them common scenarios and allowing them to practice these new behaviors can help them better understand and remember them. It also gives you an opportunity to help any students who are struggling understanding or implementing the application principle in real life situations.

At times, you may want to send students home with some tools to remind them to use the application principles they have learned in class. This may be a craft that reminds them to do certain things, like a craft that reminds them to pray every day when they see it. Or they can create an item they will use in the practice of the principle, like a gratitude journal.

At the end of class, give students a concrete challenge to help them remember to practice the application principle. Allow a few minutes at the beginning of each class to allow students to share their successes and issues with using the application principle between classes. Do not be discouraged if students forget. The more often you do it, the more likely some of your students will be to participate in your challenges - especially if you share your experiences with them, too.

Helping Students Find Application Principles

It is important to begin teaching students to find the application principles in Bible stories independently. This skill set will help them apply God's words to their lives long after they have left your class. It will also make reading the Bible independently more meaningful as they understand the lessons God wants them to learn and use in each passage.

Younger children will struggle with identifying application principles independently. It is a rather abstract concept that their concrete thinking will have difficulty processing. You can still begin teaching them the steps to finding the principles, so they will know what to do when they are developmentally able to do it.

Older children may also struggle finding the application principles in a Bible story at first. With enough practice, however, they should be able to identify at least one principle in each Bible story. Do not be too concerned if a few students are still unable to identify application principles independently before leaving your ministry. Give them some sort of summary of the steps to take with them and encourage them to keep it in their Bibles to use whenever they are reading it. When they are developmentally capable of finding application principles at a later date, they will have a written guide to help them.

Often the best way to begin teaching children how to find the application principle independently is to ask them why they think God put this particular story in the Bible for us to read. What might He want us to learn from it? What did the people do in the Bible story that made God happy or sad? Do we do any of those things today? Which of those things are you doing? Does God want you to make any changes in your life based on the application principles in this Bible story? All of those questions can help children discover application principles.

It is often best to start teaching children these questions by writing them on a large sheet of paper they can see during every class. You may also have them create their own version of the document that is decorative and contains these questions. They can then take it home and place it in their Bible as a bookmark to use whenever they are reading the Bible.

As you teach your Bible students how to find application principles independently, start each practice session by asking them the questions mentioned earlier. At first, they may not answer or give incorrect responses. Encourage their efforts, but then give the correct application principle. It may also help to explain your thought process as you identified the application principle. End each practice session by asking them to list ways they can put the principle to use in their own lives.

Giving students practice in finding, learning, understanding and practicing application principles is essential in helping them build a strong spiritual foundation. It also gives them important tools to help them apply God's commands and principles to their lives. Teaching

application principles more intentionally will help them make important connections between the stories in the Bible and their lives.

Although we introduced some questions to help you teach children application principles, using questions to enhance learning is key to an effective Bible class. Next we will learn the various types of questions that will help your Bible students reach deeper levels of understanding during Bible lessons.

Discussion Questions
1. What are application principles?
2. Why is it important to teach application principles to children?
3. How can you identify application principles in a particular Bible story?
4. What are some important things to remember when teaching an application principle to children?
5. What are some activities you can do to help children understand, practice and implement application principles?
6. What are some ways to help children learn to find application principles in Bible stories independently?

Chapter 8 – Using Questions to Enhance Learning

Questions are an essential tool in any classroom. Used effectively, they can not only help you assess student progress, but also increase student knowledge and understanding. To use questions well, we need to explore different types of questions that can be used in Bible classes and other learning environments for children in your ministry.

Vocabulary Questions
Christianity has its own unique vocabulary. Since the Bible is translated from other languages, translations often use the words Christians have used for hundreds of years. Many of these words are rarely used in daily conversations - especially by children. Other words may have a slightly different contextual meaning than that which accompanies the word in the conversational speech children have mastered.

Even very young children can begin learning basic vocabulary words like Bible and prayer. Older children may need help learning to read the words used in the context of Christianity which may not be used in their school environment. When you are unsure if your students understand the meaning of a word you are using when teaching, providing a definition can help improve both their vocabulary and their comprehension of the lesson.

Younger children are concrete thinkers and will have difficulty understanding some of the more abstract concepts expressed in words found in the Bible. While older children are more likely to understand abstract concepts, they may be able to use a word properly in a sentence while still being unable to define the concept in their own words. Or they may have memorized a rote definition and can repeat the definition while still having very little comprehension of the actual meaning of the word.

With vocabulary, like many other things you will cover in your classes, children will learn at different speeds. It is important to regularly discuss important vocabulary words to help children who may still struggle with understanding them.

Bloom's Taxonomy
When children are asked questions in a Bible class, they generally are asking students to recall the facts of the story. Asking other types of questions, however, will encourage children to think more deeply about the things they are learning from the Bible.

When educators discuss using questions to enhance learning, they often refer to Bloom's taxonomy. Benjamin Bloom was an American educational psychologist who developed several hierarchies designed to help educators create learning goals.[21] For our purposes, we will examine his cognitive hierarchy and how it impacts the types of questions we ask students.

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[21] Armstrong, "Bloom's Taxonomy."

Here are the various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy and the types of questions you can ask to help students begin processing Bible lessons and other educational material on each level.

1. **Remembering.** These questions are designed to help students remember the basic facts of a Bible story or passage. This is the most basic level of questioning. While knowing the facts of a Bible story is helpful, if processing Bible lessons is only done on this level, it will be difficult to live a Christian life. Examples of memory questions: "How many people were on the Ark with Noah?" "What did Jesus say to Saul on the Road to Damascus?"

2. **Understanding.** Questions for understanding are designed to make sure the child actually understands the Bible story or passage. Often this involves asking students to put the Bible lesson in their own words. Children raised in Christian homes can often use words like righteousness and faith correctly, while having no actual understanding of their meaning. Understanding questions can evaluate whether they actually have a working comprehension of what they may be saying. Examples of understanding questions: "What does John mean in 1 John 3:7 when he writes about practicing righteousness and being righteous?" "What did it mean when Jesus said he was a shepherd?"

3. **Applying.** These questions are designed to encourage children to think about the commands and principles in scripture that God wants them to apply to the way they live their lives. Although many Bible classes contain application sections, children are often unaware they have been taught the application principle of a Bible story. Asking applying questions can make them more aware they have indeed been taught how to apply the Bible to their lives. Examples of applying questions: "Why do you think God put the story of Noah in the Bible?" "What do you think God wants us to learn from the story of Ruth?" "What do you think God wants us to do in our lives in light of the story of Saul on the road to Damascus?"

4. **Analyzing.** Analyzing questions help children analyze scripture and the lives of various people in the Bible. These questions can also encourage them to analyze their own lives and compare them to how God has asked Christians to live. Most children have not developed cognitively to the point where they can answer these questions easily. Some older children may be able to give at least rudimentary answers to analyzing questions. After giving them an opportunity to attempt to answer analyzing questions, it is fine to provide them with an answer. When doing so, try to explain your thinking process in detail that helped you choose that particular answer. This guided experience will help some children answer these questions earlier than if they had no guided practice. Examples of analyzing questions: "How did the various Christians in Acts make use of the Armor of God?" "When you read the list of the fruit of the Spirit, how do you see ways you exhibit those characteristics in your own life?"

5. **Evaluating.** Asking students evaluating questions teaches them how to evaluate anything in light of what they read in the Bible. It is a critical skill set for helping young people move to a more independent faith. On a list of the educational terms used for this level of Bloom's taxonomy, you will find words like appraise, defend, select, debate, support, judge and value.[22] It is important to encourage students to support their opinions with examples from scripture. Otherwise, students can leave class thinking their ideas are acceptable to God, when their beliefs may actually be in direct opposition to what God wants from His people. This is another level of questioning that will be too difficult for children without the guidance of an adult. Explaining each step of the thought process needed to answer these types of questions will help older children learn how to eventually begin answering them independently . Examples of evaluating questions: "What do you think of the idea that a "good God" wouldn't allow evil in the world?" "What does it look like if we are loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength?"

6. **Creating.** Creating questions are rarely used in Bible classes. They are, however, the types of questions that can encourage young people to engage in ministry. These questions help students put together all of the previous levels of the hierarchy with the gifts and opportunities God gives them to live a Christian life, serve others and share their faith. It does not mean students are encouraged to get creative with how they interpret scripture in ways that change the meaning God intended for a particular passage. This level in some ways is easier for children than teens, if they have the guidance of an adult. Schools often stifle the creativity of young minds. Children are most likely to still possess quite a bit of their God given creativity. Cognitively, however, they may struggle with this line of questioning. If adults help them with the cognitive aspect of this level of questioning, they may find their students are able to be quite creative with ways to use the information to serve others and share their faith. Examples of creating questions: "In what ways has God equipped you to serve others and share your faith?" "How can we solve xyz problem in the world in ways that honor God and serve others while sharing our faith with them?"

Critical Thinking
There is another type of questioning in Bible classes that is designed to help students develop critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills in Bible classes encourage students to examine information to form a judgement as to whether or not it is in accordance with what God has given us in the Bible. If children begin developing critical thinking skills at a more basic level, they should be able to avoid believing false teachings and lies when their critical thinking skills are fully developed.

There are many skill sets within the area of critical thinking. Some are too advanced for children whose brains may be unable to process things at that cognitive level in their

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[22] Utica University, "Bloom's Taxonomy of Measurable Verbs."

current stage of development. Other critical thinking skills can be taught at the most rudimentary levels. With practice, older students may be able to use some critical thinking skills independently.

Let us explore some of the critical thinking skills that children are able to begin learning, practicing and perhaps mastering.

- **Determining whether or not a source of information can be trusted.** Children are probably unable to understand the more sophisticated levels of this critical thinking skill. You can however, begin introducing the concept that God's wisdom is infallible. They should be regularly reminded that even Christians can make mistakes and be wrong in what they teach. Take time periodically to examine Bible story books for children and compare them to the story in the Bible. Noah and the Ark, for example, is a story where many books for children either have inaccurate illustrations of the ark itself or oversimplify the number of animals that enter the ark. Explain that while the people involved did not mean to give readers inaccurate information, they did. Continually remind them to compare any teaching they receive, from anyone with the Bible.
- **Determining the true cause of a result and correlation versus causation.** Falsely attributing to God and/or Christians the problems in the world is a tool regularly used by those wanting to convince others to reject God. While children are unable to handle the more sophisticated understanding of God and His plan, they can begin to understand the basic concept. It is important for them to learn that just because someone may appear to have caused something to happen, it does not necessarily mean they did. The story of Paul in Acts 14:8-20, is a good example. God gave Paul the ability to miraculously heal a lame man. The people who saw it thought Paul was the Roman god Hermes, which was why he was able to heal. It took some time and effort for Paul to convince them he was human and it was God who had healed the man. Children can also begin understanding that just because two things appear to be connected, does not mean one caused the other. Just because everyone in your class happened to wear red today does not mean being in a Bible class causes people to wear red clothing. Periodically, give students examples from the Bible and real life, teaching them how to dig deeper to find the true cause of something.
- **Searching for all of the possible information about a topic.** Children can become easily confused because they only hear or understand part of the information about any particular topic. This can be true in their spiritual lives as well. Teaching them to thoroughly examine their beliefs by what they can find in the Bible will help them avoid a lot of false teachings in the future. A great example is when some of the people in the New Testament rejected Jesus because he was from Galilee. They knew the prophecy said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Had they asked a few more questions, they would have learned Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not Galilee. Find opportunities to give your Bible students only some of the facts and allow them to draw conclusions. Then give them the rest of the facts that change

what they had originally assumed. Continue to ask them if there are additional facts in the Bible that could change the way they think on a topic.

- **Learning logical fallacies.[23]** Children may hear teachers and other adults say things that sound logical to them. The logic used however, may be weak or even wrong. While a full understanding of logical fallacies is beyond the abilities of most children, they can begin learning how to recognize some of them on a very basic level.
- **Learning how to use the Bible as the ultimate source of truth.** Older children should be taught how to find all of the passages in the Bible about a particular topic. They need practice in finding the answers to questions about life in the Bible. Most importantly, they need as much exposure to the Bible as possible so they have a good working knowledge of what it contains. By their teen years, most children should be able to use various Bible aids to find any scriptures they need to explore a topic.

Critical Thinking Activities

There are several activities you can do with your Bible students to help them develop their critical thinking skills.

- **What happens next?** This is a great activity to help children begin to try out their early personal understanding of God and His commands and principles. You can use a Bible story or a scenario that reflects their daily lives. Begin telling a Bible story where God or Jesus interacts with someone or a group of people by saying or doing something. As you tell the story, pause before God or Jesus makes a statement or does something reacting to a specific situation. Ask your students what they think will happen next. They may already know what happens next in familiar stories. If that is the case, ask them why they believe that happened next. Try and relate the words and actions of God and Jesus back to their nature and character. When using this technique in stories with people, point out how difficult it can be to predict what a person will do next, because people are not as consistent as God and Jesus are. With practice, this will help students develop a full picture of God. It can help them avoid false teachings that attempt to imply God's approval of the false teaching in ways that are not consistent with His nature or character.
- **Bible class reviews.** This activity gives children practice in correctly drawing conclusions from a variety of information. At the end of your Bible lesson, give each student a small piece of paper. Have them write a one sentence review of the class that summarizes the main theme or application point of the lesson. This gives children practice in taking what may seem initially like a lot of random information and extracting the main points. This critical thinking exercise has the added benefit of providing you with a valuable assessment of how well your Bible students are understanding the lessons you are teaching them.

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[23] See Appendix 7 Common Logical Fallacies in Spiritual Discussions

- **Yes, No, Maybe.** This activity encourages children to begin being more aware of how the things they hear or read impact their thoughts. It can also give you assessment information in real time so you can adjust your teaching for maximum comprehension. Give each student three cards - one has the word "yes" written on it, one has "maybe" and the other "no". When the person in the Bible story has a decision to make, give students one of the possible options the person could consider. Ask students to hold up the appropriate card to reflect how they feel about that option for the person. After students become comfortable using the cards, you can ask them to use them to indicate how well they understand a concept, whether or not they agree with it, etc. In some cases, you may want to have children display cards so that other students will not see which card they are holding. Most of the time, however, students will be uninterested in what other children think.

Managing Student Responses

How you ask for responses from children can impact many of the dynamics of your ministry. Young people can develop a negative impression of specific individuals or your ministry as a whole if exchanges between Bible teachers and students are handled poorly. Often these exchanges are managed badly because teachers are unaware of the emotional impact certain exchanges can have on students. Teachers may also have unknowingly drawn conclusions about the academic or spiritual potential of their students.

Professional educators are trained to avoid having overly positive or negative perceptions of their students. Known as the Pygmalion effect, teachers were found to interact more positively with students they perceived as good students and more negatively when they believed the student was a poor student. Rosenthal and Jacobsen found that telling teachers random students were poor or excellent students changed teachers' behavior towards those students and eventual student outcomes.[24]

For your purposes, you can help your Bible teachers by training them to be aware of their interactions with students in specific areas. They should focus on treating everyone equally, as if they are all capable of having a strong spiritual foundation and becoming faithful, productive Christians. The positive behaviors researchers observed between teachers and the students they believed were capable of success were:
- **Interacted more warmly.** Teachers were friendlier to these students and had more casual, personal exchanges. They were also more likely to greet these students fondly and answer their questions with kindness rather than impatience.
- **Provided additional resources.** Teachers often gave students they expected to be successful more special books or articles to read. They also suggested other resources the students might find helpful in increasing their knowledge or comprehension.

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[24] Duquesne University, "The Pygmalion Effect."

- **Called on them more often.** Teachers called on students they thought were going to be successful more than other students - whether or not the students indicated they knew the answer. Students are well aware of this dynamic and although they may not be able to verbalize it, use it to determine the value of various students to the teacher.
- **Listened to them more carefully.** When a student perceived to be capable of success asked or answered a question, the teacher was found to listen more intently. This allowed the teacher to notice nuances in what the student said that might give clues to other strengths and weaknesses that needed to be addressed.
- **Gave better feedback.** The feedback these students received from their teachers was not always positive. It was, however, helpful feedback. Often teachers give general, broad statements for feedback like, "You need to work harder." It is difficult for anyone to know exactly what that means in the context of their actions. If, however, a teacher says something like, "If you read Proverbs chapter one, you may understand the concept of wisdom a little better," a student knows exactly what to do to try and improve. It is also critical for teachers to avoid mocking student answers or the students themselves when incorrect responses are given.
- **Assumed the best, not the worst.** This is so important to young people. When something goes wrong, they want adults to at least hear their side of the story before coming to judgment or giving consequences. Teachers tend to give students they perceive as successful the benefit of the doubt, while immediately assuming less successful students are at fault.

Training volunteers to interact with students – especially in question and answer interchanges – in healthy ways can improve the entire dynamic between children and the adults in your ministry. Having the attitude that all of the young people served by your ministry have the same value in God's eyes and yours will make it easier for adults to act in ways that make students feel loved and capable of being who God wants them to be.

Student Generated Questions
Before we leave questioning, it is important to discuss the spiritual questions your students may have. Children need opportunities to ask any questions they have about God, scripture or Christianity. Young people may not feel it is appropriate to ask the questions that are concerning them. Barna found that 35% of young Christian adults claim to have significant intellectual doubts about their faith. Yet about half of Christian young adults still do not feel comfortable asking their most pressing spiritual questions in a church environment.[25] These dynamics can begin in childhood.

Adults may also be nervous about allowing children the freedom to ask any and all of their spiritual questions. They are afraid it will create a disruptive classroom environment. Or they fear a student who expresses a doubt will then cause other students to have that

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[25] Kinnaman. *You Lost Me*, 190.

same doubt. Finally, many Christians are afraid of appearing foolish by giving incorrect answers, or not having an immediate answer.

Many who have studied doubt and faith believe that it is actually unanswered questions and doubts that can cause people to reject God.[26] Allowing young people to ask all of their questions gives your ministry an opportunity to give children the answers God would want them to know. Their doubts are not contagious. Their questions are what all of your Bible students will eventually hear from someone during their lifetime.

Your answers do not have to be immediate. Ask for time to research your answer. Explain that you want to make sure your answer is biblical and it will take some time to research. Then use the Bible, apologetics materials and other reliable resources to help you give your students the best answers possible. Credit your sources. Avoid the issues (like logical fallacies) we discussed earlier in the chapter.[27] Give your students the answers to their questions in the next class period if possible. If it is one of those rare things where God has not given us an answer, be honest. God's truths can withstand the questions and doubts of your students. Encouraging student questions will help their faith stay strong when others ask them those same questions.

Often more than half of the time in a Bible class for children is spent doing various activities to enhance Bible learning and comprehension. It is important to examine carefully the various types of activities you may choose to use in your classes to make sure students are extending learning by completing them. The next several chapters will focus on learning activities in general as well as thoroughly exploring the more popular learning activities used in Bible classes.

Discussion Questions
1. What purposes can questions serve in a Bible class for children?
2. Why is it important to ask children vocabulary questions?
3. Make a list of vocabulary terms children who are part of your ministry should understand.
4. What are the various levels of Bloom's taxonomy and what is the definition of each?
5. Create two questions for each level of Bloom's taxonomy.
6. Why is it important to begin teaching children critical thinking skills in Bible classes?
7. What are some basic critical thinking skills children can be taught?
8. What are some critical thinking skills activities for children?
9. What are some key concepts to remember when handling student responses to your questions?
10. Why is it important to encourage students to ask any questions they may have about God, the Bible, Christianity, etc.?

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[26] Ibid., 192.
[27] See Appendix 4: Common Logical Fallacies in Spiritual Discussions.

Chapter 9 – Planning Activities for Bible Lessons

Depending upon your ministry, the children you serve may spend more than half of their time with you participating in some type of activity. Many of these will happen in the context of a Bible class. Your ministry may choose to provide additional activities for children outside of a classroom environment for any number of reasons.

Fortunately, there are plenty of activities from which you can choose. For ministry purposes, not every activity has value. In fact, some activities will use valuable time and money with no corresponding benefits for the children you serve. It is important to understand the purposes of activities in a ministry to children and how to choose the most appropriate activities to achieve your goals.

Setting Goals for Activities
When planning an activity for a children's Bible class or larger ministry function, it is crucial to determine what you want the activity to accomplish. Just as you have learned the importance of setting goals for your ministry, your Bible classes and lessons, you will also need to create goals for any activity you use. The process may not be quite as formal as goal setting for a ministry or a Bible lesson, but it is still essential.

Knowing the goals you want a particular activity to accomplish will help you choose the best activity to meet those goals. Although you will create a more specific goal for a particular activity, there are several overarching goals for activities used in a ministry to children. Although each activity may not meet every one of these goals, it should meet at least one of them.

- **Helping students remember important information.** These activities focus on doing things that will help children move information from their short term to their long term memories.

Short Term Memory is the information a person is currently thinking about or aware of in their current environment.

Long Term Memory is the storage of information in the brain long term. Any information obtained earlier and then retrieved is from long term memory.

- **Helping students understand key concepts.** These activities will help students process what they have been taught. They are designed to increase comprehension of the Bible lesson, key concepts and other important elements you want them to understand.
- **Helping students learn, understand and practice application principles.** Children often need detailed instruction and guided practice in order to incorporate

God's commands and principles in their daily lives. These activities give them the opportunity to learn Christian life skills and practice the things God wants them to do in their lives.

- **Helping students create something that will encourage them to put the things they learned into practice in their daily activities.** These activities result in something concrete children can take home. These objects serve to help remind them of the things God wants them to remember and do in their daily lives.

Definition of Effective Activities

It is important to understand the definition of an effective activity for a Bible lesson or any other opportunity you provide as part of your ministry. Effective activities are not just about filling time or keeping children busy. Ultimately, every activity should enhance the spiritual education of the children participating. It should help them build a stronger spiritual foundation and grow towards their godly potential. While not every activity may be overtly spiritual, it should be productive in student growth and have an underlying spiritual component.

To be effective, activities need to encourage students to continue learning new concepts and processing or using them in some way. Activities should help children answer the guiding question you posed at the beginning of class. To help students grow spiritually, activities also need to have these four basic characteristics.

- **They are hands-on activities or projects.** Effective activities usually require students to participate with their hands, if not their entire bodies. Not by completing worksheets or coloring pages, but through creating, exploring or experiencing something.
- **They are engaging.** Students should be enthusiastic about beginning an activity. They should be excited about the opportunity to participate in it and be reluctant to stop when your class time has ended. When students are interested in the activity, they are much more likely to learn something from participating in it.
- **They are meaningful.** The tie between the activity and the Bible lesson should be strong and obvious to the children participating. If the tie feels forced or unnatural, the activity probably does not have a strong connection to the lesson. Students may enjoy the activity, but it will not enhance their knowledge and understanding of the Bible.
- **They are memorable.** Engaging activities are not easily forgotten. Students should be excited to tell others what they did in class. The best Bible class activities become lifelong memories for many of the children who participate in them.

Definition of Ineffective Activities

The activities used in many Bible lessons do not accomplish what the writer of the lesson had hoped they would. For various reasons, these ineffective activities result in very little spiritual growth in students. As a result, they serve merely as a way to fill the remaining time in a class period and add no real value to the lesson.

It can be difficult to differentiate between an effective and ineffective activity. Some ineffective activities result in more beautiful crafts or students having more pure fun while participating than a more impactful activity. There are several warning signs that an activity may not help you achieve your learning objectives for it. While any one warning sign does not necessarily mean you should reject a possible activity, it will alert you to its possible weaknesses as an educational tool.

- **The activity does not give students any new information or help them in processing the lesson.** This is one of the more difficult warning signs to identify correctly. Just because an activity claims it can teach a child something new or help them comprehend a key concept, does not mean that it will. It is important to try to think like each of your students will think while participating in the activity. Will their minds really be learning anything new or comprehending something more clearly?
- **The activity requires the minds of students to be more engaged in superficial decisions than learning.** Are they going to be thinking more about the artistry than the actual Bible story or concept? Some activities require students to know nothing about the Bible story or its application principles to complete it. If the students' thought process is merely about colors or other secular thoughts, it is highly unlikely additional learning will happen during this time.
- **The activity is didactic.** Didactic activities are generally worksheets and other activities that remind students of listening to a boring lecture. They usually require little mental effort beyond a basic memory of facts. Often even that is eliminated by allowing students to use the scripture to complete the activity.
- **The activity requires substantial reading and/or writing.** Many students struggle with reading and writing well. Because you may be unfamiliar with the academic abilities of your Bible students, you may not know who will struggle with any reading or writing the activity may require. With these activities, there is always a chance that a child who may be struggling at school will be subjected to embarrassment in your class when their reading or writing issues become apparent to the other students.
- **The activity is designed for fun and has no real substance to it.** Effective activities are often fun. The difference between the fun in an effective and an ineffective activity is the amount of actual substance to be found within it. If the activity ends with a spiritual platitude, but does not require students to think and learn during the activity itself, it is more likely the activity is ineffective.
- **The activity is repetitive or boring.** If children have done the same activity multiple times over a period of time, it can lose whatever effectiveness it may have once possessed. Likewise if students find the activity boring, they will not engage with it in ways that will encourage spiritual growth.
- **The activity is too easy or too difficult.** You will most likely have students in your class on a variety of developmental levels physically, intellectually and spiritually - even if they are all the same age. It is important to find activities that will be challenging enough for the most advanced students in your class without being too

difficult for those who may be struggling. It may be necessary at times to adapt the activity to provide a modified version for some of your students.

Choosing Effective Activities
There are other important considerations when choosing an activity to use with the students to whom you minister. An activity might be hands-on, engaging, meaningful and memorable and still not be the best activity to choose for your particular group of children.

As you analyze your activity choices, think about the specific students who will participate in it. When you think about how they will interact with the activity, is the activity still the best choice for them?
- **What do these specific children need from an activity?** Are they beginning or advanced Bible students? Are there special considerations because of current events in your community? Does their home environment impact this activity in some way? Do they have special needs either spiritually, physically, cognitively or emotionally? The answers to these types of questions can help you filter activities to better match the needs of your students.
- **Is the activity developmentally appropriate for them?** Even the best Bible activity is useless if the children participating in it are not developmentally able to participate in it or process it. Giving a class of two year old children an activity requiring them to cut out tiny items from a larger piece of paper, for example, will only succeed in frustrating the children and their teachers. A two year old child does not have the motor skills to complete the activity.
- **What other activities have these children done in your ministry recently?** Even the most engaging activity will become boring with too much repetition. Try to schedule activities so children are exposed to different types of things to do. This also helps for children who may not enjoy a particular type of activity. Knowing the next activity will be something different can encourage reluctant participants to engage in an activity they may not enjoy as much.
- **If the activity results in an object to be taken home, will it actually make it there?** Worksheets, coloring sheets and meaningless crafts are often left at church or dropped on the way home. If children are excited and proud of what they have created, they will take much better care of it. They will make sure the object goes home with them.
- **If the activity results in an object, will it be displayed or used for a period of time?** Objects that are created in a Bible class should help students remember and/or practice important scriptures, spiritual disciplines, commands and principles. That will happen more successfully if the student wants to display or use the object. The materials do not have to be expensive, but the finished project should appear relatively attractive and have meaning to the child who makes it.

Planning Effective Activities

Once you have chosen a few possible activities, there are several more decisions about it to be made in the final planning process. These last filters should help you choose the very best activity for that particular lesson or program and plan it for maximum student growth.

- **Do you want the activity to be completed individually or by groups of students?** How students are grouped while completing an activity can change its dynamics. Individually completed activities can be more challenging or prevent student embarrassment. Group activities can give students meaningful interactions and help students who do not know or understand the material well. You will need to consider your objectives and the needs of each specific student in order to make the best grouping choice.

- **Do you want an "open" or "closed" activity?** Open activities allow students to be creative within a loose set of guidelines. Closed activities require the activity to be completed in a very specific way. Open activities allow children to express what they have learned in their own unique way. They can be a great tool for assessing student growth. Closed activities are valuable when specific results must be achieved. Building a model of the Tabernacle, for example, would be a closed activity since the Tabernacle was historical with a very specific design.

- **Do you have the resources to obtain the materials you need for the activity?** Many ministries to children are not well funded. You may have no budget for materials and lack the personal funds to purchase them yourself. Do not be afraid to ask people - even people outside of your church or ministry - if they would be willing to donate needed items. Often when they understand it will be used by children, even people who are not particularly religious will be happy to help. Another overlooked resource is found materials. Often these are items that are recycled and might otherwise have ended up in the garbage. Found materials can also be things found in nature or other places in your community and are available for use by anyone.

- **Do you have the space necessary for students to complete the activity?** Some activities require a lot of space to complete. If your normal classroom space is too small, consider completing the activity in another area. Is there a larger area of your building that is not in use during your class time? Is there a safe outdoor space you could use to complete the activity? If you must stay in a space that is too small to complete the activity easily, is there some way to adapt the activity so it works better in the space you have in your classroom? Changing a participatory drama experience to a participatory puppet show, for example, can give your students a similar experience while using less space.

- **Do you have enough adults to help with the activity?** Some activities will require more adult assistance than you may normally have in your Bible class. You may need extra adults to help the activity run more smoothly or to help students complete it in a timely fashion. Or you may need extra adults to help keep students safe during the activity. If you cannot find the adults you need, it may be better to

use another activity. This is especially important if student safety may be compromised in some way.

Adapting Activities for Children With Special Needs
You may have one or more students in your class with special needs. These special needs may be obvious or they may be unobservable to you. Many of the special needs that children can have are on a spectrum. Two children with the same diagnosis may be on opposite ends of their spectrum. One may need a lot of their activities to be adapted, while the other may be able to participate with little or no adaptation.

It is important to carefully observe your students as they participate in the activities you plan. Do any of them appear to be overly stressed or have obvious difficulties in completing them? Some parents of children with special needs will make you aware of their child's learning needs. Others will assume the church environment does not need any changes for their child to participate in activities and will fail to mention their child's special needs.

If a child appears to struggle consistently, it is usually best to have an empathetic conversation with the child's parents. It is important to realize, this may be a very sensitive conversation with some people. Try to be as empathetic, loving and kind as possible. Do not ask for a diagnosis, although some parents may offer it. Rather focus on attempting to learn how you can make it easier and more enjoyable for their child to participate in your class.

Depending on the educational system in your area, the parents may be struggling to find out how to help their child, too. You may want to offer to partner with them to help them find strategies as a way of ministering to your student. Or they may have very specific suggestions for what their child needs to be as successful as possible in a learning environment.

Resist the temptation to ignore the struggling or frustration of a child. To do so is to give the child painful memories of a Christian environment. It is also important to avoid segregating the child with special needs from other children his or her age unless it is absolutely necessary.

A child with special needs should never be seated to the side or corner of the classroom and given a coloring sheet while the other students are engaged in an interesting, meaningful activity. Rather, find ways to adapt the experience so the child with special needs can participate as much as possible. This may include finding a volunteer who focuses on helping the child with special needs be successful. Do not ask the parents to take on that role. Raising a child with special needs can be exhausting and they need to be in their own supportive adult Bible class environment.

It is important to train any volunteer who will be assisting a child with special needs. They need to be aware of any care needs or physical issues that may cause health problems for the child. They need to know what the parent wants them to handle and when the parent wants to be involved in the care of their child. Volunteers also need to understand how to best help the child learn at their level. They should encourage the child to do as much independently as possible, while providing assistance before the student becomes too frustrated.

If you have one or more children with obvious special needs in your Bible class, it may be necessary to help your students learn how to interact with each other in ways that are supportive and loving. If the student has medical needs that could be accidentally compromised by the other children, make sure the students are taught how to interact with each other in ways that are not dangerous or hurtful.

The parents of children with special needs may choose to come talk to your students with or without their child. Some parents are excellent at explaining to other children about their child's special need and how the other children can interact successfully with their child. Other parents may ask you to have that discussion with your students for them. It is important to balance the needs of children with special needs, the wishes of their parents and the needs of your other students. Learning how to interact in loving ways with people with special needs, may be one of the more important lessons the students in your class will learn.

Categories of Activities
There are various types of activities ministries to children often use in their Bible classes and other programs. We will spend the next several chapters examining each category and learning the best ways to use each effectively in Bible classes and activities for the children you serve. Since the primary focus of most ministries to children is Bible class, much of the discussion will focus on these activities within the framework of these classes. The same principles would apply to other educational environments your ministry may provide like faith based tutoring or ESL classes.

Discussion Questions
1. What are four possible goals for an activity in a Bible class for children?
2. What are several qualities of an effective activity?
3. What are several warning signs an activity may be ineffective?
4. What are some additional considerations when choosing an activity?
5. What are some decisions you will need to make when planning an activity?
6. What are some considerations when adapting activities for children with special needs?

Chapter 10 – Effective Craft Activities

A craft or an art project is a popular activity in Bible classes for children. In theory, crafts are hands-on activities that engage students and can be meaningful and even memorable at times. Unfortunately, not every craft activity has the same educational value for the children who complete them. It is important to closely analyze craft activities to determine what benefits they may provide for your students.

It is not helpful to judge the educational value of a craft merely by its appearance. Some of the most attractive crafts accomplish little in helping students grow spiritually. Two crafts can appear very similar, yet one has educational value and the other does not. The artistic abilities of the teacher and students are irrelevant, as long as everyone is physically able to complete the steps of the craft independently or with the adult assistance provided.

Defining an Effective Bible Craft
Many craft ideas appear very similar. It can be difficult at first to differentiate amongst the various craft projects. With enough guidance, however, Bible class teachers can learn to determine how much educational value a craft will add to their lesson. Crafts that do not have enough value should be exchanged for a more meaningful craft or adapted in some way to help students learn or process the lesson while completing the craft.

When deciding whether or not to use a particular craft, ask yourself the following questions.
- **What will students be thinking as they complete this craft?** it is important to think like your students, not like an adult. If a student is spending more time choosing which colors to use rather than lesson content, it may not be the best choice. For example, a coloring sheet merely requires students to choose which colors they will use. They do not need to know anything about the lesson to complete it. However, giving children a blank sheet of paper and some paints and asking them to depict the story they just heard, will require reflection on the details of the story. (Note: Occasionally, there will be a student who adds non-biblical elements to their crafts, like superheroes or space creatures. A gentle reminder that those items were not in the lesson and should be removed is usually sufficient .)
- **Does the craft add any new information to the lesson?** The best crafts often add new information about the lesson as the students complete them. If you are teaching about the building of the Tabernacle, for example, your students may have only heard the big idea of a Tabernacle. Building a scale model will help them understand what was in the Tabernacle and how each item was used by the priests.
- **Does the craft help students better understand the application principles of the lesson?** Using a craft as an application activity is not as common, but they can be used to help students better understand some application principles. For example, if the Bible lesson were about Daniel in the Lions' Den, the application principle might involve the types of things about which they can pray. Students

could make something, like a container with prayer topics on slips of paper, to help them understand God wants them to pray to Him about anything that is on their minds.

- **Does the craft help students memorize an important passage of scripture?** Scripture art, whether it is a pillow or something else decorative, can help students remember and eventually memorize important scriptures. These crafts do need to be as attractive as possible to encourage children or their families to display them for long periods of time.
- **Does the craft help students reveal a piece of their hearts or their Bible knowledge, understanding or practice in their daily lives?** Crafts that are open, allowing students free artistic expression, can give teachers a lot of information. These crafts give students only very broad instructions like, "Draw all of the things about which you personally pray to God." While it is not a perfect assessment tool, the drawings that result can give you an indication of which students are struggling with prayer and which ones seem to have an independent prayer life.
- **Does the craft encourage them to apply the application principles of the lesson to their daily lives?** Does the craft somehow encourage students to be more consistent in doing the things you wanted them to learn from the lesson? Having students create a prayer journal, for example, where they can record their prayers and God's responses to them can encourage them to be more consistent in their independent prayer lives.
- **Will the craft be used by students to serve someone and share their faith?** Service projects as an activity will be covered in a separate chapter. Many service projects involve some sort of craft project, like a blanket for a homeless person, that will then be given to someone else. Whenever possible, it helps to tie service project crafts to specific Bible stories with a similar theme or that involve someone in the story serving others in a similar fashion.

Finding Craft Ideas

Regardless of which curriculum you use, you may find it necessary to find a craft idea for a lesson you will be teaching. Some very creative people are able to do this without any outside help or inspiration. Others may need to find inspiration from other things to generate new ideas. Often this inspiration comes from being in nature or looking at art or other beautiful things.

Some volunteers may not feel comfortable generating craft ideas. There are many sources to find both crafts meant to be used in Bible classes or more secular crafts that can be adapted for use in a particular class. If you have internet access, the Teach One Reach One ministries website[28] has hundreds of craft ideas already tied to specific Bible stories.

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[28] http://teachonereachone.org/activity-ideas/

You can also search online or in books for ideas shared by educators for particular age groups and adapt them for your class. Often ideas meant for teaching secular subjects like history and literature are the easiest to adapt. Do not forget to search for ideas online or in books that were originally art or craft ideas, perhaps with a secular theme. These can also be adapted at times for use in a Bible class.

When searching for ideas, be very careful to use the criteria at the beginning of this chapter before selecting them. Often the most appealing crafts, even crafts that were specifically designed for a Bible class, have little value educationally. Using those crafts wastes crucial learning time and possibly money and other resources as well.

Adapting Craft Ideas
Adapting a secular craft so it adds educational value in a Bible class for children is not particularly difficult. If you find yourself struggling to make a craft more meaningful in respect to the Bible lesson, it may be best to find a different craft idea. Trying to force meaning that is not there naturally rarely results in students learning what you really wanted them to learn from completing the craft.

It often helps to think about themes when attempting to adapt secular crafts for use in a Bible class for children. What is the original theme of the craft? Does it correlate in any way to the theme of the lesson? Can adding scripture to it make the connection to your Bible lesson more clear? Is there something else you can change about the craft itself or how it is made that will give it more meaning as a craft for your lesson? Carefully thinking through themes and other aspects of the lesson can alert you to areas of the craft that can be adapted to make the tie to your Bible story stronger than it may have been in the original secular craft.

At times, you may need to adapt a craft because one or more of your students are not developmentally able to complete every task in the project. The craft may perhaps take more time to complete than you will have with students. Doing parts of the craft in advance or having extra adult helpers can help adapt the craft so it will work for your class. Occasionally, you may also decide to give students more than one class period to complete a craft or send the materials home for them to finish it later.

Adapting crafts takes a little extra time and effort. It is important though for your students to have craft projects that add value to what you are trying to teach them in your class. Without adapting the crafts to make them more appropriate, you may be neglecting to meet your learning objectives for the lesson. Taking a few extra minutes in planning can give you extra opportunities to teach your students important lessons.

Finding Craft Materials
Financial considerations may impact what craft projects you are able to offer students. There are many sources for finding needed materials when your budget is small or

nonexistent. If you know far enough in advance the materials you will need, consider asking others if they have any of the items they can donate. People who have craft hobbies usually have small bits of materials left from previous projects. They are often willing to give those to you to use.

Even adults who are not involved with your ministry or congregation, may be willing to provide materials if they know children will be using them to create something. Asking those outside of your ministry to donate items is also a great way to do some community outreach. Possible donors may be interested in learning more about a church that is willing to serve children.

Often you can use found materials in craft projects. These are the items that are still in good condition, but would normally be thrown into the garbage. Many crafts can be completed with items like scrap paper and cardboard, left over bits of crayons or paint. The more creative you can be, the more likely you are to be able to find a found object that can replace a more expensive material needed for a project.

Items found in nature are often easily accessible and can be found in abundance for free. It is important to make sure the place where you find these materials allows them to be removed. Many crafts require these items or you can sometimes adapt a craft to use items from nature instead of more expensive man made items.

At times, you can adapt the craft itself to make use of less expensive or found objects. Instead of expensive paints, find a recipe that uses ingredients normally found in the kitchen. Once again, look online or in books for substitution ideas.

Implementing Craft Activities Within a Lesson
Once you have chosen and prepared the craft activity you want to use with your lesson, there are a few other best practices to keep in mind. Craft activities designed to enhance learning and understanding can fail if they are not presented and managed in effective ways.

As you introduce the activity to children, make them aware of what you want them to learn from it. Often this is best done by posing guiding questions like those discussed in the earlier chapter on questioning Bible students**.** You may choose to pose the question formally or by saying something a little more casual like, "While you are working on this project, I want you to think about…".

As students continue to work on the craft, you may want to remind them a couple of times of the question you posed or the topic upon which you wanted them to reflect. At the end of the activity, have a short discussion and gather student thoughts and reflections. Not only will this provide an informal assessment, but it will allow you to correct any misunderstandings or poorly drawn conclusions.

Timing is critical when implementing a craft activity during a lesson. Some children will complete the craft more quickly than others. It can help to remind them periodically you want them to do their best work on it. While it is important to never compare student work, you want every student to work to their potential.

At times, the craft will be so engaging students will not have it completed by the end of the class period. They may ask to stay longer or to continue it during the next class. You will need to use your knowledge of your students to make the best decision. If none of the children have completed the craft, you may decide to give them a few minutes when they arrive for the next class to complete it. If you and the parents are open to staying past the end of the class for a time, that often works best if only a few students are not finished. Or you may decide to ask children to complete it at home, allowing them to borrow materials they may not own.

When the craft activity time has ended, remember to spend time discussing what students have learned from the lesson and the activity. It is also a good idea to give them instructions for what to do with the craft when they take it home. This is especially important if you want them to use the craft in some way to encourage their spiritual growth outside of class.

Crafts can be an effective part of a Bible lesson. It is important though to follow the practices in this chapter to ensure you are using your class time and resources appropriately.

Discussion Questions
1. What are the questions you need to ask when choosing a craft activity?
2. Where are some places to find craft ideas you can use in a class?
3. What are some ways to adapt a craft activity to make it more appropriate for your students?
4. What are some sources of free craft materials?
5. What are some best practices to keep in mind when implementing a craft activity during a lesson?

Chapter 11 – Effective Project-Based Learning Activities

Project-based learning activities are rarely used in children's ministry, particularly in the Bible class environment. This is unfortunate, because these projects can help children reach deeper levels of understanding about the things God wants them to know. Taking additional time to have students work on more complex projects designed to help them explore important topics in Christianity can seem intimidating. Done well though, it can be transformative for many students.

Defining Effective Project-Based Learning Activities
Project-based learning has been used in secular education for some time now. Research has found that effective project-based learning activities contain specific elements.[29] The list below has adapted the findings to reflect our focus on students learning how to use the information in the Bible and applying it to real life situations.
- **Students are expected to tackle a realistic real world problem using what they find in the Bible**. While the project may require them to interview Christians or consult other Christian books, the finished project should accurately reflect God's word.
- **Students drive the learning process, including project development.** The guidelines given in project-based learning are often very loose. Students may be instructed to create any type of project that demonstrates a solution to a particular dilemma. The format of the finished project as well as what they include in it is driven by the children. The teacher does provide a rubric for the basic elements that should be included in the project to insure the quality of the finished assignment.
- **Teachers ask questions, but avoid answering them.** In project-based learning activities, teachers often answer student questions with questions of their own. The answers to the teacher questions should give Bible students a clue about where to find the answer to the question they originally posed. When teachers give direct answers to student questions, it can undermine the learning process. There may be an occasional student question that should be responded to directly, but generally teachers should attempt to answer student questions with questions of their own.
- **Students can work individually, in pairs or in larger groups.** There is no one right way to group students for project-based activities. Since the church is supposed to work together as a body, it may be best to have students work together. This will give you the opportunity to guide them on godly ways to work with people who may be very different from them. There may also be reasons you have for wanting students to work individually. If you believe it is in the best interest of your particular students to work in this manner, then feel free to allow each student to create his or her own project.
- **Projects should have meaningful ties back to the Bible.** While this is not part of the original research, it is crucial for our purposes. The focus of our project-based

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[29] Vega, "Project-Based Learning Research Review."

learning is for students to better understand and be able to use scripture. If their project ignores scripture in favor of other sources or the solution or project does not accurately reflect what is found in the Bible, the entire endeavor has been counterproductive. Both the original assignment and the finished projects should have strong ties to scripture.

Designing Effective Project-Based Learning Activities
Designing effective project-based learning activities can be challenging. If the project is teacher driven and too easy, it is really just a normal Bible class activity. If it is too abstract or difficult, students will become frustrated and bored. You want to create projects that are engaging, meaningful and challenging.

As with any activity, it is important to consider the goals you have for a project-based activity. Often these activities are best when used to help students combine what may seem to them to be several bits of random information, understand how they connect and then how to use that information in their daily lives.

In the process, they may also learn how to find the information they need in the Bible, how to find other reliable sources to help them understand difficult Bible concepts, how understanding the culture of Bible times can give deeper meaning to some passages, how to use the gifts and talents God has given them to serve others and how to work together with other Christians to serve God. The resulting projects can often also be used to serve or teach others about what they have learned during the project.

Once you have decided your goals, you can begin designing the project-based activity around them. For example, if you want students to better understand how to use the parables of Jesus in their lives today, you may want to design the project around the parables of Jesus, without giving them a specific parable. Obviously, these more difficult projects are best suited for older children, because they involve more difficult reading and research.

Projects for younger children may involve the life of a specific person in the Bible and the stories you have taught them about the person. You can give oral reminders of the stories for non-readers or place drawings of the various stories around your classroom to help them complete the project independently without needing to actually read.

The prompt should pose a problem or situation and the way the project they complete will be presented. For example, in the parable project above your prompt might be, "Choose three parables of Jesus and design a presentation to help younger children remember the parables, understand their meaning and be able to apply them to their lives in a concrete way." Once again, this is a challenging prompt designed for older children who have quite a bit of Bible knowledge and understanding.

An easier prompt for younger children will be a little more concrete. "Design a museum exhibit using the materials provided to help people understand a story from the life of David." You could provide the students with a wide variety of art and craft materials to encourage their creativity. After they design their museum display, you can give them an additional prompt by asking them to write (or dictate to an adult to write) a description to go with their displays.

Implementing Project-Based Activities
Your students may have never been given a project as an assignment at church or even school before. It is important, therefore, to carefully explain how the activity will be completed. Give them the learning goals you have chosen for the project, as well as the prompt you have created. Let them know what materials they can use and the amount of time they have to complete the project.

It is important to carefully choose the amount of time you give students to complete a project. Most students will not work on their projects at home, so it is important to give them enough class time to complete the project. In general, it is best to give them less time and then extend it if necessary, than to give them too much time.

Often, you can continue to teach new Bible lessons that may help them with their project and then allow them to work on their project during the time you normally allow for activities. Or you may choose to have a special extended time outside of the regular class meetings when students can work on the project and complete it in the one session.

Interpersonal Considerations in Project-Based Learning
During most project-based learning activities, children will be working together while completing the assignment. For some children, this may be the first time they have ever needed to work with someone to accomplish a goal. This lack of experience can cause interpersonal issues, like conflict.

Other students may have some experience working on group projects, but find they have personality clashes with one or more of the people in their group. Often, these clashes are more about immaturity than the actual personality differences. Sometimes though, these personality clashes result from children trying to work together who have very different ways of viewing and operating in the world.

No matter the underlying cause of the interpersonal issues that arise, it is important the teacher addresses them in direct, concrete ways. If multiple groups are having similar issues, it may be wise to pause the project and have a lesson on how God wants us to treat the people around us. There are numerous examples in the Bible of the types of interpersonal issues your students may be experiencing.

It is important to understand that some children are very good at hiding poor interpersonal choices like bullying or teasing from adults. While students are working on their projects, it is important for the teacher to constantly roam from group to group listening to the various conversations. Also be aware of students who seem to be unhappy with each other - even if it is only evident on their faces or in their body language. It can be an indication of interpersonal issues you need to address.

Assessing Completed Projects
Children in Bible classes do not receive grades. For project-based learning to achieve the goals you set, however, assessment during and at the completion of the project is crucial. This assessment should be constructive and not punitive. Students should learn from the assessment as well as the project itself.

In some ways, assessment will occur throughout the project. Join each group for a few minutes periodically. Observe who is participating and who seems to be learning new things. Ask questions that are designed to help students dig a little deeper in their investigation. Have them share with you what each of them believes they have learned. Quieter students may be reluctant to talk within even a small group situation. Occasionally call on these quieter students by name or find ways to have conversations with them that are a bit more private.

These observation times and questions have the purpose of assessing what students are learning, not to penalize students who have yet to learn anything they can verbalize. It may alert you, however, to additional instruction you need to provide either during or after the project. Or you may find you need to clarify the assignment a bit - especially for younger students.

Whenever possible, have students present their final projects to an audience. The members of the audience could be family members, younger students or the entire congregation. The method of presentation can be decided by students, or you may want to provide a basic framework - especially regarding time limits, number of speakers per team, etc. Part of the final presentation should include students sharing what they believe they learned from participating in the project.

Encouraging Outside Advisors in Project-Based Learning
Project-based learning is a great way to introduce the children in your ministry to adults in the congregation who could potentially become their mentors. They also provide a wonderful way for parents to become actively involved in the spiritual education of their children. Christians with special gifts can also be brought in to teach skill sets the students may need to complete the project.

Adults should be cautioned to be careful in their interactions with students. Like teachers, they should be encouraged to answer student questions with questions of their own

whenever possible. They should be encouraged to think of themselves in the role of a coach rather than a manager. Any adults helping students should also provide encouragement and any critiques should be purely constructive.

When beginning a project-based learning activity, it is often helpful to provide parents with a detailed letter explaining the project and the parameters you have set for it. You should also share how you would prefer parents become involved, even if that involvement is refraining from making specific suggestions. Finally, the letter should provide any important dates associated with the project.

Project-based learning can be a great way to help children explore biblical ideas in more depth than regular Bible class activities. It also teaches them how to continue learning from the Bible independently. It may take more time than planning and executing more standard activities, but for some children project-based learning can be transformative.

Discussion Questions
1. What is a project-based learning activity?
2. What are the characteristics of an effective project-based learning activity?
3. What are some important considerations in planning and implementing project-based learning activities?
4. What are some interpersonal issues that could arise while students are working together to complete a project?
5. What are some ways to address interpersonal issues in project-based learning?
6. Why is assessment important during a project?
7. How can other Christians and parents become involved during project-based learning activities?

Chapter 12 – Effective Learning Games

Learning games can be effective activities, if they are planned and executed well. If not, students will probably enjoy the activity, but get little educational value from it. Often, it is not the game itself, but the classroom management aspects of playing the game that cause it to be ineffective.

Learning games can serve several purposes in Bible classes or other learning environments your ministry may provide.

- **Students can review important facts, vocabulary and concepts.** These learning games are the most popular in a Bible class environment. It is important to understand these particular games help students remember important information, they do not necessarily help them better understand or use what they have learned.
- **Students can move important information from short term to long term memory.** One of the methods for moving key information from short to long term memory is repetition. Games can be a fun way for students to get some of that repetition, especially if the same questions and answers are required in multiple ways throughout the game.
- **Students can begin processing important concepts from the lesson.** Scenario type games can help students better understand more complex or abstract biblical concepts by reframing them within the game in more familiar settings.
- **Students can get necessary practice in implementing key principles in their lives.** Games can be designed to give students practice in using what the lesson has taught them God wants them to do in their lives. This practice will better equip students to use what they have been taught.
- **Students can practice using godly problem solving skills.** Games can be designed to teach students how to use reliable sources for information and give them important godly strategies to use when they encounter a new situation requiring them to make decisions.

Defining Effective Learning Games

Whether you are using a game prepared by someone else or designing one yourself, it is important to understand the key elements of a game that is used as a learning activity. The goal of most games is for the people playing them to enjoy the experience. In a secular game, whether or not anything is learned from playing the game is often irrelevant.

Whether you are using a game in a Bible class or another learning environment your ministry provides, you need that game to enhance the lesson for students. The best learning games generally have these characteristics.

- **Fun and education are well balanced.** If the game is fun, but has no educational value, you are wasting valuable class time by playing it. If the game contains a lot of lesson content, but is boring, students will not want to play it. The goal is to use games that are both fun and educational.

- **Educational value can be found for students at multiple levels.** The very best games are easy enough for a child with little knowledge to play and enjoy, while still challenging advanced students. Often this can be achieved more by how the game is played than the actual questions being asked.
- **Game rules are simple or based on a game already familiar to students.** You have a limited amount of time to play the game in the framework of a class. You want to avoid spending most of that time helping students understand and remember the rules. While the content may change, many games fall into one of several game categories. Keeping the games you use within those basic categories will allow students to spend more time in actual game play.
- **Learning objectives were considered when choosing or designing the game.** Just because a game is a "Bible game", does not necessarily mean it will add value as an activity to a particular lesson. The content of the game should reflect the learning objectives for the lesson, while possibly adding an additional objective. Whenever possible, consider providing a guiding question for students before beginning game play. Allow time at the end of the class period for a discussion of what students learned while playing the game.

Design Types for Learning Games

There are several types of basic designs that can be used for learning games. Within each of those basic designs, there is room for further creativity. These are some of the types of games that are easily used when designing learning games.

- **Board games.** Board designs may differ greatly and be designed on a regular game board, on a computer to be displayed as the board for an entire class or occasionally on paper as boards for individual or small team play.
- **Experience games.** These games can involve creating a life sized board game where students are the game pieces. Or you can use a game requiring students to engage with some sort of experience to play it.
- **Treasure hunts.** These games ask students to find the answer to questions that then send them to a specific location for the next clue. The final clue leads them to the treasure, which can be some object from the lesson that remains in the class or some small "treasure" for students to take home.
- **Acting games.** These games can involve acting out scenarios from the lesson or an application of the lesson. They can even be elaborate and involve "living" a Bible story in a re-enactment or solving a mystery that involves an unfamiliar Bible story.
- **Escape rooms.** These can be designed to help students review units of study by having them solve a variety of puzzles about the lessons in order to find the code that allows them to "escape" the classroom.

Managing Classroom Behavior While Playing Learning Games

Children usually enjoy playing learning games. If there is any sort of competitive aspect to the game, they will naturally get more excited as play progresses. You want your students

to have fun while learning from the content of the game. Unfortunately, this excitement can at times cause other issues that need to be addressed.

Excited children usually make noise. They often jump up and down and move their bodies to emphasize their enthusiasm. If you are playing a game outdoors, and do not expect children to learn anything from the game, noise and movement are not a problem.

In a classroom environment, too much noise and movement can distract other classes. More quiet or introverted children can become overwhelmed and stressed by the commotion and shut down mentally. Children with certain special needs can become so overwhelmed they have a tantrum.

Learning games are a great way for students to have fun while achieving your goals for them. It is worth taking the time to adjust classroom management a bit so they can still play enthusiastically while not hampering learning for others.

Classroom management for games requires some forethought. How loud can your students become before the level of noise hampers learning in nearby classrooms? Often that depends upon the tolerance level of the teachers in those classrooms. Most people are comfortable with more noise than you might anticipate, because of the muffling effect of walls, closed doors and furnishings. Ask nearby teachers if the noise from playing games in your room is disturbing their Bible students.

If you find your students would have to be almost silent to avoid disturbing other classes, you may want to go outside of your classroom to play a game. If your congregation has a safe outdoor space or an area away from other classes, take your students there to play. If that is not an option, you may want to bring students together to play the game at another time, when the noise level is not as important.

Regardless of where you choose to play the game, it is important to realize the point when children are becoming so enthusiastic they are beginning to lose their self control. When excitement reaches this level, no productive learning is happening. Games can become chaotic as noise levels and behaviors get out of control.

Have a quiet sign students recognize and use it to stop game play before it reaches that level. Taking a minute or two to remind students of the goal of the game and acceptable behavior gives them a moment to regain their self control. Usually, after such a break, game play begins again at a slightly lower and more acceptable level of excitement than before.

Designing Game Content
Bible teachers often find they need to design their own games. It is difficult to find many games designed as educational games to be used in Bible classes. Often the ones that can be found are expensive or focus mainly on Bible trivia.

When designing game content for a Bible class, it is important to decide what you want the children to learn from the game. Analyze how you can best design the game so your students accomplish your learning goals while playing it. This can be done by the way the game is played or by the actual questions or content used during game play.

It is also important to understand your students and their current level of knowledge and comprehension of the material covered in the game. If the game you design is too easy, students may become bored or play the game without learning anything from it. If the game is too difficult, children may become frustrated and upset. As most classes provided by children's ministries contain children with various levels of knowledge and abilities, designing content that helps everyone learn something new can be difficult.

If the group playing the game has too wide of a range in their knowledge and ability levels, you can do several things to help.
- **Change how students compete.** It may be better to have two versions of the game being played simultaneously - one version for more advanced students and one for students who may be new to the material in the game. You can also create teams that are balanced in their overall level of ability, rather than allowing students to create a team that has only the top players in it. Or you can design the game so students are competing against themselves, improving their personal performance rather than comparing their performance to that of others.
- **Use cooperative games.** These are games where the class works together as an entity to win the game. Everyone has a role and can contribute towards the successful outcome of the game.
- **Change the scoring.** If one team gets too far ahead of the other, you can make the last question worth enough points so the losing team still has a chance to "win". This will keep both teams invested in playing the game. If the team comes from behind to win on the last question, the other team can console itself by knowing they answered the most questions correctly.
- **Do not keep score.** If the game normally involves winning points, do not assign points for anything. The key to keeping kids enthusiastic about playing a game where there is no clear winner is how you react during game play. Your excitement at correct answers will often be mirrored by your students. They may even forget you were not keeping score. Some students will still ask at the end of the game who you think "won". Usually pointing out how much everyone enjoyed and learned from the game lets them know they all won!
- **Use better players to create new content and "host" the game.** This means adding an additional goal for the game. More advanced students will be learning

how to teach the Bible to others and help them use what they learn in ways that are kind and loving. The other students will learn from actually playing the game.

Materials for Creating Learning Games
Creating learning games does not have to be expensive. Often you can use found materials or adapt the supplies from a secular game you may already own. Materials like poster board, cardboard and other stiff papers can make game boards or game cards. If you want to reuse the same game board and make new game cards to change the game, you may want to purchase a board canvas used by artists and paint a game board on it.

Make sure you use some sort of protective covering when possible so the game board and cards will last longer. Laminating film or even clear plastic bags or wrap can keep game cards looking new longer. For painted boards, using Mod Podge or a mixture of three parts glue (use a glue that dries clear) to one part water to cover the entire board will allow you to clean it carefully without fading the board.

For life sized game boards, painted cardboard works well for the spaces. If you can find giant dice or make an oversized spinner, that adds to the illusion of an oversized game board. Students can be the game pieces, allowing them to keep active by physically moving whenever they have a turn.

When designing a board game that will be projected from a laptop computer and displayed on a screen, the basic PowerPoint program works well. You may also be able to find online templates for games that allow you to insert your own content.

Game Ideas
There are a lot of basic games you can design using the format for popular board games or game shows in your area. In addition, there are some games educators have used for years, that may be less familiar to you. The ones below are learning games many secular educators use on a regular basis.
- **Pass the Chicken.** Find a silly object like a rubber chicken that students can quickly pass to each other. It should be unbreakable and large enough to pass quickly without dropping it. Have students sit in a circle. Tell them to quickly pass the object until you ring a bell. Vary the amount of time you allow the object to be passed. When the bell sounds, the person holding the object must keep it. Ask the person holding the object a game question. If the child answers correctly, the object begins going around the circle again. If the child answers incorrectly, he or she goes into the middle of the circle. After the first missed answer, any subsequent missed answers can then be answered by any players in the middle of the circle. If they give the correct answer, they can all return to their seats and the person who originally missed the answer goes into the center. If the group in the center misses the question, they remain in the center and the person who originally missed the question joins them. If you wish, you can create a random game card that allows

players in the center to exchange places with someone in the circle whenever that card is drawn.

- **Fast Facts.** Print off multiple five by five grids for students or have them draw their own. In one container place slips of paper - each one containing a category like "Apostles" or "Women in the Bible". Try to have as many review categories as possible. In another container place slips of paper, each containing a letter of the alphabet. (You may want to eliminate any letters that have no answers for any of your categories.) Draw five categories and have students write one in each space above the grid. Then draw five letters of the alphabet and have students write them to the left going from top to bottom of the grid. The resulting game board should have a space where each category can have an answer for each letter. Students may not start writing answers until you start the clock. Give students two minutes to start and adjust the time as necessary for future rounds to make the game fun and challenging. At the end of the two minutes have students count their total answers. Have the student with the most answers tell his or her responses to the class, so other students can learn from the answers. If the student with the most answers has incorrect responses, the player with the next most answers can check his or her answers to see if he or she has more correct answers. Students love playing multiple rounds of this game as each round involves new categories and letters of the alphabet. This is a great game to encourage students to try to best their own previous efforts.
- **Four Corners.** This game can be played for more complex subjects like application principles. Read the question to students. Tell them that when you give the signal, they are to run quickly to the corner of the room they believe contains the correct answer. Then point to each corner and give it a possible solution to the question you just posed. Give the signal and let students run to the corner they believe was the right answer. There is no scoring for this game, but it's a great way to subtly assess which students may still be struggling with the material.
- **Fireworks.** In a large, unbreakable container place a number of craft sticks or slips of paper. On each slip should be written a question. Include several craft sticks or slips of paper that just have the word "Fireworks" written on them. Have students sit in a circle. They pass the container around the circle. As each person gets the container, he or she pulls out a question and attempts to answer it. If the answer is correct, the person keeps the craft stick or slip of paper. If they draw "Fireworks", they must put any craft sticks or slips of paper they have won back into the container. The person with the most craft sticks or slips of paper at the end of the game wins. The more questions and more "Fireworks" you have in the container, the more fun the game can be.
- **Proverbs or Folk Wisdom?** This game helps students begin to differentiate between the wisdom found in scripture, and the "wise" sayings of others, that may or may not actually contain wisdom. Prepare slips of paper with quotes from the book of Proverbs in the Bible and quotes from popular folk wisdom your students may have heard elsewhere. As you read a statement, students must guess whether

it is in the Bible or is folk wisdom. If you choose examples carefully, you can make the game difficult and a lot of fun. You may want to spend additional time discussing God's ultimate wisdom and the inability humans have to be as wise as God - if they are wise, it is often because they have learned or accidentally found God's wisdom.

- **Scavenger Hunt.** These can be used for reviewing a unit or making decisions based on application principles. The game is more fun if the teams are relatively small. It takes some work to set up the hunt so teams are going in different directions, but it can be done by rotating the clues between teams. Have a team name, number or color for each team and make sure each team has an envelope specifically meant for them at each location to prevent confusion. The questions should be in the format "Question. If you believe answer A is correct, go to this location. if you believe answer B is correct, go to a different location." The incorrect location will have no envelopes when the team reaches it. Only the correct location will have an envelope for their team with the next clue. Until students become comfortable with scavenger hunts, it is helpful for each team to have an adult volunteer to keep them from getting too confused. The volunteer should not help with answers and should allow them to choose incorrectly. The volunteer can, however, remind them they can go to the other location or that they need to find the envelope with the next clue. The volunteer can also help read the clues to younger children. The "hunt" can end with the teams finding the final location, where the teacher may choose to have a refreshment or some small mementos for students to take home to help them remember the main points of the lesson or to remind them to practice the application principles.

Games can be an important educational tool for teachers to use with their students. If planned and executed well, the children playing them will have an enjoyable learning time that can also help many of them better remember the material you want them to know, understand and incorporate in their lives.

Discussion Questions
1. What are some of the purposes of using learning games in the classroom?
2. What are some characteristics of effective learning games?
3. What are some design types for learning games?
4. How can classroom behavior be managed while playing learning games to avoid hampering learning for others?
5. What are some ways to adapt games to compensate for players with widely divergent knowledge and skill levels?
6. What are some materials that can be used for creating learning games?
7. Create a learning game based on a secular game that is already familiar to your students.
8. Create the materials for one of the additional learning games mentioned in the chapter.

Chapter 13 – Effective Drama Activities

Have you ever watched a play or movie and become so engrossed, you had trouble adjusting to real life for a few minutes after it ended? Or perhaps the emotions caused by a drama stayed with you hours after you left the theater. Used properly, drama activities can actually provide several educational benefits for the students in your Bible classes.

- **Dramas can help children understand the details of a story.** Bible stories often contain a lot of details. Children can become confused with the various unfamiliar people, culture, objects and situations. Acting out the Bible story can improve comprehension of it for some students.
- **Dramas can capture children's interest in a Bible story in some cases better than telling or reading it to them.** Some students will engage with drama more than listening to a story or reading it in the Bible. (There are some important caveats to this benefit, which we will cover later in the chapter.)
- **Dramas can help children develop empathy for the people in the story if they participate in the drama.** When children have to walk around outside in the hot sun, they can feel empathy for the Israelites who grumbled for water. This empathy can make the lessons in the story more meaningful to them. It can also encourage them to think more deeply about the story.
- **Dramas can help children understand how culture impacts the meaning of a Bible story.** Children often do not understand what life was like without electricity or other modern conveniences. Having them water a pretend camel (like Rebekah watered actual camels) gives them a greater appreciation for her servant heart. Experiencing aspects of the culture in Bible times can give students a much deeper appreciation for the lessons behind the story.
- **Dramas can be used to help children understand abstract biblical concepts in more concrete ways.** Concepts like the Trinity can be very confusing to children who are still thinking concretely. A drama that has one character asking the questions students may be afraid to voice, while the other character uses ice, water and steam to better explain the Trinity can increase student understanding.
- **Dramas can provide a way to make learning detailed information more fun and engaging.** Using a fun improv and rhyming drama to introduce children to all of the prophets in the Bible and their messages is a lot more engaging and memorable than a lecture discussing those same facts.
- **Dramas can give children opportunities to practice application principles and Christian life skills.** Children need practice to make it easier for them to apply the Bible lesson's application principles to their lives. Having them act out scenarios can give them time to practice what they might say or do in a similar real life situation.

Types of Dramas
There are various types of dramas one can use in a Bible class or other ministry setting. In general, no one form of drama is necessarily more effective than another. The learning

goals you set for the drama may help you determine whether one type of drama will work better than another.

Each type of drama has particular advantages for students.
- **Plays with adult actors.** These dramas can work best for large groups of children or when attempting to teach younger children. Minimal participation is required from the children watching this type of drama.
- **Plays with adult actors and all of the children playing a non-speaking role in the drama.** These dramas are great for helping students actually feel as if they have lived a Bible story. While the adults play roles like Moses, the children may play important background characters like the Israelites.
- **Skits written and performed by children.** These skits can be Bible stories or about application principles. These dramas could be part of a project based learning activity with learning goals that are met during the creation and performance of the skit.
- **Skits written and performed by adults.** These skits are great for helping students understand application principles in a Bible story or abstract biblical concepts. They are best performed for large groups of students or for younger children.
- **Puppet shows.** Although technically puppet shows can be used to teach Bible stories or application principles, they are best used to help students understand application principles or abstract biblical concepts. Although younger children are more appreciative of puppet shows, they can still be used occasionally with older children as well.
- **Improv skits performed by adults.** These skits are fun ways to expose students to detailed information they would find boring in a lecture type lesson. Creating a fun rhyming script read by a narrator while the actors improvise with provided props and costumes is what makes it fun. This type of drama is best used with older children who are able to process multiple things simultaneously.
- **Real life scenarios improvised by children.** These scenarios allow children to practice how they can use application principles in their lives. The scenarios allow them to try different words and actions and get a realistic response from a peer, without any negative repercussions. Scenarios should be carefully written to reflect the real lives of the children using them.

Planning Dramas
Some Bible class teachers are reluctant to use drama. They may believe drama only works well when it looks like something a professional acting company would produce. Other teachers may believe that costumes, sets and props are not worth the trouble and have students read dialogue with a lot of words they can barely pronounce. In reality, to be impactful, dramas need to have thought put into every aspect of creating and performing them.

Drama Scripts

If you are staging a scripted drama, someone will need to write a script. Scripted dramas give the writer more control over the content of the drama. This is helpful if you are using the drama to teach a Bible story or explain an abstract biblical concept.

Unscripted dramas give the actors more freedom to write their own lines as they act. Unscripted dramas are best when asking students to participate in scenarios helping them practice application principles or Christian life skills. Some children, especially with certain special needs, will be unable to participate in an unscripted drama. They may not have the necessary social skills or processing speed to quickly create a response to another actor's line. In those cases, you may want to provide a script to help those students practice saying appropriate things in specific social situations.

When writing a script for a drama depicting a Bible story, it is important to use the exact wording in scripture as much as possible. If your audience contains very young children, you may have to change some of the vocabulary to use simpler words with a similar meaning. Be very careful not to add things to Bible story dramas that could potentially change the meaning of the story.

When writing any script for a drama performed for children, it is important to keep the dialogue simple and conversational. Long soliloquies will bore children, causing them to lose interest in the drama. If the vocabulary is too difficult or the dialogue contains too much information, the children will become confused. If you are unsure, watch the children's programs enjoyed by your Bible students to understand the level of dialogue to which they are accustomed.

Scripts also need to reflect the attention span of the children for whom it will be performed. Most children have relatively short attention spans. A shorter play or skit that keeps students engaged is better than a longer drama that loses the attention of your students after the first five minutes.

Often script writers want to add humor to a play or skit to engage the audience. Laughter can make a drama seem more fun and engaging. Humor needs to be used very carefully, however. The humor regularly used in professional productions is often sarcastic, mean spirited and inappropriate for children to be exposed to in a Christian environment. Unfortunately, many adults have become so accustomed to this inappropriate humor, they no longer realize the issues it can cause for those watching it.

There is some natural humor the Bible has included in particular Bible stories. Adults who are familiar with these stories may find the humor and the action in the story boring and want to add something extra. It is important to remember these Bible stories are still new to children. God put plenty of humor, action and drama in the Bible for children to be

drawn into Bible dramas. There is really no need to add things that could accidentally change the tone or meaning of the Bible story.

Drama Sets
A set is the environment in which a drama occurs. The sets for your drama will depend in part upon how much space you have to use. If you do not have adequate space indoors, consider staging your drama outside. Outdoor dramas can be impacted by weather, so be sure you have contingency plans in place.

Once you have found the space in which to stage your drama, look at your script to see how many locations are mentioned. If more than one location is involved, you can change locations by altering the set or moving the audience to another location where there is a different environment staged.

Whenever possible, use what is already in place in the location you have chosen. If, for example, the drama is depicting a Bible story that took place outside of a building, staging the drama outside may mean you do not need to create a set. You can instead use what is already in the outdoor environment you have chosen.

Indoor environments in Bible stories are often best recreated by replacing electric lighting with LED candles, removing furniture and any modern inventions and placing basic floor mats and clay or metal jugs and jars in groupings to the sides of where the drama will be performed.

For more involved sets, you may choose to make reproductions of some or all of the items that would have been in the original environment. Often these can be made with scrap wood or cardboard. Items that were made of gold can be painted with gold paint.

It is important to remember that a set is there to help the audience believe what they witness is actually happening. While expensive sets are wonderful, they are not necessary for ministry purposes. Children generally have wonderful imaginations and the simplest of sets will help engage them in the drama.

If your drama is being written and performed by children, let them design and build the sets as well. Children as young as five or six years old can design and create imaginative sets with minimal adult guidance. Perfection should not be the goal in student designed sets. Often children will learn more if they are allowed to create sets with minimal adult interference.

Drama Costumes
If you are going to invest resources in a drama, costumes would be the most helpful area to choose to enhance your drama. Once again, costumes do not have to be elaborate or

expensive. They should, however, make the actor appear to be the person they are portraying.

Costumes can be created from all types of scrap fabric - including old bed linens and curtains. If you plan to use dramas regularly, it is probably best to have someone who can sew, create costumes that can be used multiple times. They can create their own patterns based on drawings of clothing during Bible times or purchase patterns for costumes representing the cultures in that time period.

If you are performing a play set in more modern times, actors can often provide their own costumes. Other items can be borrowed from people involved with your ministry. In most dramas set in today's world, there should be no need for someone to sew an original costume. The only exception might be if it belongs to a character that will appear in other plays in the future. If you need unusual costume items, thrift stores or vintage stores may have what you need.

In some locations, you may have access to stores that sell costumes. They may sell items representing Egyptian, Greek or Roman eras that can be incorporated into a costume for a Bible drama. These are often accessories that can transform the same plain fabric robe into an outfit representing different cultures or time periods. It is also possible to make many of these accessories yourself by adapting more modern items to make them represent the correct culture and time period or by creating inexpensive replicas with resources you may have available.

When creating costumes, do not forget footwear. If actors in Bible dramas do not own sandals that look as if they are from the appropriate time period, have them go barefoot. Wearing visibly modern shoes and/or socks can distract from your drama. Accessories like jewelry can also add some additional authenticity to your costumes, even if it is inexpensive jewelry representing something more expensive.

Drama Props
Props can add a lot of realism and depth to your drama, but are often forgotten. Many of the props used in Bible dramas can be used multiple times over the years. It may be worth taking the time to create sturdy, well made props rather than continually making new cheaper versions of the same prop.

When deciding what props to use, make sure to research what items looked like in the time period of your drama. Having a modern glass oil lamp as a prop in a Bible drama when they would have had small clay oil lamps may not seem like an important detail. As children become older though, they will remember if your ministry made every attempt to represent things in the Bible accurately or appeared to use any convenient substitute. Accurately representing props as much as possible sends an underlying message that your

ministry cares about teaching the Bible accurately. The details on props do not have to be perfect replicas, but they should have the basic look of the original object.

Props like scrolls can often be stained with tea to give them an antique look. Paint can make an inexpensive prop look real. When creating props, remember to view them from the same distance your audience will be from the prop when watching the drama. Even with excellent vision, distance can blur some of the details of a prop. This can add to the illusion or make a prop worthless, if audience members cannot tell what it is.

For scenarios and improv dramas, begin collecting random everyday objects which can be used when performing them. You may also want to create a grab bag of costume type items students can use when performing in scenarios. This can add to the fun for students and make them more interested in extended scenario practice on an application topic or Christian life skill.

Actors in a Drama
Actors can make your drama a success or a failure. The good news is that children are a very forgiving audience. They do not demand award winning performances. They do however, appreciate actors who know their lines and can add some life to their character.

Unfortunately, adults have much higher standards for what they expect from a drama. As a result, they may be reluctant to act in fear of embarrassing themselves. Most people, especially those who are extroverts, are much better actors than they realize. Often actors are so intent on remembering every word of their dialogue perfectly, their delivery becomes wooden. Allowing actors to say the gist of the line if they forget the words, can be freeing to most and improve their overall performance.

Try to give the script to actors as far in advance as possible. The more time they have to memorize their lines, the more comfortable they will be performing them. Unfortunately, many adults will procrastinate because they do not understand the importance of drama in the spiritual education of the children in the audience. If your drama is important to the success of your lesson, you may want to remind actors to practice their lines or even have a dress rehearsal before the performance.

If you are using the children in your ministry as actors, there are a few additional considerations. Unscripted scenarios are casual class activities and most students should be able and willing to participate. If a student is extremely uncomfortable, allow them to be the "director" and make suggestions for doing the scenario another way the other students can then use to act.

If you are planning a scripted drama with children as actors, they can be great opportunities for introducing new children to your ministry. Community parents often

appreciate an opportunity for their children to be engaged in a meaningful project like a performance of a play.

When using child actors, communicate your expectations clearly to their parents. Parents need to understand the rehearsal schedule, the lines their children should memorize and any costumes or props they will be expected to provide. When working with child actors, be prepared to improvise even during the performance. Children who have loved being on stage during rehearsal can freeze in front of a live audience or one of your actors may take ill at the last minute. Putting on a large scale performance featuring children takes a lot of work, but it will create lasting memories for most of the children who participate.

Student Drama Performances
Children are often excited about participating in a drama. They want an audience, even if it makes them more nervous. It is important that even student performed skits have some sort of audience to watch the students perform. At times, the audience may be their peers in the class.

For more involved dramas, consider inviting people outside of the class to a performance. Family members are often enthusiastic and supportive audience members. If your Bible students are older, consider having them perform for students in younger classes. If the production is on a large scale, like a musical or church wide drama, inviting the community can introduce new people to your ministry.

Finally, consider capturing the performance for the future. Giving parents a copy of the entire play to save for the future is a great way to touch your students emotionally and spiritually when they are much older. Nostalgia can drive them to view or share their old performances, bringing back happy memories of church and God. At times, these memories can bring people back to churches they have left many years before.

Using dramas in their various formats can enhance your curriculum in many ways. Just be careful not to over use them or they can become boring to students - no matter how wonderful they may be.

Discussion Questions
1. What are some possible purposes for using drama in a Bible class for children?
2. What are the various types of dramas that can be useful in a learning environment?
3. What are some important things to remember when writing a script for a drama?
4. What are some ways to create sets for dramas?
5. What are some things to remember about creating costumes for dramas?
6. What are some key points to remember when creating props for a drama?
7. What are some important things to remember about casting and preparing actors for dramas?

8. What are special considerations when you are performing a large scale drama using children as actors?
9. What are some potential audiences for dramas in which students participate?
10. How can dramas be used as an outreach tool?

Chapter 14 – Effective Learning Excursions

Learning excursions are a great way to give children experiences that are difficult to provide in the classroom setting. Unfortunately, many Bible classes and ministries for children do not take advantage of these opportunities to provide additional unique learning experiences. While learning excursions can be problematic, they can be impactful when they are well planned.

Learning excursions can provide various important spiritual benefits to the children participating. One learning excursion will not give them all of these benefits. With careful planning, however, each experience can provide one or more benefits. If learning excursions are provided regularly over a period of time, the children to whom you minister can grow spiritually in multiple ways.

- **Understanding the cultures in the Bible.** Many museums contain artifacts from the cultures in the Bible. A learning excursion to specific exhibits will give children an opportunity to see an actual idol of Baal or a clay oil lamp and other items they have read about in the Bible.
- **Comprehending the historicity of the Bible.** Much of the Bible is a book of history, although children may be taught otherwise in school or at home. Visiting museums that contain the objects and cultures in the Bible helps underscore the historical nature of the Bible.
- **Learning to see God.** Learning excursions to natural areas are a great way to connect students to God through His creation.
- **Discovering and developing their gifts from God.** Learning excursions can provide children with an opportunity to experiment with various gifts and find the ones God may have given them. They can also be used to give students with particular gifts opportunities to develop them more fully.
- **Building empathy.** Learning excursions can be designed so children develop empathy for others. These experiences must be carefully planned to avoid unintentional negative consequences, but when executed well, children can find them life changing.
- **Building relationships and community.** Children need a strong emotional connection to the people in their church family. These relationships and connections can help young people through their more turbulent teen and young adult years. Learning excursions can give children more opportunities to bond with peers and adult members of their church family.

Planning a Learning Excursion
As with any activity, it is important to consider the goals you want to accomplish during a learning excursion. It would be virtually impossible to achieve all of the possible benefits in one experience. Your planning may start with the destination in mind or you may prefer to choose a location after you have chosen your learning goals.

Once you have decided your learning goals and a possible destination, you will need to do additional research. Thoroughly read the website if you are visiting a museum or similar location. Make sure you understand any fees you may be charged by the purveyor. Some places give special discounts for groups and may even provide a free or low cost guide. If the website does not provide the information you need, try calling. Ask if they have a special person who works with groups to whom you can speak.

If possible, you may want to visit the location yourself before taking children there. This scouting visit will allow you to map out the specific things you want the children to see or experience on the outing. As you walk through the location, look for special learning opportunities you want the children to have as well as areas that could create issues. Remember to view the location from your view as a teacher, but also from the viewpoint of the children who will go on the learning excursion.

Whether or not you are able to visit the location before taking a group of children, it is important to plan for the types of issues that can happen on an excursion with children. You will need to plan restroom (WC), water and possibly food breaks. It is also helpful to be aware of areas where there are breakables or other items that might tempt children to make poor choices. Gift shops can cause problems on learning excursions, so create a detailed plan for how gift shop visits and purchases will be managed.

Planning Transportation
Transporting a group of children to a location can be difficult. If you have a large number of children, they may need to be separated into smaller groups to more easily and safely get them to your destination. You will need to make sure you have enough adult chaperones to accompany each group of children.

When planning transportation, you may find you have more than one possible option for moving the children from your location to the area of the learning excursion. When you have multiple transportation options, it is important to consider the following areas.
- **Safety.** Which option is safest? If private vehicles or taxis are considered, will all of the drivers be safe? If public transportation or walking is an option, do you have enough chaperones to watch all of the children carefully?
- **Cost.** Can the families of the children or your ministry easily cover the additional cost of the transportation you have chosen?
- **Time.** How much time will it take to get to and from the locations involved? Are you spending so much time traveling that you will have little time for the excursion itself?
- **Energy.** If walking is involved, will the children have the stamina to walk to and from the location, as well as any walking involved while there? Do any of the children have mobility issues or health conditions that could make a lot of walking problematic?

Financial Considerations of a Learning Excursion
Once you have decided upon the location of your experience and the transportation you will use, you will have an idea of how much the learning excursion will cost. Depending upon the situation, your ministry may decide to cover the costs, or you may ask parents to cover the costs for their children to participate. You should have some provision to cover the costs of any student whose parents cannot or will not pay for their child to accompany you. If the learning excursion is important for the children, the lack of money should not keep them from having the experience.

When considering costs, you may need to factor in other optional expenses. Water, food, restroom (WC) charges, and souvenirs will be possible additional expenses incurred. Taking the time to stop and drink water or eat a meal or snack together can provide valuable opportunities for mentoring and connecting with children. It will also increase student attention and learning that can lag when students are overly hungry or thirsty.

Obtaining Parental Permission
It can be helpful to have a signed document from the parent or guardian of each child. This document should be completed by the parent and returned to you before the excursion. The document should have two parts or parents should receive a copy of the form for themselves. The first part contains all of the information about the excursion, including the places you will be, the transportation you are using, the date and times of the excursion, any costs or special instructions for parents and phone numbers parents can call if they need to reach your group during the excursion.

The second part should be taken with the excursion leader in case a problem occurs during the experience. It should contain the name of the child, the name of the parent, permission for your church or ministry to take the child to the specific locations, permission to take an injured child for medical attention while the parent is attempting to meet you, any known medical issues the child may have that could impact them during the excursion, and a phone number where a parent can be called during the excursion if there is a problem. The parent should sign, date and return this portion of the permission slip to you before the child is allowed to go on the excursion.[30]

While it may seem unnecessary, permission slips can prove very helpful if there is ever a problem. Not only can it give you vital information, but it can also be helpful should an authority question you for some reason.

Choosing Chaperones
It is almost impossible to have too many chaperones on a learning excursion. Younger children will need more chaperones than will older ones. It is important to remember that a chaperone may need to suddenly separate from their group to help one child who is

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[30] See Appendix 8. Sample Permission Slip.

having issues. Having extra chaperones can allow that to happen without preventing the rest of the group from completing the experience.

It is also important to consider the personalities of the children who will be on the learning excursion. Do you have children who tend to get distracted and may wander off or fail to realize their group is moving to another area? Do you have children with mobility issues? Are any of the children particularly fascinated with some of the things you will see or experience? Do you have children that have a difficult time following instructions or obeying? Have any of the children been to this location before with others? Any of these can cause a need for extra chaperones on your excursion.

When asking for volunteer chaperones, it is important to screen them carefully. If they are not already volunteers in your ministry, they should go through your volunteer screening process. If parents are volunteering to chaperone, work with the parent and child before the learning excursion to decide whether or not the child should be placed in the group with his or her parent.

Preparing Chaperones
Chaperones are seldom given the preparation they need to help the children meet the goals of a learning excursion. Without this training, some groups of children will learn more from the experience than others. To keep the experience pleasant and productive for both chaperones and children, chaperones should be given the following information at least a week before the actual excursion.

- **Expectations for chaperones.** What are they responsible for during the excursion? Be as specific as possible, listing both the names of the children and the duties they will be asked to perform. You may also want to remind chaperones their attention should be focused on the children and not on other chaperones. Often chaperones want to spend their time interacting with each other, rather than focusing on the needs of the children they are chaperoning.
- **Safety rules and procedures.** What are the rules you are expecting students to follow? How do you want chaperones to handle potential safety issues like injury, illness or even disobedience? Knowing the rules and the procedures will help prevent any possible problems from the way a chaperone manages the children during the experience.
- **Learning excursion goals.** Sharing the goals of the experience will help guide chaperones as they talk with the children in their group. You may even want to include the specific things they could do with their group to help these goals be met.
- **Specific objects, experiences, dialogue and questions you want them to share with their group.** Often it is easier in a small space to send the groups in different directions to make it easier for the children to see and hear everything. When this happens, chaperones can get distracted and miss important things you wanted the children to see or experience. There may also be specific things you want the students to be told at certain points during the excursion or questions you would

like them to answer. Providing this information to chaperones in advance, makes it more likely those things will happen.

- **Ideas for developing mentoring relationships with the children in their group.** If your chaperones have not been previously trained on how to mentor children, giving them a few written tips and ideas can help. These mentoring moments could be a one time conversation during the excursion, or a long term mentoring relationship could begin because of the experience. Encouraging mentoring interactions will make them much more likely to occur.

Preparing Children for a Learning Excursion

Preparing children for a learning excursion needs to go beyond giving them the logistics. Depending upon the excursion, you may need to give them preparation lessons, activities and even things to do at home. You will need to carefully consider what knowledge your students will need in order to get the most out of the experience.

There are several ways you can help prepare children for learning excursions.

- **Teach them a special lesson.** Perhaps there is a Bible story that involves an object they will see or covers a principle you want the excursion to reinforce. Or you may want to teach an application lesson they will use during the excursion.
- **Give them important information about what they will see or do.** If you are going to see an exhibit on a specific culture, you may want to show them maps or discuss where that culture is seen in the Bible. Many exhibits will also have the information, but going over it with the entire group will reinforce it.
- **Have a special activity.** Is there an activity that will help them appreciate the learning experience even more? Sometimes these activities can be done either before or after the learning excursion. You will need to decide at which point it will most positively impact student learning. For example, if you are studying Joseph and taking students to an exhibit about ancient Egypt, you might want to try mummifying a fish in class so students will better understand what was done to the bodies of Jacob and Joseph. Or you may decide the activity will be more impactful after they have seen actual mummies.
- **Give them outside reading.** Is there a Bible story, scripture or a book of some sort they could read at home that would better prepare them for the experience? Not every child will participate, but those who do will learn more from the excursion.
- **Give them special thought questions and things to notice.** Are there things you want your students to think about or see while they are on the excursion? Giving them those things in advance will make it more likely that it will happen. You may even want to develop a worksheet or "treasure hunt" they complete during the excursion to help them answer those questions or find and closely examine the things you want them to notice.
- **Give them a list of expectations.** What are the rules for the trip? What are the consequences if they disobey? What are the logistics and what do you want them to do if things do not go as planned? Are there specific things you expect all of them to

see or do on the excursion? Explaining those things clearly several times before the excursion will help.

Reflection After a Learning Experience
Children need some time for guided reflection after a learning experience. You may choose to have two times of reflection. Gather students immediately after completing the experience and lead them in a reflection activity. Then take a few moments the next time your class meets to do any additional reflection that may be needed.

During guided reflection, you want to accomplish several goals.
- **Analyzing what went well and what problems there may have been.** You need this feedback to help in planning future learning excursions. While your reflection times may be primarily for the children, it is important to get this feedback from chaperones as well as children.
- **Having children share what they learned during the experience.** This will serve as a review for some and give children who may have missed something another opportunity to learn it. It will also let you know what areas may have been missed and still require additional instruction.
- **Uncovering questions or misunderstandings.** With their limited life experience and knowledge, it is quite likely some of your students did not understand what they saw and experienced. They may have questions or have misinterpreted something they saw or heard. It is important to discover these misunderstandings during a time of reflection so they can be addressed. Their questions may also give you ideas for areas in which the students are interested in deeper instruction.

Discussion Questions
1. What are some possible benefits of taking children on learning excursions?
2. What is involved in planning a learning excursion?
3. What are some things to be considered regarding transportation?
4. List the key points in recruiting and training chaperones.
5. What are some ways to prepare students for a learning excursion?
6. What are some things that should be covered during a time of reflection after a learning experience?

Chapter 15 – Christian Life Skills for Children

Christian life skills are the skill sets children will need to be obedient to God. God has given us instructions for our hearts and our behaviors. While the heart can be molded, some of the behaviors are easier to do if one has been taught helpful skills needed in their performance. Young people may want to obey God in a particular area, but struggle because no one has given them the tools to make obedience a little easier.

There are many examples of Christian life skills. Stewardship, for example, is easier if one has learned how to make a budget. Godly conflict resolution is more likely if one has learned a process for resolving conflicts. One needs only to look at the various commands in the New Testament and analyze each for any skills that would be helpful when one is attempting to be obedient.

Many Christian life skills appear to be skills that are more appropriately taught to teenagers or adults. Starting to teach Christian life skills at the most basic levels to children, however, can prevent bad habits from forming and lay the groundwork for more intensive Christian life skill instruction later.

Planning Christian Life Skill Lessons
Christian life skills can be taught in the context of a regular Bible class or offered as a separate class or activity by your ministry. A thorough Christian life skills lesson will last longer than the standard forty-five minutes to an hour of a regular Bible class. Because the lessons involve a lot of activity and practice, even children in early elementary school can benefit from Christian life skill lessons that last ninety minutes to an hour.

Christian life skill lessons have three basic parts: a Bible lesson, the teaching of the skill and guided practice of the skill. Within each of those areas, you may have additional learning elements like introductory activities, questions, demonstrations and more. It is important to remember that while some of the skill sets being taught are also secular, the focus should always be on using these skills to live the lives God wants us to lead. If you lose that focus, Christian life skill lessons will become secular and miss the larger goal.

When planning how to teach students a particular Christian life skill it is essential you choose carefully. For some topics, like financial planning, secular resources are more likely to focus on personal financial gain, rather than stewardship and generosity. It is important to carefully analyze the underlying message and make sure it is godly before teaching it to children.

At other times, a life skill can be taught in more than one way. A budget for instance will always have the same basic information. Different teachers may use different styles for recording the information. One is not necessarily better than the other. At times, one style will appeal to some children more than others. In those cases, it is often best to give the

students several options and let them experiment to discover which format works best for them.

Choosing Bible Stories for Christian Life Skill Lessons
Christian life skill lessons are often great for introducing children to lesser known people in the Bible. Often these mentions are only one or two verses long, so adding another story or passage may be necessary to have a full Bible lesson. Sharing more than one story with the same theme also reinforces the importance of that principle to God.

When attempting to connect two seemingly unrelated Bible stories in the same lesson, it is important to explain why you are telling them together. Remind the children when each story occurred within the larger framework of the Bible. Tell the stories in chronological order and periodically remind your Bible students what you want them to learn from both stories.

If you are teaching a lesson on stewardship, for example, you might choose to use the story of Abigail in the Old Testament and the mention of Susannah and Joanna in the New Testament. All three women used their resources to serve God. They had to use those resources carefully, so they would have enough to do the things God wanted them to do.

Teaching a Christian Life Skill
Teaching the actual skill is a critical part of the lesson. If this section of the lesson is not engaging, students will lose interest. Often teaching a skill is a rather dry task, but there are things you can do to keep students interested and engaged. In general, you want to avoid lecturing in favor of demonstrations and side by side instruction.

Demonstrations are often more engaging if they are given by someone the children do not know well. Or you may choose to do the demonstration yourself, calling up various students to help you with aspects of the demonstration. Avoid using filmed demonstrations if at all possible. Children can be sensitive to production values and ignore anything that appears outdated or has poor production values.

When demonstrations are given, it is important to stop periodically and make sure the children understand what is being done. At times, portions of the demonstration will need to be repeated. When only one or two students are confused, it may be better to spend one on one time clarifying the step later with just those students. Complete comprehension is not mandatory after a demonstration. The guided practice portion of the lesson will clarify things for most students.

For complicated Christian life skills, side by side instruction can be more productive. This will require more adult volunteers as each adult should preferably work with only one or two students. The advantage to side by side skill teaching is that each student can receive

instruction in the ways that help him or her best learn. Children are also more likely to feel comfortable asking questions and admitting confusion in a side by side scenario.

Whether you are using demonstrations or side by side instruction, it is important to allow sufficient time for the process. Rushing through Christian life skill training can leave children feeling frustrated and confused. It is better to slow down the instruction a bit and make sure students fully understand how to do the skill - even if they cannot master it yet. Be careful to watch for students who already have had some training or experience with the Christian life skill. Find ways to give them additional instruction in more complex areas of it.

Spiritual Disciplines as Christian Life Skills
While spiritual disciplines are not technically Christian life skills, they are important if the children in your ministry are to stay spiritually healthy long after they have aged out of your ministry. Young children will be dependent upon adults to help them with many of these disciplines. As they reach late childhood, however, most will be capable of at least beginning to practice spiritual disciplines independently.

There are several different spiritual disciplines. For each, your ministry can provide training and guided practice. You can also send home resources children can use independently or with the help of their parents to establish healthy spiritual discipline habits. The various areas are explored below with suggestions of activities and resources that can be used to encourage them.

Bible Study
While the goal is to encourage children to have a heart that loves and values spending time reading the Bible, for many it will begin as a healthy habit like teeth brushing or exercise. Habits are easier to establish when they are placed naturally into the child's normal schedule. Help each child find an event, like eating a snack or going to bed, that is done daily and can easily have five to thirty minutes added to it without disrupting other activities. This is often the best place to incorporate a time of Bible reading into their schedule.

Often children fail to establish independent Bible study habits because they run into difficulties. Finding them an easy to read version of the Bible can help beginning readers actually enjoy reading the Bible, rather than viewing it as a frustration text. The Bible can also seem overwhelming to a child when it is viewed as one very long book that must be read from cover to cover. If children are taught the Bible is a library of books that can be read in any order, it can remove a lot of the intimidation factor.

Encourage children to begin by reading books of the Bible that are primarily stories. If the child has a particular interest, suggest they read Bible stories that contain topics of interest first. This makes the Bible seem more engaging, like many of the other books they read for

school or pleasure. Suggesting specific books of the Bible to read, or encouraging an entire group of children to read the same book at home and discuss it in class can also encourage children to read more regularly.

It is important to frame successful daily Bible reading carefully. In the book *Tiny Habits,* Fogg notes the importance of making a habit appear doable, even on the worst of days.[31] For children trying to establish a habit of daily Bible study, suggest reading one verse a day. If they have time to read a chapter, that is wonderful. If they have a rough day and can only read one verse, that is also great. Fogg found that when people were faced with a tiny goal each day, they were more likely to accomplish it and even go beyond the minimum goal many days.[32]

Finally, it is important to help children create visual cues to remind them to read their Bible each day. These can be made during a Bible class for one of your activities. Encourage them to place the Bible where they will see it at the time they have scheduled to read it. They may want to create a fancy cover for their Bible or small visual reminders they can place around their house to help them remember the new habit they are trying to begin.

Prayer
If any spiritual discipline is practiced by children at home, it is often prayer. Unfortunately, many children are only taught to pray rote prayers at meals and bedtime. Your goal in encouraging an independent prayer life for children is to also expand and enrich whatever prayer life they currently have during a typical day.

While rote prayers are biblical, you also want children to understand that prayer is a conversation between them and God. It is important for them to also learn to pray in a conversational way. Conversational prayers can be helpful when encouraging children to pray without ceasing. It is easier for them to pray a sentence to God in the moment, than to recite a rote prayer that seemingly has little to do with the current situation.

It is also important to encourage personal responsibility for praying to God. Help them identify times to pray each day, when they cannot depend upon an adult to remind them. These personal prayer times are also great for children who may not be ready or able to express their thoughts and emotions to an adult. Teaching them God wants to hear everything that is on their minds, can help them until they find a loving, Christian adult to guide them.

There are several resources you can provide or have them create that can encourage them to strengthen their prayer lives. Prayer journals can be created from scraps of paper or repurposed school notebooks. Prayer containers with ideas of possible prayer topics or a

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[31] Fogg. *Tiny Habits,* 73.
[32] Ibid, 86.

class list of prayer requests can help children who struggle knowing what to pray. Colorful crafts they can place around their home to remind them to pray can also be useful in encouraging children to pray more often or more consistently.

When encouraging children to pray, it is important that you also teach them God answers prayers in different ways. God wants what is best for them and may deny their request or ask them to wait for any number of reasons. Sometimes, they will understand God's wisdom later. Other times, though, they may never really understand why God answered their prayer by denying their request or making them wait. Teaching them to remain faithful in prayer, even when God does not immediately give them what they want, is key to them developing a rich prayer life.

Service and Faith Sharing
Children may think of serving others and sharing their faith as something only adults do or an experience that your class does together. The idea of finding little ways to serve others and share their faith daily may be foreign to them and even their parents or other Christian adults. Since it is such an important part of living a Christian life though, helping children establish good habits can help them bear more spiritual fruit as they grow and mature.

The best way to encourage independent service and faith sharing is to give children lots of guided practice during class times. Have discussions about things they can do daily to serve others and share their faith. Give them challenges to serve someone or share their faith in a specific small way outside of your ministry times.

Many children will have no idea what it means to share their faith with someone. Give them lots of practice telling the overarching story of the Bible and the life of Jesus. Make sure they thoroughly understand how to explain to someone how to become a Christian. Older children may be ready for some guided practice answering common questions, like why baptism by immersion is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The more guided practice opportunities you can give them, the more likely they will be to share their faith when they have an opportunity to do so.

Godly Character
Godly character is often difficult for both parents and children to understand. On the surface it can look exactly like what a secular parent may be teaching their child. The difference is that a Christian acts in a certain way because of their heart. They want to obey and please God. They also understand that their character can point others to God or discourage them from wanting to learn more about God. Character in many ways is a great way to obey the second greatest command about loving others as we love ourselves[33].

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[33] Matthew 22:36-40

There are many lists of character traits you can find which list all of the desirable character traits mentioned in the Bible. Some, like honesty, are on every list. Other lists vary slightly only because of their definition of a character trait. The average list of Christian character traits has between forty and fifty attitudes and behaviors listed.

When teaching children about character traits, it is crucial you are defining the trait by God's definition and not the current secular definition. Honesty according to God, eliminates any dishonesty, including half truths, omitted truths, etc. In the secular world, honesty is circumstantial. Dishonesty is accepted and even valued in certain situations. When teaching older children, taking the time to explain the differences between what God wants and what they will be told is acceptable in the world, can make a huge difference in their actual obedience to God.

Children will need lots of guided practice in knowing what a Christian character trait would look like in practice in their daily experiences. This is often most easily accomplished in acting out scenarios or playing games where they are given several possible options. Because some of these character traits may be attitudes or behaviors they have never considered, some children will need concrete ideas and strategies to help. Giving them several ideas on ways to be patient when they are frustrated, for example, can help them be more successful when those situations arise.

Throughout character training, it is important to continually reinforce the importance of their hearts having these traits and not just their actions. Explain the thoughts and feelings God wants them to try to have when they do these things. Younger children will struggle understanding many of these abstract ideas, but continually discussing them will move them to long term memory - ready to be processed and used as their abstract thinking abilities emerge.

Seeking Answers From God
A crucial spiritual discipline is discerning God's will for one's life. When the question is straightforward, even children may easily find the answers they need. Answers become more difficult to discern if the questions are complex or the real life situation does not have an exact match in scripture. Teaching children where to find godly answers to their questions is a critical skill set for developing discernment.

As children become stronger in their reading skills, they are more likely to engage in independent Bible reading. These readings can create questions in the mind of a child. While the answers to their questions are probably also found in the Bible, children may need help with finding answers for their spiritual questions.

Children who can read well can be taught how to find scriptures by topic. There are a variety of resources often either in their own Bible, in reference books or online available to guide them. Spend time teaching them how to determine the topic their question covers

and then find any relevant scriptures that may contain the answers they seek. Also spend time teaching them how to find Christians who will give them biblical answers when they still struggle understanding a topic.

Another area requiring children to practice discernment is making godly choices. With some decisions, the godly choice is obvious. More complex dilemmas can cause confusion, especially for children who may still lack helpful Bible knowledge and life experience.

Helping children make wise choices begins with teaching them to stop, think and pray before making decisions. Young children may need to start with merely identifying situations in which they have a choice. Children who struggle making godly choices, may need extra help with metacognition skills in order to recognize they have indeed been making choices, when perhaps they believed someone else made the choice for them.

Teaching children the Christian life skill of making good choices can also prove helpful. They may need to be taught how to analyze their options and compare them to scripture to understand the thought processes involved. Offering guided practice with multiple experiences common to the children you teach can also prove beneficial.

Finally, older children need to begin thinking about God's plans for their lives. There are several layers to this area of questioning God. The primary plan God has is for them to become Christians when they reach the age of accountability. Some children may be reaching this age before their teen years. All older children need to begin learning the Gospel message and how to become a Christian.

Children also need to understand God has specific plans for some areas of their lives. For some of those, God has given all of us commands and principles. In other areas, God has gifted them with specific gifts He knows they will need to complete the good works He has prepared for them in advance.[34]

Finally, God may have other specific choices He wants them to make regarding education, careers, and a host of other aspects of their lives. They need to be taught how God can use scripture, circumstances and people to help them understand what He wants them to do. Although those abstract concepts will be too difficult for many children to thoroughly understand, regular teaching and discussion can give them the tools to use when they are capable of more abstract thought.

Guided Practice for Christian Life Skills
Initially guided practice for a Christian life skill should be in the classroom environment. This gives children a safe place to try and possibly fail at their initial attempts to use the

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[34] Ephesians 2:10.

skill. After they have developed some proficiency in the skill, you may find ways to give them more real world practice outside of the classroom.

Guided practice activities should always be hands on and as engaging as possible. Adding an element of fun is wonderful as long as students are still getting the practice they need in the skill. Games, scenarios, projects, creating items to encourage continued practice and actually using the skills in mock real life situations can all help children with understanding and retention.

If your ministry is coordinated with a ministry for teens, the children served by your ministry will hopefully receive more Christian life skill training and practice as they get older. If you believe they may not get additional help with Christian life skills, you may want to revisit crucial skill sets multiple times over the course of a few years. Most skills have multiple possible options for teaching them which can give your students the variety they want with the extra practice they need.

Discussion Questions
1. What is a Christian life skill?
2. Create a list of ten Christian life skills you would like the children in your ministry to learn.
3. What are some important things to consider when planning a Christian life skills lesson?
4. How can you incorporate Bible stories of one or two verses in a Christian life skills Bible lesson?
5. What are two effective ways of teaching a Christian life skill?
6. What are some things to consider when planning guided practice opportunities in a Christian life skills lesson?

Chapter 16 – Service Projects for Children

Service learning can be a great way to help children understand how the things they are learning in Bible classes are put together to form the framework of living a Christian life. Unfortunately, many service projects are completed in such a way that the experiences leave them confused or unaware of the connections between their Bible lessons and life. Making a few simple changes can turn service projects from seemingly random activities to experiences that can result in meaningful spiritual growth.

Service projects can serve several functions as Bible class or ministry activities:
- They can help children better understand application principles like empathy.
- They can help children make stronger, usable connections between the various biblical concepts they have learned in class.
- They can help children learn how to serve others, while also sharing their faith in some way.
- They can provide opportunities for children to discover, develop and use the gifts God has given them.
- They can provide children with opportunities for personal spiritual growth.
- They can help children begin to understand the difference between ministering to others and secular service.

Setting Goals for a Service Experience
Often those leading children in service projects have a difficult time articulating the goals they have for the experience. If pressed, they will often mention helping the people being served or teaching children how to "love like Jesus". While on the surface those are positive goals, in reality they are ambiguous and impossible to measure. As a result, service projects can fail to help the participants and/or those who were being served.

It is important to have clear, concrete, measurable goals for any service learning experience. What specifically are you hoping to accomplish? What personal interactions do you want to occur? What specific ways do you want participants to grow spiritually from the experience? Can you attach some sort of quantitative measurement to your goals?

While meeting goals is important, setting them has another purpose. Having concrete, measurable goals helps you evaluate and improve your service learning experiences. Goals help when more than one person is involved in evaluating an experience, because they insure everyone is using the same evaluation criteria. It then becomes clear in which areas improvement is needed when planning future service opportunities. Clear, concrete, measurable goals save time and reduce conflict during the evaluation process.

Planning a Service Project
Whether you choose the actual project before or after you set your goals, it is important to avoid some common pitfalls when planning the project you will do to serve someone.

Often those planning a service project tell the recipient what they are planning, rather than asking what is most needed. While you may believe you know what is needed, often those being served are most knowledgeable about what will be helpful. Too often, well meaning people spend time and money on service projects that are meaningless or perhaps even harm the recipients in some way.

When recipients ask for specific projects to serve them, it is important to differentiate between felt needs and core needs. Felt needs are those things recipients know they need, like food or clothes. Core needs are those deeper spiritual needs of the recipients which they may not even be aware they have. While meeting felt needs is important, it is crucial to begin teaching children how to see these core needs when they serve others. Understanding that serving others should involve meeting both felt and core needs makes it more likely children will remember to always combine serving others with sharing their faith.

Although children often have little experience with serving others, it is important to provide some variety in the types of activities you choose. For example, if the children are constantly making cards as a service experience, they will eventually become bored with the activity and no longer grow from the process. Or they may not complete the project with their best effort, leaving the recipient with results that are perhaps undesirable. Providing variety in service activities increases the likelihood children will be fully engaged during the experience.

It is also important to plan a project that works with the Bible lessons you plan to teach as part of preparing children to participate. Stronger connections will make it easier for them to remember the experience and the things they learned from it. If you decide to do a project serving flood victims and pair it with the story of Noah and the Ark, it will be more memorable than if you tie the project to the story of Jesus healing the blind man.

Even in this initial planning stage, it is important to involve the children who will be participating in it as much as possible. The older the children are and the more practice you give them in planning, the more they will be able to contribute to the process. In the beginning, give them two acceptable options for some aspect of the project and allow them to decide which they prefer. Gradually add more freedom and responsibility for planning as they show their ability to manage the various planning tasks. Some children will show mastery sooner than others, but they should all participate in the planning process in some way.

Additional Project Planning Considerations
Service projects can be short term or long term. Short term projects are completed once and the participants may never serve those particular people again. Long term projects can involve either serving the same people in various ways over a long period of time or serving a large variety of people with the same service project repeated multiple times.

To keep participants' interest level and personal spiritual growth at its maximum, children are normally not well suited for continually doing the same service project multiple times. The exception would be if it is a project done once every year and the experience has become a valued event for the children participating.

Short term service projects have the advantage of providing variety. They allow students to discover many different ways to serve others while sharing their faith. Short term service projects often give students opportunities to discover, develop and use the different gifts required by each project.

Long term service projects can provide a more relational experience. The children participating time after time can begin to know and love the people they are serving. These relationships will improve the likelihood of them developing meaningful empathy for the people they are serving.

Another potential advantage for long term service projects is side by side serving. Over time, it is possible to find a third group that your group and the people you have been serving can then work together to serve. These service projects keep those initially being served from developing an unhealthy victim mindset. It also reinforces to your group that those they are serving often have things to share from which they can learn. These joint projects can also keep your group from developing an attitude of superiority over those they are serving.

The actual activity you choose will depend upon your goals and your resources. The possibilities are endless. We have provided a list of some of the more common service projects completed by children in an Appendix to assist you in planning.[35]

Preparing Children to Serve Others
The amount of preparation children will need before participating in a service project will vary based upon the experience itself. Short term service projects completed in thirty minutes will have different preparation needs than a complex, long term service project.

Regardless of the project, there should be some preparation that involves scripture, prayer, empathy building, making connections, personal reflection and skill training. A thirty minute project may do all of this preparation in less than an hour. Longer term service projects may prepare students a little at a time over the course of several weeks. It is important to factor in your goals and the abilities and needs of the children participating in order to provide adequate preparation.

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[35] See Appendix 9. Service Project Ideas.

Connecting Scripture to Service
For students to incorporate serving others and sharing their faith into their daily lives, they need to fully understand what it is that God expects from them. They need examples of people in the Bible who may have also served others in a similar way. Children need to be familiar with and even memorize key scriptures that apply to the principles they will need in order to complete the project.

Scripture is also vital, because an important aspect of serving others should be the personal spiritual growth of those participating. Children need to know and understand how God expects His people to think, feel, act and speak. They need to become familiar enough with God's commands to develop an awareness of when they need to work on one or more of them to be more godly.

It will take extra time in the planning stage to identify pertinent scriptures and determine how many the children participating can realistically remember and use in the course of the service experience. Short term projects will probably involve one Bible story or a key verse. Long term opportunities may involve more than one Bible story and multiple passages of scripture.

When you have chosen your key scriptures, it is important to find ways to use them in preparing children to serve. You should also use them as needed while actually serving and in the reflection process after the experience.These repetitions will make it more likely the scriptures and the memory of the activity will be connected in the brains of the children and more easily placed into their long term memory.

Connecting Prayer and Service
During the business of completing a service project, it is easy to forget the place God should retain in the process. According to scripture, God has prepared good works for each of us in advance.[36] This means God also has things He wants those good works to accomplish. Too often we forget to keep in close contact with God through prayer as we serve others. The project slowly moves from God recognized as being in control, to those serving attempting to take complete control of the experience.

Encouraging children to pray before, during and after a service experience can help remind them to stay connected to God. You may choose to have times of corporate prayer, times of silent prayer and times when you encourage them to pray individually or with their families at home.

If the service project is long term, consider encouraging the children involved to ask others to pray for the project, the people being served and their participation and personal

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[36] Ephesians 2:10

spiritual growth. If time allows, these prayers also give you additional opportunities to teach about prayer and provide them with guided practice in praying.

Empathy Building Activities
Too often service projects are done with lots of sympathy, but no real empathy. Sympathy often has an unspoken element of condescension. We feel sorry for others and often believe we have the answers the people we are serving are incapable of having without our help. Those possessing sympathy often believe they are the teachers and those they are serving have nothing of value to teach them.

Empathy is more than just understanding what daily life is like for another person. It is more than just imagining what emotions they might feel. Empathy is understanding that we have more in common than we have differences. It is understanding we can learn from anyone - even if it is only the mistakes we should avoid. It is building relationships with those we serve - even short term. It is learning to truly love everyone with the passionate desire to help them get to Heaven - because you actually love the individual, not because you merely feel sorry for them.

There are several ways you can help the children in your ministry develop empathy for those they will be serving. Some are for developing empathy for others in general, while other activities are more appropriate for preparing children to serve a specific group of people.

- **Walking in Their Shoes.** Bring in a wide variety of shoes. Give each child a pair of shoes. Ask them to describe the person they think may wear those shoes. Then ask the group if there is anyone else who might wear those shoes. Depending on the age of the children, you may want to offer suggestions like someone in a different country or with a different occupation. After the shoes have all been discussed, point out that you cannot know about someone just from seeing the shoes they are wearing. Nor can you know anything for sure about who might wear a certain pair of shoes. You can only really know someone by hearing their story.
- **A Day in the Life.** Ask children to answer questions about what they think daily life is like for the people they are about to serve. Include questions about what they eat for breakfast, what they see when they look outside their window, what they do for fun, etc. If possible, have the people you are going to serve answer the same questions before you serve them. Compare their answers to how the children thought they would answer. What assumptions did the children make that were inaccurate? Why is it inappropriate to make assumptions instead of asking people for the real answers to our questions?
- **Could I Do It?** Some aspects of a person's life might not appear difficult to a child with little life experience. They may not understand how difficult it would be to carry a full water bottle two miles from a source of water or to live on an extremely limited budget. Providing the opportunity for them to merely try to lift a full water bottle or pretend to pay the bills on the average amount of income of those you will

be serving can help them better understand the challenges the people they are serving may be facing.

- **Memento Boxes.** Prepare shoe boxes before meeting with the children. In each box place three items that represent a person. Ask a wide variety of real people for the three items they would choose. If an item, like a musical instrument, is too large for the shoebox, you can place a picture of the item in the box instead. Give each child or pair of children a shoebox. Have them take turns opening the shoebox they were given, describing the contents and the person they believe chose those items. Make sure they include things like age and gender in their description of the person. After their guesses, reveal the actual descriptions of the people who chose those items. After everyone has shared their box, ask students how many of them also like one of the items in one or more of the boxes. Point out that people who seem very different can have a lot of things in common. Encourage them to work to find those commonalities when they minister to others.
- **Anchor Charts.** To create an anchor chart, you will need something to write on that is large enough for the entire group to see and that can be saved and referred to over a period of time. Your anchor chart could have various themes like, "What do we think we know about the people we will be serving?" or "What questions do we have about the people we will be serving?" Ask children to suggest things to write on the chart. Refer back to the chart periodically to see if there are statements that need to be added or deleted. After the service experience is completed, the anchor chart can be used in the reflection process.
- **A Day Without.** In some service experiences, your students will be providing items needed by the people they are serving. Depending upon their own circumstances, they may not understand how not owning these items can be difficult. Encouraging a "day without" can give children a better understanding of why what they are doing is so important. If you choose to do this activity, be sure to include parents in the planning and implementation or the experience may only work for some of the children.
- **Immersion Experiences.** Full immersion experiences are rarely done with children. They usually involve entering the world of those being served and fully living in that world as do the people they are serving. There are mock immersion experiences that some have attempted, but those are difficult to create accurately. Camping under the stars on a beautiful night on a suburban lawn for example, is not anywhere close to the experience of someone who is homeless in an urban area during bitter, snowy, winter weather.
- **Empathy Readings.** If your group is serving another ministry or organization, that group may have articles or books they suggest people read before serving them. Otherwise, try to find articles and books on a variety of reading levels for the children who will be participating. Depending upon whom you are serving, you may need parental approval to give students books reflecting the true reality of the lives of the people you will serve. You may also decide to summarize printed materials in age appropriate ways for those participating.

As part of your empathy activities, you may want to share photos of the people you will be serving. This can be helpful when it is done to help children learn the names of various people or other helpful information.

It is important to avoid showing photos of the people you will be serving that were staged to make the person in the photo look pathetic. These photos may be generated by an organization to encourage people to become involved in their ministry or cause. Any photos used should be respectful of the people in them. So called "pity photos" are designed to encourage sympathy, not empathy, and are not appropriate for your purposes.

Connection Questions
An important part of preparing children to serve others is teaching them how to ask respectful questions that create connections between them and the people they are serving. These questions help strengthen knowledge and empathy, but they also serve another purpose.

Connection questions are designed to build relationships. They help people discover the things they have in common and usually strengthen the bonds between people. They are those questions we often ask when meeting new people. The key is to teach children to not move on after failing to find something in common with the first few questions. Although that is common in normal social situations, it is counter productive in ministry. Encourage children to continue asking questions until they find at least one thing they have in common.

The commonality does not have to be spiritual or even important to either person. It can be a favorite song or a favorite food. You can encourage students to practice by periodically dividing them into random groups and giving them three minutes to find some item they have in common in a particular category. For example, if the category is food, they must work to find a food they all like to eat. The bigger the group and the odder the category, the more challenging and helpful the exercise can be.

Connection questions are crucial.[37] When we allow our minds to think of someone as very different from ourselves, our minds can dehumanize them. When this happens, it is easier to be thoughtless, hurtful or even cruel to the other person. When our brains are allowed to dehumanize someone, the self control we may normally exhibit when dealing with others becomes inhibited. The brain reacts as if we are dealing with an inanimate object, like a lamp, instead of a person. Asking questions to establish commonalities can prevent this dehumanization from occurring.

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[37] Epley. *Mindwise*, p.41.

It is important to work with children so they will ask connection questions naturally and respectfully. When being asked questions to find things in common, the other person should not feel as if they are being interrogated or judged. Some children will find they are able to do this naturally, while others may need quite a bit of guided practice. This skill set is so important to impactful service and faith sharing though, it is worth spending some time dedicated to helping children master it.

Encouraging Personal Spiritual Reflection and Growth
Often the assumption is made that merely by participating in a service experience, a child will grow spiritually. Unfortunately, any spiritual growth is often accidental and short term. While a child may state he or she feels as if there has been spiritual growth, the actual growth may be nonexistent.

For meaningful, long term spiritual growth to occur, work must be done in the preparation process. Many children have little training in personal reflection and limited knowledge of the scriptures. Helping them attain personal spiritual growth while serving will take intentional preparation and guidance during all stages of the service experience.

It is important to remember that one cannot expect a tremendous amount of spiritual growth during one thirty minute service project. That is why it is so important children have multiple times each year to serve others throughout their entire childhood. Spiritual growth is cumulative, so additional opportunities can add new growth or reinforce previous growth.

Teaching children the art of spiritual self reflection can be extremely difficult. Young children are often incapable of abstract thought, much less analyzing whether or not they have achieved abstract concepts. Often it is best to help them gradually develop the skill sets that will help them accomplish these goals as their brains become more capable of abstract thought.

Metacognition is the awareness of one's own thoughts. Unfortunately, it is a skill rarely taught young people. As a result, most children struggle with sharing their thoughts, much less analyzing them. Encouraging children to spend time journaling can make them aware of their own thoughts.

You may want to provide pretty journals and five minutes of class time for journaling. Ask a question each class that requires them to be aware of their own thoughts. Explain they can draw, or write words or phrases instead of full sentences if they prefer. Have the questions focus on their thoughts about some of the big ideas in Christianity. There is no need for them to share their journals with anyone unless they wish to do so.

Another way to encourage metacognition is to ask them why they answer higher level questions with a particular answer. In this particular case, you are not necessarily looking

for a citation. Rather you want them to develop an awareness of where they attain information and the thought processes they use to accept or reject new information.

When preparing children for a service project, you can ask them to reflect on their current spiritual condition - even if they are unable to articulate an answer. For example, you may mention that the project you will be doing requires a lot of perseverance. Define the term you want them to reflect upon and give examples of what they might think, say or do if they had that godly attribute. With preteens, you may have them generate a list of several godly attributes that may be required. They can then make personal choices of the one character trait upon which they wish to focus during the project. Those choices may be the same or very different from child to child.

It may be necessary the first few times you do this activity to ask them to think about times they did or did not exhibit the qualities you are discussing. You might even ask older children to give themselves a "grade" on how well they consistently demonstrate the attribute. Preteens may be capable of picking unique areas of spiritual growth, but it is often best to have an entire group of children working on the same attribute.

With younger children, you will need to predetermine the attribute for them to work on for personal spiritual growth while you are serving. Discuss why you want them to focus on demonstrating that godly character trait or habit more consistently. Explain what attitudes, speech and behaviors you want them to display to show they are actively working on it. Tell them specific behaviors that would not reflect that attribute.

When the children have a thorough understanding of the area in which they want to grow spiritually while working on the project, it can help to give them assignments outside of class to encourage more reflection on the attribute. This will be more realistic with long term service projects than one you complete during one class period.

The assignments can include prayer and reading specific scriptures. You may also find additional readings or journaling prompts that may help them be more intentional about their personal spiritual growth. It is important to remember for any outside assignment you give, only a fraction of children may complete it. Encouraging parental involvement can increase participation. Punitive measures for those who do not participate are rarely effective in a ministry environment. It is best to use encouragement to motivate children to participate.

While the children participating in a service project may have difficulties with metacognition, self reflection and assessment of their spiritual growth, it is still important to go through the process. These are skill sets that need to be learned, practiced and fully developed over time. Taking the time and effort with children to give them guided practice can make it more likely they will experience meaningful personal spiritual growth when they serve others in their teen and adult years.

Skill Training
Many people who are served will privately admit they are often disappointed with the results of a service project a group did for them. This is often because the people participating were not given training in doing the various skills needed for the project. The walls of houses, for example, may be ruined because young people who have never been taught to paint a wall, allowed paint drips to dry.

It is easy to assume children of a certain age have already been taught how to do the various skills your service project requires. Since children have various backgrounds and training, it is important to review every skill needed. For skills the entire group appears to have mastered, a quick review may be the only thing needed. More complex or novel skills may require intensive training, including some guided practice before working on the actual service project.

During a Service Project
Often the problems that arise during a service project could be prevented. This is particularly true for long term service projects lasting several hours or days. Problems can arise because participants are not well rested, fed healthy foods at appropriate intervals or well hydrated. Encouraging ten to twelve hours of sleep the night before, providing healthy snacks, meals and plenty of water can eliminate a lot of issues.

Adults who are helping the children complete the service project should be encouraged to engage in conversations with the children rather than other adults. These conversations can alert adults to potential issues before they become problems. When the adults participating only talk with each other, many things go unnoticed until they are major problems.

If the service project is particularly difficult, stressful or will happen under adverse conditions, it may be helpful to have a decompression area away from the main activity. Children who are extremely introverted or have some special needs may find the atmosphere of a service project over stimulating. Giving them a quiet place to decompress for a few minutes periodically can help them stay calm. This is also a safe place to handle first aid needs, conversations regarding inappropriate behaviors or for comforting a child who has become upset for some reason.

The decompression area should be staffed by an adult to provide the support the children who use it may need. An adult can also determine if the area is being used inappropriately in an effort to avoid working. It does not have to be fancy, but should contain first aid supplies, tissues, Bibles and water.

During the service project, some children or adults may want to take photographs of the experience. Remind everyone that photos should respect the people in them and in some

cases, they should ask permission for taking a photo of someone - especially if it will later be shared online.

After the Service Project
It is crucial whether the service project is completed in a few minutes or over the course of several days to have a time of reflection after its completion. There are several reasons why reflection is so important after serving others..

- **To give the children an opportunity to analyze what went well and what did not go quite as expected.** Children are often very observant and may notice things the adults missed. Reflecting upon what happened not only improves your planning processes for the next service opportunity, but also teaches children how to analyze their own efforts to serve others and share their faith.
- **To review the goals for the project and whether or not they were achieved.** This serves both to remind children what was supposed to have happened and what you wanted them to learn from the experience. It can also illuminate issues that were not previously discussed.
- **To clarify any misunderstandings.** Children have limited life experience. This can cause them to make inaccurate generalizations from an experience. If they interacted with an older person who was cranky, for example, they may decide all old people must be cranky. Children are also confused by unfamiliar words and concepts, at times substituting the things they do know for what they heard or experienced. This can lead to some confused conclusions that can last for years if not discovered and corrected.
- **To reflect upon any personal spiritual growth.** How do they believe they grew spiritually from the experience? Did they grow in the areas you identified before the project? Do they think they grew in additional ways? Did they discover a weakness they did not realize they had before the project? What will they do to grow spiritually now that the project is completed?

In addition to having reflection discussions, you may wish to encourage some children to do a reflection project that uses their gifts from God. They may choose art, photography, writing or any number of avenues for reflection. Parents and others who were unable to participate in the project may be encouraged by the results of these reflection projects. They can also be helpful in encouraging others to participate in future service opportunities.

Discussion Questions
1. What are some of the benefits participating in service projects can provide children?
2. Why is it important to have specific, concrete, measurable goals for a service project?
3. What are several key elements of planning a service project?
4. What are the six areas for preparing children to participate in a service project?

5. What are several ways to include scripture in preparing children for a service project?
6. Describe at least two empathy development activities that can be done with children.
7. What are some considerations to address during a service project?
8. Why is reflection so important after completing a service project?
9. What are the areas that should be covered in a reflection discussion?

Chapter 17 – Classroom Management

It does not matter how well you plan your lesson or how much natural teaching ability you may have. If student behavior is out of control, very little learning will occur. Classroom management involves creating an environment that is conducive to learning. It includes managing student behavior, but there are other environmental aspects involved as well.

Because people have such widely divergent ideas of a well managed classroom, it is important to define the term as it will be used in this discussion. Classroom management does not mean your class will always be quiet or even appear perfectly organized. In fact, a well managed classroom may actually be noisy at times and the children in it may move around from place to place. The key question to ask when discussing classroom management is whether or not the environment you have created and maintain is optimum for learning.

Creating a Learning Environment

The ideal learning environment will take into consideration the learning needs of your students. Most children learn best in environments that are bright and colorful, with ample decorations. If your students have certain special needs, however, too much visual stimulation can be overwhelming and actually inhibit learning. It is important to know as much as you can about your students as you begin planning how you will decorate your learning environment.

Secular researchers have analyzed everything from furniture placement to wall colors to find which environments are optimum for learning. While you may or may not be able to control the various aspects of your classroom, it is important to understand the impact the current environment may have on your students and their ability to learn.

Since Bible classes are often geared towards working in groups, arranging furniture so students are sitting in circles can enhance the group dynamic. Avoid placing students in rows when at all possible, as this can discourage student participation - especially for children sitting on the back rows.

It is extremely important to avoid placing too much furniture in a space that is too small. This can create what appears to be behavior problems, when there is actually too little room for children to move about without running into something. In some cases, it may be best to remove all of the furniture and have students sit on carpet squares on the floor, giving them ample space to move, create and learn.

Perhaps the most challenging classroom environment is when multiple groups are sharing a large open space like a gym or an outdoor playground. In those cases, it is best to put as much physical space between the groups as possible. Moveable rug squares can absorb some background noise indoors. Vegetation or natural barriers can provide a similar noise

reduction function in outdoor spaces. It may also help to coordinate schedules with the other teachers so one group is not trying to do an activity that requires quiet, while the other class is involved in an extremely noisy activity.

Even something as simple as the color of the paint on the walls can impact learning.[38] Yellow walls for example, create a bright, cheerful room. If students are in the room for multiple hours though, they can experience eye fatigue. Green walls can be calming and stimulate creativity, but they can also cause students to become bored more quickly. Blue walls can communicate security and increase creativity, but they can also give students a feeling of an aloof environment. As you can see, learning environments have many nuances and there are not necessarily perfect answers for every possible aspect.

While decorations in the classroom can engage students, avoid cluttering the room with too many decorations and objects. Experts recommend at least twenty to fifty percent of the wall space should be without decoration.[39] Try walking into your classroom as if seeing it for the first time. Do the decorations make you want to learn more about God and the Bible or do they just leave you feeling overwhelmed? Each student's personality will play a part in their reaction to the classroom environment, but you should be able to find a middle ground where each of your students is motivated to learn.

Even lighting can impact student learning. Lots of sunlight is best, so open any blinds or curtains. Lamps create a homelike atmosphere, so when possible use those instead of overhead lighting. Also be aware that fluorescent lighting can distract children with certain special needs.

Temperature and air flow can also impact the ability of students to focus on the lesson. If the room is too hot, cold or stuffy, students will only be thinking about how uncomfortable they are at the moment. At times, bringing your own fan or electric space heater can help you make the classroom a bit more comfortable. If you know in advance, you can also ask parents to dress their children in ways that will provide more comfort in the challenging climate of your classroom.

One of the problems many volunteer teachers face is that their classroom is a shared space. You may not have the ability to decorate your room or even move the furniture. In those cases, you should focus on what you can do in the space rather than what you are not allowed to do.

Often the best solution requires more effort on your part, but allows you to create a welcoming learning environment for your students. Think of items you can bring into the room with you each class period to make the environment more pleasant and interesting.

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[38] TeachThought, "The Science of Classroom Design (Graphic)".
[39] Ibid

It may be a lamp, a portable heater or interesting or unusual objects students can explore. Just a few extra items can make a huge difference in the classroom environment - even if they are only there temporarily.

Creating a Classroom Management Plan
Children are often in multiple classroom environments during the course of the week. They understand that while a school or church may have certain general rules, each teacher will actually define appropriate classroom behaviors differently. Unfortunately, churches and ministries often have no overall rules in place. Many volunteers do not try to manage classroom behaviors or manage them poorly. As a result, children often believe they can behave in any way they desire when attending a church or ministry class.

When volunteer teachers fail to have or enforce rules, chaos can result. Often volunteers are afraid children will no longer want to attend class if they are expected to obey rules or receive consequences for disobeying them. In reality, a chaotic classroom environment is not only extremely stressful for children, but it also inhibits learning. An effective class will always have an underlying expectation of the respect for teachers, other students and the lesson itself that rules create.

It is best if the ministry sponsoring the classes has overall rules for behavior. The list should not be extensive, unless children are in classes daily for several hours. Rules should be very basic and involve respecting teachers and fellow students in order to provide an optimum learning environment.[40]

Teachers may choose to add additional rules that are more specific. Once again, the fewer rules you have, the easier they will be to remember and enforce. Specific classroom rules allow teachers to adjust for developmental differences between classes. Younger children may need slightly different rules than older children. Children can adjust more easily to the differences in rules from one class to another, if the rules are posted and explained to students.

When explaining rules to children, it is important to explain your definition of the terms you have used. For example, your idea of being quiet when someone is talking may be very different from how the teacher in the next class would define it. In some cases, it may even be helpful to demonstrate or have students practice desired classroom behaviors.

Any rules should be enforced consistently. If you remind a child to obey a rule, he or she should do so immediately. Never count while waiting for a child to obey one of the rules. Counting does not improve compliance. Instead, children learn they can continue disobeying until you reach the required number. There are times in life when children can be seriously injured or killed because they are not immediately obedient. For example, they

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[40] See Appendix 10. Sample Classroom Rules

must instantly obey an adult who tells them to stop before entering the path of an oncoming car. Expecting children to comply immediately to rules is crucial not only for your learning environment, but potentially for their safety and their need to be obedient to God in their lives.

Once you have decided what rules you have, you must consider what consequences children will receive for breaking a rule. It is critical that these consequences are given consistently. One student should not be shown preferential treatment over another unless there is an extenuating circumstance that can be easily explained. Giving consequences to some students while ignoring the same misbehavior by others can quickly create a toxic learning environment.

Since most classes in children's ministry are relatively short, consequences should be minimal and not overly harsh. They should never involve physical punishments like hitting, pinching, spanking, slapping or enduring harsh physical challenges. Verbally abusive consequences are unexceptable. Consequences should be logical in respect to the misbehavior. So for example, if a student breaks a rule during an activity, he or she might have to sit to the side for a moment and not participate in the fun.

The children in your class should understand the consequences for breaking the rules. They can be discussed when you are sharing classroom rules during the first class together. You may also find it helpful for the parents of the children to have a copy of both the classroom rules and the consequences for disobedience. While this may sound overly cautious, informing everyone can help minimize misunderstandings.

Creating a Classroom Routine
Children thrive in an atmosphere where there is structure. They crave routine and boundaries. This can be especially true for children with special needs or from traumatic backgrounds. Structure, routine and boundaries do not have to be rigid, but they should be consistent enough for children to feel safe in your class.

When creating the routine or schedule for your class, it is important to consider the dynamics of your students. Do they arrive on time or is their arrival spread out over a thirty minute period? If half of the class shows up ten minutes after the appointed starting time, it may be best to schedule the important activities, like the Bible lesson, for later in the class period.

It is also important to remember what we discussed earlier regarding attention spans and the need for movement. Can your group realistically spend the amount of time sitting that you have scheduled for an activity? Does your routine involve the amount of movement the current students in your class need to help them focus? Remember if your classroom space is large and you are transitioning from one area to another, you will need to allow time for it in your schedule.

If you have a longer class period or students with special needs, it can be helpful to post the schedule where everyone can see it. This can also help visitors feel less stressed, since they can clearly understand what will happen next in this unfamiliar environment. If your students cannot read, find pictures to communicate what happens at each point in the schedule. If you use pictures, explain them carefully so they are not misinterpreted by the children in your class.

Routines can also encourage students to enter the classroom on time or even early. If they know the first few minutes are always an exciting opening activity, they will rush from the worship service or encourage their parents to get them to your facility on time. When they do arrive to class late, they will know exactly where you are in your routine and be able to immediately join the activity with a minimum of confusion.

There may be activities or ministries events that occur outside of the normal routine. While these can provide wonderful opportunities for student growth, they can also present unique behavior management challenges. Before allowing children to participate in an activity outside of your normal routine, it is important to explain any special rules. Define the rules clearly and explain any consequences that may occur when the rules are disobeyed.

During activities outside of the routine, anticipate the need to remind students of rules that are unique for the experience. Remember, they may forget these new rules, but often these rules are created to keep them safe and must be obeyed. Consequences in this case should only be given for rebelling against the rules, not forgetfulness or childish mistakes. In those cases, a firm, but gentle reminder should suffice.

Teacher Preparation and Classroom Management
Classroom management begins before the first student enters the room. If the teacher has prepared an engaging, hands on, meaningful, memorable lesson and activity, students will be highly engaged and less likely to misbehave. Often classroom management improves dramatically when more attention is given to preparing a Bible lesson and activity children will find meaningful and engaging.

It is important to teach Bible lessons that meet the needs of your students. Lessons that are too easy or too difficult can frustrate students and cause them to make poor behavior choices. Differentiation is often necessary when children with a wide variety of knowledge are in the same class. Often mixing difficult and easy questions and offering more challenging activities to those who want them can help.

Avoid calling on children to read aloud or answer questions when they have not offered to answer. Children who struggle academically will often misbehave to distract attention from their lack of mastery of basic skills like reading, writing or even Bible knowledge.

After each class, think about what happened and how students behaved in light of your lesson and activities. Even children who are normally well behaved may misbehave when bored. If you are having a lot of behavior problems and have adjusted for other factors, re-examine your lessons. In some cases, you may have a few mature students you can ask for honest feedback. Lessons do not need to be all fun and no substance.They can however, be engaging while students are learning important material.

It is also crucial teachers arrive well before the first student whenever possible. Teachers should not be reading over the lesson for the first time while students are in the room. Needed supplies should already be in the classroom. Any necessary setup should be completed before students arrive. It is especially important that the teacher is in the classroom as students begin to enter. When children enter a room with no adult, it is easy for misbehaviors to begin and quickly escalate. It is exponentially more difficult to get out of control children calmed than it is to keep calm children calm.

Giving Correction
There are times when correction is necessary in classroom management. How that correction is given can impact you, your students and your classroom environment. It is important when correcting children, that you remain calm. Children may be misbehaving to get a reaction from an adult or to manipulate or attempt to control adult emotions and behaviors. If you remain perfectly calm, it removes those potential dynamics.

Staying calm when giving correction also minimizes the chances you will say or do something inappropriate while correcting a child. Derogatory terms, yelling, cursing and verbally abusive language are never acceptable in correction. Shaming or overly embarrassing a child is also counterproductive. If you feel yourself getting angry, pause a minute before saying anything. Say a quick prayer asking God to help you handle the situation in a godly and productive way. Use the time you are praying to get your emotions under control.

When you do speak, pay attention to your vocal qualities. Often correction is ineffectual because the tone and inflection of what is said communicate the wrong message to the child. Try to keep your voice in the lower or deeper ranges of your voice. Use short, declarative sentences. Make sure your inflection ends sentences with a period and not a question mark. Speak as softly as possible, while still using a firm, audible voice.

Correction does not always have to be given verbally. You may wish to teach children a class signal that indicates they should immediately stop what they are doing and be totally silent. When you give the signal, the children should also give the signal to show they are aware you are attempting to get their attention. Often the most effective signals involve using both hands and their mouth to help them also meet the requirements as they give it. Class signals are particularly helpful when working with large groups of children.

There are other subtle, nonverbal forms of individual correction. Often a look or a soft touch on a shoulder allows you to continue teaching while simultaneously correcting a particular student. This allows the student to self correct, saves valuable teaching time and minimizes embarrassment.

Additional Classroom Management Techniques
There are times when traditional classroom techniques appear to be ineffective. You may need to discover if there may be another cause and more effective solution for the behavior issues you are experiencing.

If there is only one child causing problems, try having a private conversation with the child or his or her parents. It may be something stressful is happening in the home, like an illness, job loss or divorce. Or the child may have a special need that requires special interventions. It is important to respect the family's privacy while you are working with individual children and their parents. Your goal is to love and support the child and the family, while also working towards a better learning environment for your other students.

A common cause for large groups of students being lethargic or misbehaving during an engaging lesson is a lack of blood sugar. If your students have not eaten since the night before or it is almost time for their next meal, their blood sugar may be too low. Providing a small snack can raise their blood sugar without negatively impacting their next meal. If you decide to provide a small snack, avoid highly processed snacks with lots of sugar. Make sure you have checked with parents for any food allergies. Often foods from Bible times, make the best snacks and have a direct tie to many Bible lessons. Dried figs and dates or a few bites of rustic, whole grain bread can be the perfect snack.

Other physical issues can make it more difficult for children to have self control. If students are tired, it can make them lethargic or cranky. Encouraging parents to put children to bed earlier or give them rest times before class can help. Students with a variety of special needs may need additional strategies to help them manage classroom behaviors. Parents can often share strategies that work, but a quick search online can also provide ideas like fiddle objects that can help.

You may find the culture surrounding your students does not encourage respectful classroom behavior. Often skits or picture books written for children about specific attitudes or behaviors can help resolve these issues. Older children may also be capable of having discussions about the culture around them and how it differs from the expectations God may have of them.

If you are truly puzzled why you are still struggling with classroom management, consider asking a more experienced teacher to observe your class. While teaching, it can be difficult to notice more subtle causes of misbehavior. A person who is only there to observe may

notice an instigator is quietly motivating another child to misbehave and separating the two by a few seats will stop the problem. Or the observer may notice that a child does a particular thing a few seconds before launching into a tantrum, giving you time to intervene before it begins.

Ministering to Students Who Struggle With Behavior
If only one student continues to consistently disrupt learning after employing the techniques and ideas in this chapter, the child may have an issue that requires loving intervention. This may involve providing mentoring for the child and possibly his or her parents. It is important to try to discern the root of the behavior problems.

If the problems result from physical or even some self control issues, you may need to employ additional strategies. Developing an informal behavior management plan between you and the student can prove helpful. Work with the student to identify triggers that encourage him or her to misbehave. Are there ways the impact of those triggers can be minimized?

Perhaps the child needs more focused attention from an adult during your class time to help break bad habits and create new ones. Depending upon the severity of the issue, you may wish to ask another adult to work with the struggling child and focus on helping him or her manage problem behaviors.

In less serious cases, you and the child can decide upon a secret hand signal or code word to remind the child to stop a particular behavior without continually disrupting the class and embarrassing the child. Or you may decide to have a written contract that lists the specific behaviors the child is working to eliminate.

Children struggling with classroom behaviors need to feel loved and accepted. Often they are also struggling at school and home and are just as frustrated as the adults in their lives. They may have begun actually defining themselves as "bad" instead of realizing they are making bad choices. This can begin a lifelong negative spiral that often results in believing God has permanently rejected them with no hope of redemption.

Often spending time outside of class doing something positive together can help break the cycle. While the child may still struggle to behave in class, he or she also has opportunities to show his or her positive traits in less restrictive environments. Outside activities give you opportunities to know the child better and to find things to praise and encourage. Merely spending additional time with the child communicates your love and willingness to get to know the child's heart.

Classroom management is critical in order for a ministry class to impact the lives of students in meaningful ways. With some children, the task is easy. With others, it may take months to find the best strategies that allow all of your students to experience a productive

learning environment. Regardless, it needs to be a priority if you want your ministry classes to be as effective as possible.

Discussion Questions
1. Why is classroom behavior management important?
2. What are some physical aspects of a learning environment that can impact student learning and behavior?
3. Design the ideal Bible classroom for the age group you teach. What changes can you begin making in your classroom to make it more like your design?
4. What are the elements of a classroom management plan?
5. Why is it important to have a routine or schedule in your class?
6. What are some key concepts in correcting students?
7. Why might a student need extra interventions to help manage their classroom behavior?
8. What behavior management issues are you currently experiencing? What changes can you make that might improve the learning environment in your class?

Chapter 18 – Assessing Spiritual Growth in Children

In a secular learning environment, students are regularly assessed. These assessments are often tests, although other methods can be used to discover how much each individual student has learned. Assessment allows teachers and administrators to know whether changes need to be made in curricula or teaching style. It also helps identify students who may need extra help mastering the material.

Assessment is rarely done in a ministry setting for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, this leaves teachers guessing as to whether or not students are actually learning anything from their lessons. It is also difficult to know which students are struggling spiritually and which children are experiencing meaningful spiritual growth. Without assessment, ministries are basing a lot of crucial decisions on guesswork.

Challenges in Assessing Spiritual Growth
The difficulties with assessing spiritual growth begin with a teaching of Jesus. He made it clear God is concerned with the hearts of people and not just their behaviors or knowledge. There is no accurate assessment for measuring the heart of a young person. Even though most children have not reached the age of accountability, they are beginning to make choices that are slowly molding their hearts. Assessment could help us identify those students who are beginning to struggle, making it easier to provide the additional assistance they may need to develop a strong faith foundation. How to assess that accurately, however, is an ongoing challenge.

Spiritual growth can be difficult to define. Only God can measure it accurately. Self assessment could be helpful. Unfortunately, children rarely have the knowledge base, understanding or life experience necessary to accurately self assess. Christian adults attempting to assess the spiritual growth in children may struggle because of varying ideas of the definition and evidence of spiritual growth.

Children are rapidly growing and changing in a variety of areas. Their worldview is in the process of being formulated. What they believe, understand and put into practice spiritually can change drastically in a short period of time. An assessment is only accurate for where a child is spiritually at the moment. A child who appears to be experiencing healthy spiritual growth one week, could actually be weakening spiritually the next.

Because assessment is unusual in a ministry environment, the very process of a formal assessment can make children and their parents very uncomfortable. The challenge is to find ways to assess students in a variety of areas more subtly than a test. Any assessment will be imperfect, but can still provide important information on the effectiveness of curricula and teaching. It may be less helpful in identifying children who are struggling, but can give indications of children who are missing some of the basics needed for a strong faith foundation.

J. Helm developed a framework in which the teaching of Bible stories, rituals and doctrine, as well as the memorization of scripture passages, leads to the development of a Christian lifestyle.[41] This lifestyle includes a personal relationship with God, an understanding of the individual's meaning and purpose in life and in the Church and the ability to incorporate their religious beliefs into their life. If Helms is correct, the more concrete areas of this framework could be assessed, assuming those who perform well will indeed develop a Christian lifestyle from these building blocks of faith. There is not enough data, however, to be certain Helms framework is valid for every child.

Ultimately, the best assessment encourages the person being assessed to take personal responsibility for doing what is necessary to improve in any areas of weakness an assessment reveals. The challenge is finding ways of assessing spiritual growth that also teach and encourage self assessment and personal responsibility for spiritual growth.

Methods of Assessment
Secular teachers use a variety of methods to assess student achievement. While tests are the most popular, there are other methods of assessment that are perhaps more appropriate in a ministry environment.
- **Questions.** Students can be asked a variety of questions to assess their knowledge base. Questioning outside of a test, however, fails to assess the knowledge or progress of every child in the class. It can, however, give you an overall indication of whether the majority of students are learning, remembering and understanding various topics. It is also possible to ask questions that reveal a child's metacognition, a way of seeing a bit of a child's heart. In a ministry environment, questions can be asked in the context of a lesson or can be presented during learning games.
- **Observations.** Observation can be useful in identifying areas where knowledge, faith and behaviors are not aligning. It is a subjective form of assessment in many ways. Your interpretation of a child's behaviors may differ greatly from how another Christian might see them. It is still useful, however, as an indication more assessment may be necessary.
- **Student questions and conversations.** What children say or the questions they ask can reveal their knowledge, understanding and even give a glimpse of their hearts. Unfortunately, not every student feels comfortable speaking in a classroom environment. Although it is rare with very young children, older children may already be learning to tell adults the answer adults want to hear, rather than the answer they actually believe.
- **Lesson activities.** Learning activities can be designed to also provide assessment information. This is particularly true of activities completed individually. While worksheets may seem a great activity for assessment, they often bore children. This boredom can mean children who know the answers do not complete the

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[41] Helm, Berg and Scranton. *NurturingChildren's Spiritual Development,* p. 214-229.

worksheets because they do not find them engaging. Hands on activities are more engaging and can prove a more accurate assessment tool. Student generated artwork, artifact analysis, maps and model making, charts, photo essays, and more produce items that can help assess what students have learned.

- **Portfolios.** A portfolio usually contains examples of a student's work. Portfolios allow teachers to have an idea of student growth over a period of time. In a ministry context, a portfolio could be useful if items are gathered during the course of a particular unit of study or for a specific period of time. The most helpful portfolios are created by the children themselves. Each Bible student chooses which items go into his or her portfolio. Some may choose to add items they have completed at home. You can also encourage them to add descriptive information to their portfolios that help explain the items in it. Portfolios work best when students think they will be seen and appreciated by others. Students can help decide how they want to share their portfolios and with whom. Otherwise, portfolios can feel like a waste of time.
- **Projects.** Project based learning activities and service projects can provide additional opportunities for assessing children. Since these are often completed by groups of children working together, it is important to understand what each child contributed. Observing students as they work on the project can provide more helpful assessment information on individual children.
- **Student teaching.** While children are not equipped to actually teach a Bible class to their peers, you can provide them opportunities to share what they have learned with other students. This can be as simple as asking them to give a summary of the Bible story from the previous week to encouraging them to write and perform original skits illustrating Bible stories, application principles or explaining difficult spiritual concepts.
- **Self assessment.** Children are generally not capable of deep self assessment. Many have not been taught metacognition skills. They may not have the Bible knowledge, vocabulary or life experience to accurately assess how well they are or are not meeting a standard God has set. In spite of the difficulties, it is an important skill set to begin teaching children. If they are to grow spiritually, accurate self assessment is a critical skill for Christians. Giving children opportunities for guided self assessment can help them develop these skills.
- **Assessment by peers and family members.** Often when adults are given a tool to assess their spiritual maturity, they are given a second copy to share with a close friend or family member. This person is to complete the form about the person completing the assessment to ensure the self assessment portion is accurate. Unfortunately, children are not really equipped to evaluate their peers spiritually. Parents may or may not have an accurate perception of their child. This type of assessment is virtually useless unless a parent or peer expresses specific concerns about a particular child's spiritual growth and development. These conversations are initiated by the concerned individual and not the teacher responsible for student assessment.

The best assessment will probably use a combination of these methods. The weaknesses in one assessment can be compensated for in another. Using a variety of methods is likely to give you the most accurate and helpful information.

Indicators of Spiritual Growth in Children
Once you have decided the methods of assessment you will use, it is important to decide what indicators of spiritual growth you hope to see. This may be based on the goals of your ministry, the curricula you have been using or general measures of spiritual growth found in the Bible. The best assessment will include information that will also help you identify weaknesses and strengths in your ministry, the curricula you are using and the teaching styles and methods employed.

Perhaps the easiest measure of spiritual growth to assess is knowledge. While knowledge alone is not necessarily an indication of a spiritually mature Christian, it is an important tool for growing spiritually. If a child does not learn what is in the Bible, it will be difficult to please God. If a child knows Bible stories, but does not understand the application principles in them, the stories are merely entertainment. There are other knowledge based parts of Christianity that can be assessed like terminology and theology on the most basic levels.

Knowledge can be obtained from other people or independently from reading and studying the Bible. Children rarely control whether or not they attend Bible classes. You can, however, assess the knowledge they display when they are in class. You can also assess whether children are beginning to read the Bible independently and whether or not they understand what they are reading.

While some may use the terms interchangeably, knowledge and beliefs can be two very different things. Just because a child is taught something from the Bible and can restate it, does not necessarily mean he or she actually believes it. Unfortunately, ministries often assume knowledge equates to belief and are satisfied when children display ample Bible knowledge. Some children may be afraid to share their beliefs during conversations and other informal assessments. If they believe they are in a safe environment where they will not be punished or mocked for their answers, however, most will share their beliefs honestly.

When assessing beliefs, it can be helpful to ask students the source of a particular belief. Many religions and world views have beliefs that sound similar, but over time can be destructive to the spiritual growth of a child. Understanding where the child first heard the belief and what made them accept it as true can make it easier to help children who are being confused by beliefs and world views outside of biblical Christianity.

Other spiritual disciplines like prayer, meditating on scripture, worship, solitude, serving others and sharing the Gospel message will rely on primarily self reporting or assessment. While some of those activities may occur during a Bible class, it would be difficult to make accurate assumptions based on behaviors seen in a mere fraction of a child's life.

Behaviors, character traits and attitudes are a little easier to assess, especially over a period of time. A child who is consistently rude, may be struggling with character traits like respect and kindness. It is important to remember that some children are already learning to adapt their behaviors to their environment. How they behave in a Bible class may be very different from the way they act when with friends or family members. Few children will exhibit negative behaviors as part of a false identity, but some children who appear well behaved in class may actually be struggling in the rest of their life.

Some aspects of living a Christian life can be assessed by setting up practice scenarios. If a student is able to demonstrate an ability to share his or her faith in a practice scenario, it is more likely it will happen in real life. Unfortunately, part of spiritual maturity is being willing to do what God wants in situations where it takes courage to do so. Merely exhibiting the ability to do what God wants, does not always mean it is happening in their daily lives.

A critical area to assess is whether or not a child has strong connections to others in their church family. If a child has no meaningful relationships with other Christians, it will be easier for them to gradually gravitate to belief systems where they do have friends and close relationships. This is an area that can be easily and regularly assessed by asking each child to name the people they are closest to at church and finding out whether or not they spend much meaningful time together.

The heart is the most difficult to assess. Only God is able to do so with complete accuracy. We can only assess what children allow us to see of their hearts. Young children tend to be very honest and can be quite open about sharing their hearts. Older children have learned sharing their hearts can result in pain and are often more guarded. They may be sharing their hearts or merely saying what they think you want to hear them say.

The best way to try to assess spiritual growth in a child's heart is by looking at all of the other assessments you have done and extrapolating whether or not it appears there is positive spiritual growth. It may not be totally accurate, but it can give you enough information to make more informed decisions regarding curricula, teaching strategies and providing extra ministry resources to children who appear to be struggling.

Discussion Questions
1. Why is assessment important?
2. What are some of the reasons it is rarely done in ministries?
3. What are some methods for assessing the spiritual growth of children?

4. What are some areas that should be examined when ascertaining whether or not a child is experiencing healthy spiritual growth?

Chapter 19 – Children and Christian Community

Ministries to children need to make a conscious effort to help the children to whom they minister develop meaningful relationships in their church. Relationships with peers can make it more likely children will want to attend Bible classes and ministry events. Relationships with mature Christians can result in helpful mentoring interactions.

Jesus modeled the importance of relationship to spiritual growth during his ministry on earth. His relationships with his Apostles gave him the opportunity to teach, mentor and prepare them for what they would be called to do in the early Church. Scott Frisbie notes that, "Discipleship is about relationship…apprenticeship. Discipleship is not just for adults, but for young adults and even children."[42]

Relationships that impact children are often those in which both parties have invested a great deal of time. Children need to feel loved and accepted by those with whom they are close. They need to feel somewhat accountable - especially to Christian adults. At times, these relationships develop naturally. Often though, it requires intentionality on the part of the Christian adults in the life of the child for these relationships to be nurtured and developed.

Relationships that impact children spiritually usually result not just from time spent together, but also shared experiences, interests and gifts. Ultimately, the most successful relationships involve each of the people sharing what is on their hearts and minds. When this does not occur naturally, ministries to children can encourage these nurturing relationships in a number of ways.

Encouraging Peer Friendships
Parents want their children to have friends at church. Children are often more excited about attending Bible class or a ministry event if they know a friend will be there. Difficulties arise when peers do not spend enough time together to develop friendships. Ideally, parents would provide opportunities for their children and peers from their Bible class to spend time together outside of church.

Unfortunately, parents are often oblivious to the importance of these relationships and do little to encourage them. Those involved in ministering to children may be able to encourage parents to be intentional in their efforts to connect their children to peers at church. This can be done through informal conversations or formal parenting classes.

Some parents may still not provide the support needed for their children to develop friendships with the children in their church. It is often left to the ministry to provide opportunities and encouragement for children to develop friendships with their peers in

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[42] Frisbie. "A Study of Church Attendance Among Young Adults".

classes and at events. This can be accomplished by providing opportunities for children to talk freely with each other and have shared experiences.

Encouraging peer friendships at church can be difficult when the children have very little in common with each other. The ingredients for a typical friendship may not be present when there are only a handful of children whose interests, tastes and personalities are very different.

When this occurs, creating an environment that encourages children to think of each other as family members rather than merely peers can help. Children are accustomed to finding ways to enjoy spending time with cousins and other family members who have very different interests, tastes and personalities from them. When you reframe the relationship of peers in your ministry, it encourages children to use the same skills they use at family gatherings during Bible classes and other ministry activities.

On rare occasions, you may find one child has difficulty making these connections even with encouragement. There are many reasons why, but it is still possible to make these children feel loved and accepted by peers, even if they fail to develop close friendships. Depending on the issue, various private conversations with the child and his or her parents may help you find ways to resolve the issue. It can also help to have general class discussions about how God wants us to treat everyone, giving examples of the positive behaviors you believe God would want to see when the children in your class interact with each other.

It is also important to remember that just because a child attends Bible class or church, it does not mean he or she will automatically be a positive influence on other children. You do not want to encourage peer relationships that will be potentially harmful to another child. Initiating relationships between a child who is making poor choices with a child who makes great choices in hopes of changing the struggling child can end badly. Children do not have the knowledge, wisdom, life experience or maturity to counsel a struggling child. The struggling child is much more likely to have a negative impact on the child who was making good choices. Children who are struggling need adult guidance to change and grow spiritually.

Creating Short Term Mentoring Opportunities
Mentoring relationships are usually thought to last over a long period of time. In some cases, one conversation can impact a child for a lifetime. By exposing the children in your ministry to a wide variety of Christian adults, they are more likely to have these spiritually helpful conversations.

It is crucial to expose the children in your ministry to spiritually mature Christians. Otherwise, you run the risk of children having a conversation that does more harm than good. Any adult formally interacting with the children in your ministry should also go

through the same volunteer screening process as the adults serving your ministry on a regular basis.

The most helpful short term mentoring conversations often occur when adults and children are working together on a project or activity. They can also happen during social situations like meals. Consider inviting Christian adults to share their wisdom and experiences as special guest speakers. Chaperones for ministry events often have many possible opportunities for short term mentoring interactions. Almost any ministry class or event can provide short term mentoring opportunities if there are opportunities for adults to interact with children conversationally.

Some of these conversations will happen naturally. Many times though, adults miss opportunities to have conversations that could result in the spiritual growth of a child, because they are focused on speaking to other adults. If you want the adults attending a class or event to have short term mentoring conversations with children, it is important to clearly state your expectation.

Short term mentoring conversations are more likely to occur if you ask the adults who will be with the children in your ministry to actively look for opportunities to mentor them. You may need to help them understand the difference between a shallow social conversation and one that can help children grow spiritually. If the adults are uncomfortable with mentoring, it can help to provide a short training session. Giving them examples of possible mentoring conversations and allowing them to ask questions, can make them more willing to initiate short term mentoring.

Creating Long Term Mentoring Relationships
Long term mentoring is often introduced during the teen or adult years. The effective Christian mentoring of children, however, can help prevent some of the problems that first appear in the teen or young adult years. As with short term mentoring relationships, long term mentoring can begin organically or can be encouraged by more formal opportunities.

Since long term mentors can have a greater impact on the spiritual growth and development of children, it is important that mentors in a mentoring program sponsored by your ministry are carefully chosen and screened. In addition to normal volunteer screening, you want to look for potential mentors who have particular characteristics.

Christians asked to mentor children should be spiritually mature. They should be very familiar with scripture and live a godly life. Potential mentors should be good listeners and understand the importance of encouraging their mentees to make godly choices. They should understand how to give godly advice and be willing to ask hard questions. Mentors need to clearly understand the differences between their role and the role of a parent. Finally, effective mentors need to be willing to make a long term investment in their mentee, which often requires a lot of time and effort.

When Christians are asked by your ministry to become long term mentors of children, it is best to provide formal training. This will help establish safe parameters for the relationship and give them information for handling common mentoring scenarios. It is also a great way to reinforce any biblical concepts you are emphasizing in your ministry and want them to share when appropriate.

Matching children to mentors can be difficult at times. Mentoring is relational and works best when there is a natural connection between the adult and child. Some adults are able to create connections when they do not occur naturally. Other adults will be unable to maintain a mentoring relationship with a child when there is not a natural connection. They may be unwilling to admit the relationship is not working. Checking in periodically with mentors can alert you to any children who may need a new mentor.

Mentors may not have the training to handle difficulties that may arise while mentoring. Any formal mentoring program sponsored by your ministry should have guidelines for when a child's parents should be informed about something that happens during mentoring. You may also want to provide resources to help mentors when they have questions regarding specific needs of their mentee.

Creating Apprenticeship Relationships
Older children may have discovered and developed their gifts from God to a point where they can begin using them to serve God. A great way to provide the mentoring to continue to develop their gifts and find new ways to use them in service is to create an apprenticeship relationship.

In an apprenticeship, a child with a specific gift will be paired with a similarly gifted adult in a ministry setting. The adult should be willing to allow the child to shadow him or her in their ministry activities and help when appropriate. The adult would also provide additional opportunities for developing the child's gift. Over time, the child will be given more experience and training in using their gift to serve God.

Apprenticeship relationships are modeled by Jesus in his ministry. He prepared at least seventy two people for ministry. Then he sent them out two by two without him to minister to others. An apprenticeship relationship between a Christian adult and a child should ultimately prepare the child to use his or gift to minister to others independently.

Since formal ministry apprenticeship relationships are rare, your ministry may have to identify Christian adults who are gifted in the same ways as the children in your ministry. Any adult interacting with a child should go through your volunteer screening process. Once a ministry apprenticeship is identified, you will need to explain your expectations for it and provide support until the Christian adult, the child and the child's parents are comfortable with the process.

Helping the children served by your ministry establish meaningful relationships with peers and Christian adults in your ministry and in the church itself is critical for their emotional connection to your ministry, your church and even God. It can take a lot of ministry resources when these relationships do not occur naturally. Without those relationships though, retention of the children your ministry serves through their teen and young adult years will be extremely difficult.

Discussion Questions
1. Why is it important for children to have meaningful relationships with others in their church family?
2. What are some ways to facilitate peer relationships?
3. What are short term mentoring relationships? How can your ministry facilitate them?
4. What are long term mentoring relationships? How can your ministry facilitate them?
5. What are apprenticeship relationships? How can your ministry facilitate them?
6. Make a list of Christian adults who could possibly be short or long term mentors or provide ministry apprenticeships for the children in your ministry. How will your ministry encourage these people to establish these relationships with the children served by your ministry?

Chapter 20 – Involving Parents in the Spiritual Education of Their Children

Ideally, the children served by your ministry are being raised in Christian homes where their parents are actively teaching them about God daily. It is the rare ministry where that happens in the home of every child. Parents may not be Christians or perhaps are not sure how to help their children build strong faith foundations. As a result, your ministry may have to give parents the resources and encouragement they need to be the primary spiritual educators for their children.

Hindrances to Parental Involvement
To equip and encourage parents to take responsibility for the spiritual education of their children, it is important to understand why they are not currently doing so. Each reason will have different strategies you may need to use to change the current dynamic in a family. Here are some of the more common reasons parents give for failing to take responsibility for the spiritual education of their children.
- They are not Christians themselves and are sending their children to church for any number of reasons, but have no knowledge or understanding of what is in the Bible.
- They are new or struggling Christians and have little knowledge or understanding of what is in the Bible.
- They believe it is the church's responsibility to provide everything children need in their spiritual education.
- They do not understand the enormous amount of time it takes to help children build unshakeable faith foundations and grow to their godly potential. (Making it unrealistic for the church to provide spiritual education for enough hours each week.)
- They believe their family does not have enough free time to teach their children about God.
- They are dealing with a personal or family crisis and do not have the resources to move beyond crisis management.
- They are focused on the happiness and secular success of their children, rather than their spiritual lives.
- They are engaged in competition with other parents to meet their children's perceived secular needs.
- They believe a well behaved child has a solid faith foundation regardless of whether or not the child has enough Bible knowledge, wisdom and godly heart traits to successfully live a Christian life.
- They saw their child's godly heart at a very young age and have failed to notice it has moved increasingly far from God since then.
- They are not sure what they should be doing to help their children build strong faith foundations and reach their godly potential.
- They are unaware of the strength or weakness of their own faith foundation or the impact their childhood home environment had on it.

- They believe faith is built during the teen and adult years and what does or does not happen in childhood has little impact on faith.
- They do not understand they are in a spiritual battle with Satan for their children's souls.
- They believe the only spiritual goals for their children are for them to decide to become a Christian by asking to be baptized and to attend church somewhat regularly.
- They are unaware they have come to view Christianity as just another extra curricular activity, rather than a commitment, identity and lifestyle.
- They fail to understand the spiritual strength or weakness of their children will impact not only the spiritual lives of their children, but their grandchildren and other future descendants.

Parents who are taking little if any personal responsibility for the spiritual education of their children may have one or more of these reasons as their excuse. Without understanding the dynamics of the situation in a particular family, you may not be giving them the resources and encouragement they need. Any generic efforts you make as a result will help some parents, but not others.

Discovering Parental Needs
The ideal plan to help parents take personal responsibility for the spiritual education of their children, should involve at least some private conversations. While you may find clusters of parents who need similar resources or encouragement, to be truly effective you need to understand the needs of each child's parents. These conversations should be loving and non threatening. At this point, you are merely trying to understand the spiritual dynamic in their home.

Some parents may feel how much time they spend on the spiritual education of their children at home is a private matter. This is often because the parents involved do not consider the church their family and do not feel emotionally safe enough to share their possible shortcomings. This can be overcome by developing relationships with parents before you attempt to have a potentially difficult conversation.

It is important to make parents feel safe when you try to understand the spiritual dynamic in a family. Your role is to serve and minister to their family, not harshly criticize them for any issues they are having. People are more likely to admit their shortcomings and failings if they know they will receive empathy and help rather than a stern lecture. Your ministry and the church itself should partner with parents, not shame them when they need or want help from other Christians.

Goals for Spiritual Education at Home
Parents are often unsure of what their goals for the spiritual education of their children should be. Many focus on raising children who are well behaved. While behaviors are

important to God, Jesus made it clear God is most concerned with the hearts of people. When parents understand this, it can be overwhelming. They are unsure what they must do to help mold their children's hearts.

One of the easiest, yet often least addressed, areas of a child's spiritual education at home should be Bible knowledge. The average church only exposes young people to a very small percentage of what is in the Bible. This leaves young people with a huge deficit of Bible knowledge as they begin navigating life independently. This most often has to be done intentionally, with regular times of family Bible study.

As their children learn to read, they should also be encouraged to develop independent Bible study habits. Children will need help with special reading comprehension skills needed for reading the Bible. These are rarely taught in public schools, so parents must work with their children on vocabulary words and becoming comfortable reading a text translated from another language.

As parents spend time teaching their children stories and passages from the Bible, they need to make sure their children are actually understanding what they are being taught. Not only do children need to understand what the scripture is saying, but also how to apply the commands and principles in it to their daily lives. These conversations can happen easily throughout the day when life reflects scripture or in the context of a family Bible study.

Prayer and worship are two areas most Christian families spend time explaining and encouraging. Many parents will still struggle with transitioning their children from saying rote prayers to an independent, conversational prayer life. They may take their children to worship and Bible class, but fail to understand the importance of helping their child develop relationships with peers and adult Christians who can provide spiritual mentoring.

While most parents work with their children on character traits and behavior, there is a difference between how this is done secularly and spiritually. The motivation is different and Christians have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to support their efforts to be godly. Some parents may also struggle knowing or even fully understanding the character God wants in His people. They may be teaching their children the secular standards for character traits like honesty or generosity. When this happens, children believe they are being held accountable for their attitudes and behaviors at a much lower level than God's standards.

Serving God and sharing their faith with others should be a normal part of the family life of Christians. Unfortunately, this is an area many believe is entirely the responsibility of the church. As a result, parents may feel uncomfortable or inadequate in serving others and sharing their faith independently.

Parents should also be helping their children discover, develop and begin to use their gifts from God. Since many Christian adults still struggle knowing their own gifts, it is little wonder they are unable to help their children. Most parents who recognize talent in their children see those talents as a way for their children to earn money as adults. They are unaware of the spiritual implications of these gifts.

Finally, parents should help their children understand how all of the faith pieces above are put together to live a Christian life. They are responsible for helping their children build the strongest faith foundation possible and to grow to their godly potential. They need to prepare their children to take personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth and health. Christian parents need to teach their children how to make godly choices. Most importantly, they need to teach them how to find God's plans for their lives and the good works He has prepared for them in advance.

Training for Parents
Many parents are unaware of what they need to be doing to help their children grow spiritually. Others are aware of what they need to be accomplishing, but are not quite sure how to do it. Training can help many parents fill knowledge gaps and give them the resources they need to become more responsible for the spiritual education of their children.

There are multiple ways to structure parent training classes. If you have enough parents, it can be helpful to provide training for the parents of children in different age groups. The parenting topics and resources needed by the parents of a toddler often differ greatly from the needs of the parent of a teenager. Having parent training classes grouped by age often makes them more efficient and effective.

If you do not have a lot of parents or there is a topic that is concerning all of the parents, you may choose to offer a parent training class on a particular topic. For example, you may want to have a class on how to teach the Bible at home. Since most families have several children in different age groups, the material you provide would meet the needs of most parents.

At times, it can be helpful to create a group of parents who need ongoing training and support. Often these groups are best for parents who have specific challenges in their parenting. The challenges can be anything from a health issue to an ongoing behavioral issue. These groups should be led by people with Bible knowledge as well as some training or experience in the specific parenting needs of the group.

Planning a Parent Training Session
The two most important aspects of planning a training session for parents are deciding upon the content it will contain and choosing who will lead it. If either area is weak, it will

be difficult to convince parents to attend any future parenting training sessions you wish to host.

Parents often have very little free time. If they devote some of it to attending a parenting class, they want to leave with a lot of helpful information and resources. Many public speakers focus on the entertainment aspect, rather than the content of their material. As a result, a two hour training may only contain one or two helpful ideas. Ideally training should contain many helpful ideas. Attendees should leave feeling their time was well spent and they learned several new things.

 It is important to give attendees notes from the training class on paper. Most people have been well trained by schools to keep important papers. Your notes will be saved somewhere in their home. Hopefully, they will be read again every time the person sees those pieces of paper. It is a subtle way to reinforce and encourage use of the key points in your training.

The presenter of your workshop is critical. Even the best material is ignored if presented in a dull, monotone way. Often people, like school teachers or salespeople, who must speak as part of their profession make great presenters. The person presenting does not necessarily have to be the one creating the content to be shared, but they must be comfortable enough with the material to be able to answer questions about it later.

No matter how wonderful and helpful the content is, parents are often reluctant to believe any presenter who is not a parent. They often prefer parents who either have children older than their children or children who are adults. This is unfortunate because many younger people have enough experience with children to give helpful information, but it will go unheard if the parents do not believe the experience of the speaker is adequate.

The length of time spent in workshops depends upon the amount of time parents have to spend in training. Some ministries have found it best to offer parent training during times when parents are already at the facility and their children are in classes. Others have found evening or weekend classes work well. If you have the resources, you may want to consider offering a parenting retreat that lasts for an entire day or two.

Regardless of the length of the training, participants will need short breaks every hour or two. If the workshops are participatory, with parents completing activities or working on projects, they may not need as many formal breaks. It is important to avoid giving parents too much information if training lasts more than a few hours. If you want to cover a large amount of content, it can be helpful to give parents quiet times when they can process and discuss what they are learning.

Parenting Resources
Your ministry may also want to provide resources to help parents with the spiritual education of their children. Often, the simplest resources are the most helpful. Sending home information each week on the Bible story and scriptures that were taught to their children, along with questions and activity ideas to extend learning at home is exactly what some parents need.

Your ministry may want to consider giving families weekly challenges to complete. Challenges often work best when some sort of reminder is sent during the challenge period. The most effective challenges are geared towards families with children of varying ages. They could include scripture readings, conversation topics or activities to strengthen family bonds or encourage deeper exploration of biblical topics. Not every family will complete each challenge, but by sending them home consistently, parents will have great ideas to use when they are motivated to spiritually educate their children.

When sending these resources home, they are more likely to be used if the parents actually see and read them. It is important to know how your parents want to receive important communications. This may mean sending resources several different ways to make sure every family has received them.

You may discover some families cannot afford basic Christian resources like Bibles or children's story Bibles. Often sending home a notebook their child has decorated as a prayer journal can spur parents to encourage more prayer in the home. If your ministry can provide ideas for family devotional times, it makes it easier for parents to study the Bible with their children.

If you have access to articles and books on Christian parenting, some parents will read them and attempt to implement some of the ideas and principles. Or you can send home one page Christian parenting tip sheets to help parents with common parenting issues.[43]

A few of the children to whom you minister may live in homes that can best be described as chaotic. There is little organization and no structure or routine. Children may not get healthy meals or enough sleep at night. The parents in these homes may need more basic help organizing and structuring their home before they are ready to introduce any intentional spiritual training to their children.

When offering Christian parenting classes and resources, it is important to be sensitive to parents dealing with heavy burdens. A chronically ill child, for example, may mean the parents are spending their time in a hospital or working long hours to pay medical bills. Your ministry does not need to add parenting guilt to their burden. In cases where parents

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[43] http://teachonereachone.org/printable-parenting-resources/

are struggling to survive, it is often best to find ways to minister to their felt needs and provide extra spiritual mentoring and support for their children.

Providing Family Activities
Some ministries have found the best way to prepare parents for taking the responsibility for the spiritual education of their children is to sponsor family activities. These are often multigenerational service projects or hands on Bible lessons with activities appropriate for the entire family.

As you plan and conduct these activities be aware that you are modeling the ways you want them to interact with their children at home. Give parents guided practice in sharing Bible truths with their children and asking and answering questions. Have parents complete any activities with their children, so they can experiment with the dynamics they would have doing something similar at home.

Those leading these multigenerational experiences can provide cues to guide parents as they complete the activities with their children. More experienced parents can observe family units and provide suggestions or help where needed. Make sure you allow time at the end of the activity for reflection. Ask parents to privately share with you any problems they experienced or questions they may have because of what happened.

Motivating Parents to Participate in the Spiritual Education of Their Children
Even if your ministry helps overcome the excuses parents have given you and provides training and resources, there is no guarantee they will do anything to teach their children about God. Without proper motivation, it is very unlikely they will take any more responsibility for the spiritual education of their children than they do now.

Often the lack of motivation springs from ignorance, lack of emphasis by church leaders and missing cues to help them to develop new habits. It is vital that your ministry get as much help from church leaders as possible. They should constantly teach and encourage parents to become more involved in the spiritual education of their children. Church leaders should model good Christian parenting with their own children or teach younger parents what they learned from parenting their own children.

Classes, workshops and sermons can motivate parents to be more involved in the spiritual education of their children. Without proper cues however, they may struggle developing better habits. Work with parents to help them find the places new activities like Bible study and prayer would naturally fit into their schedule.

Give them visual cues they can use as reminders of new habits. A school notebook decorated as a prayer journal, for example, can remind them to pray more often. If they put the visual cue where it is easily seen, they are more likely to be reminded to create new habits.

It can also help motivation if you celebrate small steps in the right direction. For a family who never reads the Bible at home, having an involved Bible study with their children every night may be overwhelming at first. Start parents where they are currently and encourage them to take a small step forward. The family who never studies the Bible may find it less overwhelming to share a Bible verse of the day at the breakfast table each morning. Once that habit is firmly established, they can gradually move towards the ultimate desired behavior.

Providing Support for Children Whose Parents Are Not Christians
Your ministry may be serving children whose parents have no interest in God or Christianity. They may have many reasons for allowing their children to participate, but they have little concern for the spiritual lives of their children. They may change their minds later, but at the moment have no interest in personally teaching their children about God.

It is important to remember, no matter how wonderful your ministry to children may be, it is impossible to completely take the place of a parent. You can, however, give the children of parents who have no interest in God additional spiritual support. Often, this extra support is provided by a long term mentor who takes the role of a substitute spiritual parent. They cannot fully take the parenting role, but they can provide some of the teaching, training and guidance the child might have otherwise received.

Many aspects of Christian parenting apply to good secular parenting as well. You may find that while these parents have no interest in attending a worship service or Bible class, they might attend a parenting class. Or they may be willing to join their child for a family activity. The more you can help these parents create connections and relationships with Christians, the more likely they are to eventually become Christians themselves.

Discussion Questions
1. What are some of the reasons parents do not take full responsibility for the spiritual education of their children?
2. What are some of the goals parents should have for the spiritual education of their children?
3. What should be considered when planning a parent training class or workshop?
4. What are some other resources the parents of the students to whom you minister may need?
5. What are some ways to motivate parents to take personal responsibility for the spiritual education of their children?
6. How can multigenerational ministry activities help parents be more comfortable teaching their children about God?

Appendix 1 – Conducting a Ministry Survey

Done well, a Ministry Survey can help you understand how those to whom you are ministering perceive your ministry. It can point out areas needing improvement in a current ministry. A Ministry Survey can help identify areas where teens and their parents in your community need ministry services. Below, you will find the basics of conducting a successful Ministry Survey.

General Principles of Conducting a Ministry Survey
1. **Your Ministry Survey should include as many people as possible**. In general, the more people you can survey, the more accurate your conclusions will be. Remember, there may also be one person who has recognized or analyzed the situation in ways others have missed. Failing to interview this person could leave you without critical insights.
2. **If you are interviewing several sub-groups of people and combining the results, make sure you have a representative/equal number of people in each group interviewed.** Over representing one group of people may skew the results of your survey, making the results less accurate.
3. **Do not survey only the people whom you like or who love your ministry.** If you cannot interview everyone, put all of the possible names in a hat and draw the number of names you have time to interview. This random choosing of participants will increase the likelihood you will get a variety of helpful responses.

Before The Interviews
- **Gather the information you already know.** Gathering this information will help you better determine what areas you need to cover in the survey.

    - **Statistics -** What statistical information can you find about the teens, families and social issues in your area?
    - **Current ministry efforts** - What does your ministry currently do to reach and serve the children in your area?
    - **Community resources available to families in your area**. If your ministry is considering meeting a felt need of the community as an outreach ministry, it is important to know if there are other religious or secular groups in the area already meeting that need.
- **Decide who you will survey**. There are many options for the types of people you could survey. Your ministry only has limited resources and will not be able to effectively survey everyone in your area. It is important to decide to whom you will give the survey.
    - **Main segment(s)** - These are the primary people you want to ensure are surveyed. They may include either one or both of the following major groups of people.
        - Church Members

- ■ Community Members
- ○ **Sub-Groups-** Within the two groups above, you will find several sub-groups. It is important to survey an accurate proportion of each group for your survey results to be accurate.
  - ■ **Parents** - The parents of young people often have a better insight into their children and the problems they face than anyone else - including at times the young people themselves.
  - ■ **Ministry Volunteers** - Ministry volunteers see first hand how well your ministry is currently working. They may also have important feedback on the ways your ministry needs to improve or expand.
  - ■ **Children** - If you are ministering to children, it is important to understand what they are thinking and feeling about your ministry and other areas that may impact it. Older children will often respond to adult questions with answers they believe the adult wants to hear. It is crucial you find ways to encourage older children participating in the survey to be totally honest with their responses.
  - ■ **Church Leaders** - Church leaders can impact a ministry, even if they are not directly involved with that ministry. It is important to understand their perspective on your ministry.
  - ■ **Community Leaders -** Community leaders often know things about the issues and problems of an area that others do not know. Asking for their feedback may reveal things you might not have learned otherwise.
- ● **Decide the time frame in which you would like all surveys to be conducted**. Surveying can continue indefinitely if you are not careful. It is important to allow enough time to obtain an adequate number of responses, but no so long that your ministry becomes stalled while waiting for results.
- ● **Decide how many people you would like to survey in each category.** Be realistic about how many people you will have time to survey by your deadline.
- ● **Determine which format(s) of surveys you would like to use**. There are several available options for conducting a Ministry Survey.
  - ○ **One-on-one interviews** - If you have the time to survey people in person and individually, it can result in the most helpful results. One-on-one interviews give people more time to thoroughly explain their thoughts and for the interviewer to ask follow up questions for clarification. It is crucial if using this method to ensure those being interviewed feel comfortable enough to be totally honest.
  - ○ **Small focus groups** - Surveying small focus groups can have many of the same advantages as one-on-one interviews. Assuming each participant answers all of the questions, means these focus groups will take more time to be completed than it takes to do one solo interview. There is also a chance that peer pressure will encourage participants to adapt their personal answers to match the group's responses.

- ○ **Written survey followed by personal or small group interviews -** This method will get you written responses quickly, while still allowing someone to follow up in the small group interviews. The interviews will have the same pros and cons as those conducted without the initial survey.
  - ○ **Written survey (online or paper) -** While this option may be quicker, it often yields more questions than answers. People will often limit their responses or fail to clarify their answers. The advantage is total anonymity, which in theory could produce more accurate results. The best format is asking participants to quantify their answers and providing space for comments on questions that may need longer explanations for you to thoroughly understand what the participant is thinking.
- ● **Determine what questions you would like answered during interviews.** (See sample surveys below for ideas.) This may take more time than you realize. You want enough questions to give you all the information you need, but no so many that people will not complete the survey. The questions you ask members of your congregation may also differ slightly from questions you ask members of the community who currently have no affiliation with your ministry. While questions in the various sub-groups may vary slightly, the overall surveys should collect similar date.
- ● **Decide who will conduct any interviews and how the information shared will be recorded**. The best interviewer is someone who is personable and will not try to influence the answers of participants. Often someone perceived as neutral is the best choice. If you use someone participants know, they should have a reputation for being honest, approachable and a good listener. If participants do not respect or trust the interviewer, the answers you receive will be less accurate.
- ● **Determine what follow-up participants will receive after their interviews**. There is nothing more frustrating than to be asked to share your opinions and ideas and then hearing nothing after the survey or interview is completed. Participants need to feel as if they are heard, even if you decide not to use their suggestions. There are several methods you can use to follow up with participants in your survey.
  - ○ **Thank you note -** This should include an explanation of what you intend to do with the information you gathered.
  - ○ **Summary of total responses -** Often people who participate in a survey, want to know whether or not others agreed with them. Sending the aggregate results can give them that information. It is important to be aware though that if your ministry makes a decision different than one counseled by a majority of survey participants, releasing these results can cause additional problems for your ministry.
  - ○ **Information about steps being made to change or develop your ministry as a result of the information gathered.** This information can be shared in a newsletter, on social media or in a format where most participants will see this information.

During the Interview Process
- **Make telling the truth (as they see it) feel safe for those you are interviewing**. Surveys and interviews will not help your ministry if the answers are not totally honest. It is important to make those participating believe that their honesty is wanted and appreciated. They must also believe there will not be negative repercussions if they say something they believe will upset someone involved.
- **Treat those being interviewed with love and respect–even if you are hurt or upset by what they say.** It is hard not to take comments personally when they are directed at your ministry. It is important to remember though, that this honesty can make your ministry stronger and more effective. If you do not know how your ministry needs improving, your ministry will be less effective and you run the risk of alienating those you were hoping to serve.
- **Avoid making defensive comments in reaction to what is shared.** There is a time and place for those discussions. While an interview is happening is not the ideal time to have this conversation. When you critique the responses of participants, it is very likely they will soon edit their comments or stop talking entirely.
- **If you disagree with something that is said, ask follow-up questions to determine what specific things made them believe the statement they made is true**. Once again, during an interview is not the time to correct what you believe are misunderstandings. What you do need to better understand is what happened to make them come to that conclusion. The answers may alert you to communication or other issues your ministry may have.
- **Show appreciation to everyone who shares his or her time with you.** People are busy. They need to feel you appreciate their efforts to share their thoughts with you.
- **Let participants know what will be done with the information you gather.** Once again, this is critical - especially if you plan to conduct additional surveys in the future. Participants usually understand everyone's ideas will not be used, but they need to know how what they shared will be considered.

After Interviews Are Completed
- **Examine all of the information gathered for patterns, clusters, red flags (problems mentioned by only one or two people, but which may still be valid) and other helpful information.** It can be helpful for one person to collect and analyze all of the data and create a report for everyone to review and discuss. This report should include every suggestion - even if it was only made by one or two people. At times, the best ideas are found in the thoughts of one person.
- **Place each bit of useful information in a Ministry Plan your ministry creates.** It can be helpful to divide the various comments and ideas into four major categories: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. You can then add any additional information your ministry team believes was omitted. This information can then be used to develop goals for your ministry.

- **Adapt goals and action plans as needed.** If you already have ministry goals and action plans, you may need to adapt them based on the information you learned from the surveys and/or interviews.
- **Follow-up with each participant.** It is crucial to let participants know the decisions you made based on the feedback they gave your ministry. Changes that are made quietly will often be missed by participants and they may believe nothing was done with the information given in the surveys and/or interviews.

Sample Questions to Ask Parents Who Attend Your Congregation
1. How many children do you have and what are their ages?
2. What is the average number of times your children attend the following during a typical four week period of time:
   a. Sunday morning worship service
   b. Sunday morning Bible class
   c. Other weeknight Bible classes
   d. Ministry events for your children's age groups that occur outside of regular class times
3. What do you believe our ministry is doing well?
4. In what areas do you believe our ministry needs improvement? (Note: Those interviewed should be encouraged to give at least one thing they believe needs improvement. If necessary, remind them your ministry really wants to know what needs to improve.)
5. What else could we add that might help strengthen the faith foundations of your children?
6. What can we do to support you in your Christian parenting?
7. What are the three most concerning problems your children are experiencing outside of Church?
8. How well would you say our Bible curriculum helps your children grow in the following areas:
   a. Bible knowledge
   b. Knowing how to apply the Bible to their lives
   c. Christian life skills
   d. Gift identification, development and use.
   e. Servant leadership skills.
9. How would you describe your children's relationships with:
   a. Their peers at Church
   b. Our volunteers
   c. Our leaders/staff
   d. Other adults in our congregation
10. If you could change one thing about our ministry, what would it be?
11. Is there anything else we should know?

Sample Questions to the Community
These questions would be appropriate for a ministry wanting to improve their outreach into the community, by focusing on children with special needs.

1. Do you currently attend church somewhere regularly?
2. What experiences have you had with Church participation and your child with special needs?
3. What is the age of your child with special needs?
4. What special needs does your child have when attending:
    a. Bible classes
    b. Worship services
    c. Other teen ministry events
5. Does your child require a dedicated aide to help him or her participate in activities?
6. What concerns are you struggling to address in regard to your child with special needs?
7. How could our Church best help teens with special needs?
8. How could our Church best help the families of teens with special needs?
9. If we begin a ministry serving teens with special needs and their families:
    a. What should it include?
    b. What should it avoid?
10. What is the best way for us to find and communicate with families who have a teen with special needs?
11. What is one thing you wish more people knew about your child with special needs?
12. What else do we need to know?

Appendix 2 – Gift Identification Survey

Asking potential ministry volunteers the following questions can make it easier to identify the ways in which God has gifted them. It will then be easier to place them in volunteer assignments that match their giftedness.

1. What classes or training have you had that taught you anything that might be considered a skill?
2. When someone gives you a compliment, what are the two or three things for which they most often praise you?
3. What jobs/careers have you had in the past?
4. What is your current position?
5. What volunteer activities (in any setting) have you enjoyed the most?
6. What are your hobbies?
7. When you read books or articles, what topics are the most interesting to you?
8. What are some things you do well, but don't necessarily consider a talent?
9. If you could learn to do something new, what would it be?
10. What is something you love doing, but believe you don't really do it well?
11. If someone asks you for help or advice, in what areas do they usually need you?

Appendix 3 – Safety Policies for a Children's Ministry

This is merely one example of possible safety policies for a ministry to children. Please check with your ministry's lawyers, insurance carriers and advisors for specific changes and corrections needed for your particular program.

XYZ Ministry values the safety and well being of our students. The following guidelines are our expectations for classroom management.

- XYZ Ministry has an open door policy. We require classroom doors without windows in them to be open at all times.
- XYZ Ministry staff and/or permanent volunteers may come into your classroom at any time. They may offer assistance or observe your class.
- Parents of your students may observe your class if they have received prior permission from the XYZ Ministry staff. The staff will inform you when they have given permission to a parent to observe your class.
- Physical/corporate correction is not allowed under any circumstance.
- Cursing, demeaning comments, insults and other ugly speech are not allowed under any circumstance.
- We encourage you to require our students to follow XYZ Ministry rules:
  - Do not talk when someone is giving instructions or teaching a lesson.
  - Raise your hand if you have a question or need help.
  - If an activity allows talking, movement and/or noise, you are still expected to be respectful of others.
  - Do not use your words to be disrespectful or hurt others.
  - Do not use physical violence or force against others.
  - Follow instructions given by leaders, teachers and others placed in authority over you, unless they violate our ministry rules or God's laws.
- If a student disobeys rules or does not follow instructions, they are to be given only one reminder.
- If a student is openly disrespectful or disobedient, please let our floater know as quickly as possible. The floater will determine appropriate consequences. If you become a permanent volunteer, you will be given training on giving appropriate consequences to students.
- If you encounter a problem not addressed by these guidelines or have any questions, please contact Joe ABC.

Appendix 4 – Classroom Assessment Tool

As you observe a class for children being conducted, ask yourself the following questions. An interpretation key is included at the end to help you interpret what you observed. For a better assessment of your program, it is best to use this evaluation in multiple classes.

Before the lesson:
• Is the teacher present when the students first arrive?
• Is the teacher prepared for class before the first students arrive?
• Do students seem to be excited about coming to class?
• Does the teacher appear to genuinely love and care equally about all of the students?
Examples: • Is each student greeted warmly by name, smiles, hugs, etc.?
     • Does the teacher appear to know something about the lives and interests of students? • Are visitors introduced to other students?
     • Are visitors paired with a student who attends regularly in order to welcome visitors to the class?
     • Is an attempt made to learn a little about visitors?

During the lesson, does the teacher:
• Read the day's story from an easy-to-read or age-appropriate version of the Bible?
• Tell students the main concept they are supposed to learn from today's lesson?
• Explain unusual words so students can understand the meaning of the passage?
• Describe historic cultural and societal differences in ways students can understand?
• Ask questions to assess students' comprehension of the story?
• Ask higher-level questions (see Asking Better Questions in Bible Classes) to assess the level of comprehension they have of the godly principles and application of the scriptures being taught?
• Ask students questions to help them think of ways to put the godly principles of the passage into daily practice in their lives?
• Encourage questions from students, even if they appear to be expressing doubts or exhibiting a lack of faith?
• Share his/her own questions and faith journey with the students in order to model life's continuous learning and growth?
• Answer students' questions respectfully or make a plan for follow up if the teacher doesn't know the answer?
• Clarify any misunderstandings students may have?

Is the activity:
• Meaningful?
• Memorable?
• Hands-on or experiential?
• Strongly connected to the Bible lesson?

• Requiring the students to reflect upon and/or practice the godly principles taught in the lesson? • Appealing to students with different learning styles and interests?
• Something the student will keep or remember doing for several weeks or longer?

During the lesson, are students:
• Encouraged to ask questions even if they appear to be expressing doubts about the material covered or a lack of belief?
• Required to actively engage with the material—to think, reflect, question and/or create based on the passages taught?
• Actively engaged in an activity to experience something or create something? (Filling out worksheets doesn't count.)
• Remembering what they learned in previous classes with minimal prompting?
• Provided with materials that have been adjusted to meet the needs of any students with special needs?

Classroom management:
• Does the teacher make adjustments in behavioral expectations for students with special learning needs without embarrassing the student in the process?
• Does the teacher have age-appropriate expectations for student behavior?
• Does student behavior seem to allow other students to learn without frustration?
• Are students happy and engaged?
• Does the teacher manage classroom behavior in appropriate ways?

At the close of the lesson, does the teacher:
• Encourage prayer inside and outside of class time?
• Encourage Bible reading inside and outside of class?
• Give students challenges to put the principles from the lesson into practice during the week?
• Model servant leadership?
• Show a mutual respect for students?
• List and explain the godly principles he/she wants students to master before they leave his/her class?
• Name two or three specific and measurable goals he/she has for the class and the students?
• Provide tools (like parent letters) to help the parents of students extend learning at home?

Interpretation Key
Programs attempting to give students a strong foundation for their faith should be able to answer "yes" to all of the questions in each of their classes. This, however, would be highly unusual in any educational environment. It is more likely you will find some issues with individual classes and others that seem to affect your entire program. This tool should help you determine what additional training and resources individuals may need to enhance the effectiveness of their classes.

Appendix 5 – Setting Ministry Goals

Effective goals normally contain five characteristics. In secular goal setting, these characteristics are:

1. **Specific** - Effective goals should be as specific as possible.
2. **Measurable -** Effective goals usually include some sort of measurable component, often expressed as a specific number with a unit of measurement.
3. **Achievable** - Effective goals record something that is achievable given the resources and parameters of the goal.
4. **Realistic** - Effective goals are realistic considering the resources that are available and the time frame that is given within the goal.
5. **Time Bound -** Effective goals contain a deadline for achieving the goal.

When creating goals for your ministry to children, focus on goals that are specific and measurable. As Christians, we know God will decide whether they are achievable or realistic and their timing.The goal should contain a deadline, not to question God's timing, but rather to encourage your ministry to review the goal and progress towards it regularly.

Your ministry should have no more than three or four short-term goals at any one time. You may choose to create a much longer long-term goal list and periodically move items from that list to the list of short-term goals. This should generally occur as a short term goal is reached or removed from the list for some other reason.

Example: Instead of "Our students will become Christians," try "Three students will ask to study baptism outside of class and decide to become Christians this semester". In this instance, ministry volunteers would not pressure students to become Christians during the semester. The deadline is a tool to encourage volunteers to meet again at the end of the semester and discuss how well they are encouraging students' interest in becoming a Christian.

Appendix 6 – Curriculum Evaluation Tool

There is no perfect Bible curriculum. Master teachers understand any lesson must be adapted to meet the special learning needs of the students in each class. No literature can predict the needs of every possible type of classroom environment and student population. The following guide will allow ministry leaders and Bible class teachers to identify areas in which a particular Bible curriculum may need to be modified to optimize student learning. Note: These evaluation questions were written to assess curricula that have been written by others. Many of the questions can also be used to evaluate curricula written by individual teachers or your ministry team.

- **How many Bible stories will a student be taught over the entire span of the curriculum?** There are over 200 Bible stories that can be taught to children. A curriculum covering less than half of those stories over the entire span of the curriculum may leave students with large gaps in their Bible knowledge. In most cases, it is also wise to avoid using a Bible curriculum that teaches the same basic Bible story over a period of several consecutive weeks. (A possible exception would be classes for children under three years old.)
- **Does each lesson list specific learning objectives?** Without learning objectives, teachers and students may be unsure of the application principles and main concepts in the Bible lesson.
- **Does each lesson contain scripture references and excerpts?** If the authors of the curriculum retell a Bible story, is it faithful to the original text? Added details can change the meaning or the interpretation of the Bible story.
- **With what denomination(s) are the writers of the curriculum affiliated?** Man made doctrines are often slipped into explanatory text in a Bible lesson. This subtle teaching often goes unnoticed, but over time can build an inaccurate understanding of scripture in the hearts and minds of students and teachers.
- **Do the learning objectives of the lesson, the suggested lesson text and the activities help students understand the application principle(s) contained in the Bible story?** Understanding the facts of a Bible story is important. Knowing facts without understanding what God wants us to learn from the story, leaves students without essential information.
- **Are interesting facts about culture, history and/or archaeological discoveries included where appropriate?** This extra information can make the lesson more understandable, interesting and faith strengthening.
- **Do activities have a meaningful connection to the Bible story or its application?** Activities that focus on fun without helping students remember or understand the lesson, add little benefit to students. Students should need to think about the Bible story or its application as they participate in any activity.
- **Are activities hands-on, engaging and/or project based?** Activities should require students to manipulate objects, move, talk and process what they are taught in the lesson. They should spark student questions and reflection. Activities like

worksheets, crossword puzzles, coloring sheets and some crafts require little if any processing of the lesson by students. Students will also often find these more didactic activities to be boring.

- **Do the lessons and activities involve all five senses of the students?** In general, the more senses students must use during the course of a lesson and activity, the better they will understand and remember it.
- **If student questions are provided, do they cover higher levels of thinking beyond remembering facts?** In addition to remembering the facts of a lesson, questions should ask students to demonstrate: understanding, the ability to apply what was learned to real life, the ability to analyze using concepts learned and the ability to evaluate and create using the lesson. Not every student will be capable of answering all of these types of questions, but asking them will encourage students to process the information learned on deeper levels.
- **Are suggestions given for modifying lessons and activities?** Although Bible curriculum is usually written with the average class and student in mind, real classrooms may have very different environments, age groupings, special learning needs and more. Having general or specific suggestions for making modifications is helpful.
- **Are activities appropriate for the ages and abilities of your students?** Do students have the motor skills, language skills or other needed skill sets to fully participate in the lesson and activities? If not, changes will need to be made so students can gain maximum benefit from the class.
- **Are parent resources suggested or included?** Classroom learning can be extended in the home, if parents are given the necessary information. Parents need to be given basic information about the lesson, the activity, any concepts you taught, and suggestions for things they can do at home to reinforce the lesson with their children. Some curricula may also supply Christian parenting resources in the form of tip sheets, newsletters, blog posts and more.
- **Does the curriculum appear to have a plan for student spiritual growth?** Will the student be exposed to a wide variety of Bible stories over time? Is there an effort made to revisit basic commands and godly principles at various ages? Does the curriculum allow both children who know little Bible and those who have a strong spiritual foundation to continue to grow spiritually?
- **Does the curriculum require students to read and write independently to complete activities?** Students with learning differences may become unnecessarily embarrassed and stressed if the activities constantly require reading and writing – especially to be shared with other students. Small amounts of reading and writing are to be expected, but those with learning differences should not have to constantly struggle to complete activities.
- **If the curriculum uses photos or drawings of people, do they provide an accurate reflection of our world?** Any photos or drawings should show children and adults of a variety of ethnicities, with overt special needs, etc. Assumptions in text or activities that all children have siblings or live in two parent homes should be

kept to a minimum. Also watch for obviously dated images as young people often reject lessons told with those as being from another era and therefore not valid.

- **Does the text of the lesson or the activity require a knowledge of secular culture to fully comprehend the example?** Or are characters from secular culture added to the telling of Bible stories? Culture changes quickly. What is popular in one area may have no exposure in another area. If a secular cultural reference is outdated or unknown, understanding is lost (not added) by using it. Adding secular fictional characters to tell, observe or participate in Bible stories can confuse children and even some teens. The secular character becomes part of the Bible in the mind of the student, or people in the Bible are reduced to fictional characters, rather than the real people they were in history.

Appendix 7 – Common Logical Fallacies in Spiritual Discussions

In discussions about any number of topics, people often resort to using logical fallacies in an attempt to prove their point. These fallacies appear logical on the surface, but are actually based on poor logic. As a result, the arguments often collapse under the questioning of someone aware of logical fallacies.

Children may be exposed to logical fallacies used by people trying to undermine God as well as Christians trying to convince them to obey God. It is not necessary for Christians to use logical fallacies as God is Truth. Teaching children about logical fallacies can help them avoid false teaching, attempts to convince them to deny God and other things that could weaken or destroy their faith.

It is crucial that your ministry volunteers and especially your teachers work to avoid using logical fallacies in their teaching of the Bible to children. Often a little research or re-wording a few sentences can remove the most common logical fallacies used by Christians and actually make your Bible lesson stronger as a result.

Below are some of the more commonly used logical fallacies. There are many more you can access online if you wish to explore this topic in more depth.

- **Fact, Inference or Opinion.** While technically not a logical fallacy, it can confuse children in a similar fashion. Authors and speakers may state or imply something as if it were a fact, when it is actually their opinion. Follow up questions can often expose a fact or inference as an opinion. Inferences and opinions can be correct, but it is important to understand whether or not there are actual facts that support or undermine them.
- **Existence on the internet equates to verifiable truth.** While this also falls under other logical fallacies, it is an important dynamic for many young people. They often get much of their information online. They have come to believe if a statement or source is listed on a search engine it is a reliable source of truth. In reality, anything found online must go through the same filters for truth as information obtained from other sources.
- **Correlation equals causation.** This is the assumption that because two things are often found in correlation to one another that one causes the other. This may or may not actually be true and requires further scrutiny to assess causation. Example: Christianity causes mental illnesses. The logical fallacy would assume there is something about Christianity that causes mental illness because a large number of Christians have a self reported mental illness. There could be any number of reasons for the cause of mental illnesses found among Christians.
- **False dilemma.** This assumes that the extremes of an issue are the only options. It is often used to portray Christianity as extremist. Example: The Bible says lying is sinful. The false dilemma would assume that therefore Christians believe everyone

who tells a lie is going to Hell. This is ignoring the possibility of repentance, forgiveness and other Christian beliefs.

- **Argument from authority.** This fallacy quotes an "expert" who may or may not actually know the truth. This could be anything from a secular scientist, to a famous preacher and even taking Bible scriptures out of context. There is also a possibility that what the "expert" said surrounding the quote actually helped to clarify that the speaker believed the exact opposite of the quote.
- **Red herring.** This logical fallacy is usually used by someone in the course of an argument, often when they appear to be losing. It is a statement thrown out to distract the opponent and change the topic of the argument.
- **Loaded question.** This logical fallacy makes use of a question in which any answer will make the person giving the answer look foolish. It is often asked not because the person actually wants an answer to their question, but because they want their opponent to appear in a negative light. For example, if someone asked, "Where exactly is Heaven?", any answer would be problematic. Attempting to give an exact location would cause scorn, because there is no way to prove you are correct. Likewise, responding "I don't know" makes it appear there is not a Heaven because you cannot identify its location.
- **Possibility fallacy.** This fallacy argues that because something could possibly happen, it will probably happen. This can be used for example to make people feel threatened by God in some way. God struck Annanias dead for lying, therefore he will probably strike Bob dead if he is lying, too. God may or may not give everyone the same earthly consequences for disobedience.
- **Ad hominem.** In this logical fallacy, a person discounts what is said based on the person rather than analyzing what was actually said. This often takes the form of disparaging the person. Example: "Well of course the Apostles confirmed the resurrection. They had an ulterior motive."
- **Bandwagon.** This assumes that if the majority of people believe something to be true, then it must indeed be true. The truth may actually rest with the minority.
- **Either-Or.** In this fallacy, a person presents two unacceptable options as if they are the only possible options. In reality, there may be numerous possible options that are better for one or both parties.
- **Argument from ignorance.** This fallacy is used by someone in a discussion when they begin throwing out ideas and "facts" with no actual knowledge of whether those things have been tested or are true.
- **Circular Logic.** This is when someone continually repeats their original belief as the support for its validity. Example. "That is just wrong." "Why?" "Because it is just wrong to do that."
- **Dogmatism.** This person will not listen to any views except their own. Nothing the other person says or does will ever change their mind on the topic.
- **Emotional Appeals.** This often occurs when someone trusts their emotions more than any evidence. It can also be used in an attempt to scare the other person into agreeing with them. Example: "God says it is a sin to lie." "It just does not feel right

for God to get upset because someone lied to spare another person's feelings. Surely, God is okay with those lies."

- **Fallacy of exclusion.** Often this is used by someone who can think of one or two specific examples of the supposed truth of their argument. Those examples, however, may be the exception instead of the rule. Example: "All Christians are hypocrites. I knew this Christian one time, who was a preacher and I caught him lying."
- **Faulty analogy.** This is an attempt to relate two things that may actually have nothing in common. Example: Christianity is the opiate of the masses.
- **Non sequitur.** This is when the conclusion does not follow the premise. Example: If God were good, he would not let bad things happen.
- **Slippery slope.** This logical fallacy is itself a slippery slope. Sometimes starting down a road does quickly lead to more intense consequences. The fallacy is in assuming every choice will lead to rapid, desperate consequences. Example: If we don't have Sunday School on New Year's Day, the next thing you know, we will never have Sunday School.
- **Lack of evidence.** This is when someone claims you cannot be correct in your position, because there is no definitive, irrefutable proof or evidence. This is often used in religion in disagreements that align with, "You can not prove God exists." and "You can not prove God does not exist." In reality, neither side will be able to produce irrefutable evidence until Christ returns.
- **Straw man.** In this fallacy, one person makes a statement so extreme, no one would agree with it in hopes of destroying the other person's argument. Example: Two people are discussing Christianity. One person says, "Hitler was a Christian." As if the fact that Hitler may have been a Christian, therefore undermines Christianity itself.
- **Repetition.** While technically not a logical fallacy, repetition is a common tactic in propaganda. The theory is that if you repeat your message often enough and loudly enough, many people will begin to believe it is true - regardless of the statement's actual validity.
- **Glittering generality.** This is when people use a broadly defined word such as "love" without defining it in an attempt to win an argument. Example: Two people are discussing something God has called a sin in the Bible and whether or not they should speak to a fellow Christian regarding that sin.. "But God wants us to love our neighbors." While that is indeed true, "love" in this person's argument is used very generally. Love in this case may actually be encouraging the person to repent of their sin, not ignoring the sin.
- **Transfer.** This is another technique often used in propaganda. It is portraying someone or something in a particular way in hopes that image will transfer its meaning upon the person or philosophy. It is often employed when portraying Christians in movies and books with actors and characters who appear judgmental, backward and unattractive. The hope is that those introduced to the image will transfer the negative image to all of Christianity and not just that specific example.

- **Snob appeal.** This is an attempt to convince an opponent that everyone that person admires agrees with the speaker's position. It is often most effective with people who are already in an elite circle or are in hopes of becoming part of one in the future. It is a form of peer pressure that focuses on attaining or maintaining a highly desired social status in their culture.

Appendix 8 – Sample Permission Slip

Learning Excursion Location _____

Learning Excursion Address _____

Date of Learning Excursion _____

Beginning Time _____

Ending Time _____

Transportation _____

Cost _____

Additional Information _____

Chaperone Mobile Number _____

My Child _____ has my permission to go to _____ on _____ with _____. Should there be a need to contact me during the excursion, my mobile number is _____. In the event of a medical emergency, if I cannot be reached, the chaperones have my permission to obtain medical help. My child's doctor is _____ and he/she can be reached at _____. My child has the following medical conditions/allergies and/or is on the following medications _____.

Appendix 9 – Service Project Ideas

There are hundreds of service projects you can do with one or more child. The opportunities for serving others will vary by location and can be impacted by the resources you have available. Below you can find a brief description of various service projects. For more details on each project, you can go to Teach One Reach One Ministries' website.[44]

- Create infant care packets for families who are struggling
- Create no sew heating pads for the elderly
- Non perishable food collection and distribution
- Create decorative non-slip socks for elderly or the homebound
- Create personal hygiene kits for foster children, orphans, etc.
- Clean a park, stream or other area outdoors
- Bake communion bread
- Collect coats and other cold weather clothing for people who cannot afford them
- Visit a facility for the elderly and sing for them, play games with them, etc.
- Create packets to amuse children who are hospital patients
- Grow food and donate it to those in need
- Collect, clean, repair and donate play equipment, toys and games to an orphanage or other place that serves children
- Create and perform a puppet show explaining a godly principle or command to young children
- Create and deliver small bags of treats to fire fighters, police officers or other community servants
- Design and create decorative items for hair (like bows and barrettes) and donate them to a shelter serving young girls.
- Create small first aid kits for the homeless or other groups that may need them
- Create memory books for senior citizens who are beginning to experience dementia.
- Build and mount birdhouses - especially outside of windows of the homebound
- Create birthday kits for children who might not otherwise have a birthday celebration
- Clean the facility where your church meets
- Collect used Bibles and donate them to people who need them
- Create worship bags to keep small children quiet during worship services
- Host a tea party or meal for widows or another group of people
- Bake bread or cook a meal and deliver to people who need encouragement
- Prepare emergency supply kits for people who have recently experienced a natural disaster
- Create decorative onesies for infants
- Create and perform a Bible drama for younger children

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[44] http://teachonereachone.org/activity-ideas/

- Knit or crochet prayer shawls for the ill
- Sew pillowcases or simple clothing for orphans or others who may need them
- Learn sign language
- Create testimony quilts for the homeless
- Sew walker totes for people using walkers or wheelchairs

Appendix 10 – Sample Classroom Rules

It is often best to have a few general rules that students can easily remember and follow. The following are some common classroom rules. You may choose to have others that better meet the needs of your ministry.

- Do not talk when someone is giving instructions or teaching a lesson.
- Raise your hand if you have a question or need help.
- If an activity allows talking, movement and/or noise, you are still expected to be respectful of others.
- Do not use your words to be disrespectful or hurt others.
- Do not use physical violence or force against others.
- Follow instructions given by leaders, teachers and others placed in authority over you, unless they violate our ministry rules or God's laws.

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