

TEACHING THE BIBLE TO CHILDREN

During this workshop, participants will reflect on relationships in their childhood, consider some of Jesus' relationships, and explore how our human relationships help us to experience biblical truths. The second part of the workshop will allow people to explore specific learning activities in relation to the developmental levels of children.

PURPOSE

This workshop is designed to help people understand and apply two crucial principles of Bible education for children: 1. Children develop from young listeners, to budding readers, to new owners, and finally to investigators; and 2. Children learn biblical truths primarily through relationships.

TIME FRAME: 2 hours with one 10-minute break

BASIC WORKSHOP OUTLINE

I Introduction (*15 minutes*)

II Learning through Relationships (*45 minutes total*)

A. Our Own Relationships Help Us Understand Biblical Concepts (*15 minutes*)

B. Jesus' Relationships Taught People (*15 minutes*)

C. Some Modern Situations—What Are the Children Learning? (*15 minutes*)

Break (*10 minutes*)

III Learning Through Planned Activities (*45 minutes*)

IV Evaluation and Closing (*5 minutes*)

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

- Set up or arrange for a hospitality committee to provide light snacks and drinks for break time.
- Gather newsprint, tape, markers, and Bibles.
- Prepare the following information to be presented on newsprint or overhead:

1. Purpose of Workshop:

This workshop is designed to help people understand and apply two crucial principles of Bible education for children: 1. Children develop from young listeners, to budding readers, to new owners, and finally to investigators; and 2. Children learn biblical truths primarily through relationships. Participants will reflect on relationships in their childhood, consider some of Jesus' relationships, and explore how our human relationships help us to experience biblical truths. The second part of the workshop will allow people to explore specific learning activities in relation to the developmental levels of children.

2. Chart A:

<u>Person(s) in Incident</u>	<u>How Jesus Related to Them</u>	<u>What the Person May Have Learned</u>
1. Apostles/Disciples		
2. Boy		
3. Crowd		

3. Chart B:

<u>Child in the Incident</u>	<u>How Adult Related to the Child</u>	<u>What the Child Might Learn</u>

4. Title List for the Learning Centers:

- Young Listeners—Ages 3–6
- Budding Readers—Ages 6–8
- New Owners—Ages 8–10
- Investigators—Ages 10–12

If the Learning Centers are not located in the same room where the introduction to the Learning Centers is being given, you may need to add locations of the centers.

- Make copies of Handouts A-1, A-2, and A-3, so that there will be one for each group of five people. NOTE: Permission is granted for limited reproduction, so the number of photocopies should not exceed one copy per every 5 participants in a given workshop session.
- Make copies of Handout B for each participant.

- Prepare each Learning Center (see LEARNING CENTER INSTRUCTIONS) with materials as follows:

1) Young Listeners (Ages 3–6) and Budding Readers (Ages 6–8):

- Bibles
- Tape recorder and blank tapes (optional)
- Pencils and paper
- Young Listeners and Budding Readers Learning Center Instructions and Worksheet

2) Budding Readers (Ages 6–8) and New Owners (Ages 8–10):

- Pencils, markers, and crayons
- Scissors
- Paper and/or posterboard
- Bibles
- Magazines
- Glue sticks
- Budding Readers and New Owners Learning Center Instructions

3) New Owners (Ages 8–10):

- Matching game cards: 2 index cards with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy on one side. You should have a total of ten cards, each with one name of a Bible book and each book represented on two cards.
- Blank 3 x 5 cards
- Pencils
- Paper
- Copies of one quarter of curriculum for ages 8–10
- New Owners Learning Center Instructions and Worksheet

4) Investigators (Ages 10–12):

- Bibles (contemporary versions)
- Pencils and paper
- Concordance
- Bible Dictionary
- Investigators Learning Center Instructions

CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

I Introduction (*15 minutes*)

As participants arrive, invite them to find someone they do not know or with whom they have not chatted in a while to briefly share with one another about a fun time they have had with a child or children. Explain that the purpose is not to compete to see who has the most interesting story, to evaluate each others' experiences, or to give each other advice, but simply to tell a brief vignette and listen to one another. After a few minutes, assemble and ask participants to introduce themselves, identify their churches, and relate what led them to attend this workshop. **As an alternative** for large groups: provide name tags and ask for

a show of hands to identify: a) the churches represented; b) the age groups the participants work with; and c) the roles they play in their churches that make this workshop important to them. (An example question to ask is “How many here are church school teachers?”)

Introduce yourself and review the workshop purpose, which you have displayed on newsprint, overhead, or Power Point. Explain that during the course of the workshop you will be exploring some theoretical concepts and also engaging in some age-appropriate learning activities to learn through experience. Mention that there will be a break half-way through. Make sure that everyone knows where the facilities are and encourage participants to feel free to leave as necessary.

II Learning Through Relationships (45 minutes total)

A. Our Own Relationships Help Us Understand Biblical Concepts (15 minutes)

Offer an introductory statement such as: *Even though we may not be aware of it at the time, significant relationships help us understand and experience biblical concepts and truths.* Then ask participants to close their eyes and focus on a significant relationship they had when they were children, perhaps focusing on a particular incident within that relationship. After a few minutes, invite participants to describe the relationship in two or three words.

OR

Pair participants and allow 2 minutes each for sharing why this relationship was significant.

Next ask people to call out the words or phrases they used to describe their significant relationships. Print these words and phrases these on newsprint and ask the group to pick out the words on the newsprint that reflect the nature of God. Circle their choices and explain:

If, for example, we have never had the experience of love in relationship with another, then we could not understand what is meant by God’s love. Human relationships are basic to our understandings of God.

B. Jesus’ Relationships Taught People (15 minutes)

Explain that even if we did not know Jesus’ words, we would know about his nature by the way he related to others. Display the Chart A and ask participants to turn to John 6:2-13. Read the text together then have participants form “buzz” groups of four to five persons. Their task is to come up with at least two items for each category. Give the group five minutes to work then fill in the chart with the suggestions from the groups. Here is a sample completed chart:

<u>Person(s) in the Incident</u>	<u>How Jesus Related to Them</u>	<u>What the Person May Have Learned</u>
Apostles/disciples	Jesus listened to them. He spent time with them. He had expectations for them and told them so. He accepted Andrew's idea.	God is interested in us. People are worthwhile. We have abilities, and we can serve God.
Boy	Jesus offered acceptance. He accepted the boy's gift, thanked God, and used the boy's gift.	God accepts what I have to give. My gift is okay. I can give to others.
Crowd	Jesus welcomed them and wanted to be with them. Jesus cared about them.	God is with us. God cares for us. Godly people care for others.

C. Some Modern Situations—What Are the Children Learning? (15 minutes)

Give each small group one of the A handouts (A-1, A-2, or A-3). Provide newsprint and markers. Display Chart B and ask each group to select a recorder, whose first task will be to copy Chart B onto the newsprint. Give the groups about 7 minutes to read the vignette on their handout and fill out Chart B based on that story.

Reconvene and invite each group to read their vignette and discuss their findings. Discuss the potential for interactions with adults, especially in church, to teach truths or falsehoods about God.

Break: Remind participants of where facilities are. Explain where drinks and/or snacks can be found and invite them to take a 10-minute break.

III Learning Through Planned Activities (45 minutes)

Explain that since children have different levels of ability and readiness to learn, Bible learning activities need to be selected in light of age-level development. Point to the following list for the learning centers and review this as one way of characterizing a child's developing relationship with the Bible:

- the young listener (ages 3–6)
- the budding reader (6–8)
- the new owner (8–10)

- the young investigator (10–12).

Explain that there are four learning centers arranged according to this system. Invite the participants to work in pairs and visit the learning center(s) for the age group(s) with which they work. Allow about 25 minutes for visiting learning centers then ask participants to reconvene in small groups according to the age levels with which they work.

Invite anyone who wants to share something they developed to do so at this time. Invite discussion about the learning centers. The following questions may be helpful:

- Did you enjoy the learning center approach?
- What do you think are the strengths of using learning centers?
- What do you think are the weaknesses of using learning centers?
- How might learning centers be used in your church's educational programs?
- How might using learning centers help with churches that have intergenerational programs or have limited teaching staff?

Distribute Handout B, "Some Age-Appropriate Bible Activities," and invite participants to brainstorm additions to the learning activities listed on the handout. They may record their additional suggestions on newsprint and post them around the room. Allow time for participants to walk around and tour each other's suggested activities.

IV Evaluation and Closing (5 minutes)

Invite the participants to share their overall impressions of this workshop. Provide paper and pencils for those who prefer to share anonymously. Encourage the participants to mention things they appreciated, things they feel deserved more attention, and anything they would change.

Offer a prayer, sing together a children's song with movement such as "This Little Light of Mine," or use a song someone made up during the learning center activity to close the session.

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The first-grade children in one class were talking together about how to treat visitors, since the parents were invited the next week.

“You’re nice to them.”

“No, you treat them the way you do any old people. You’re careful with them.”

“Careful?” the teacher repeated.

“Yes. They worry if we jump around and yell.”

Just then the minister walked through in his robe and stole, looking grand. He was not quite forty.

“Hello, Old-timer,” a smiling, well-intentioned six-year-old said.

The minister laughed. The teacher said, “Mr. Wilson, we are talking about how to treat visitors, because the parents are coming next Sunday.”

Mr. Wilson looked approvingly at the children. With a serious countenance he said: “Give them chairs to sit on. They aren’t as young as you are.”

The children arranged the chairs before they left.

Reproduced from *Help! I'm A Sunday School Teacher* by Mary Duckert (The Westminster Press, 1969), 107–108. Used by permission. Permission is granted to photocopy 1 copy per every 5 workshop participants.

Natalie (three years old) comes in on Sunday morning. Her body is shaking with dry sobs as her mother prepares to leave her at the door of the church school nursery. A teacher encourages the mother to stay for a few Sundays until Natalie feels more comfortable in her new surroundings and has begun to trust the persons there. On the Sunday morning when Natalie can see her mother leave (confident that she will return) and eagerly participate in the nursery experience, then she will have experienced the Good News.

Reprinted from *Teaching and Learning with Young Children: A Manual for Workers in the Church* by Grace B. Harger and Arline J. Ban (Judson Press, 1979), 11. Permission is granted to photocopy for use in local, regional, or national workshops.

One of the few advantages of being away from the family is that your children write you letters. I keep all of them with care. Each year they grow more valuable to all of us.

Cathy writes great letters. She never has submitted to the idea that you write a letter with words only. Drawings of faces, flowers, and comical animals have always been an important part of her correspondence. Before reading the words of Cathy's letters, the reader is already attracted to the artwork.

When she was seven, she wrote to me about her part in a Sunday school dramatic presentation. Her assessment of her own performance was straightforward and to the point: "I was very good and everybody liked me." She went on to conclude her five-line letter with her thoughts about me. "I love you lots, Daddy. I miss you. Come home soon." Then there were lots of hugs and kisses.

From *The Ministry of the Child* by Dennis C. Benson and Stan J. Stewart (Abingdon Press, 1978 and 1979), 97. Used by permission. Permission is granted to photocopy 1 copy per every 5 workshop participants.

SOME AGE-APPROPRIATE BIBLE ACTIVITIES

Young Listeners (Ages 3–6)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to Bible Stories • Hearing and repeating Bible verses • Singing songs based on Bible verses • Handling the Bible • Seeing adults read the Bible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting out stories • Illustrating Bible stories or verses • Finding familiar words in a Bible text
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Budding Readers (Ages 6–8)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading verses and parts of stories • Discussing Bible stories in light of personal experiences • Illustrating Bible verses or stories • Acting out Bible stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorizing key passages • Creating a rebus story • Listening to Bible stories • Setting Bible verses to music
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New Owners (Ages 8–10)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving a Bible from the church • Seeing the Bible as a library • Memorizing key passages • Responding via art, music, drama • Developing responsive or choral readings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning their way around the Bible • Learning how the Bible came to be • Reading for self • Discussing stories and their meanings
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Investigators (Ages 10–12)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading passages for self • Learning to use study tools (print and online) • Doing word studies • Comparing translations • Responding via art, music, drama • Discussing meaning of passages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing feelings about passages • Writing poetry • Making time lines • Memorizing key passages • Identifying with characters in stories • Comparing experiences to Bible stories
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LEARNING CENTER INSTRUCTIONS

Young Listeners (Ages 3–6) and Budding Readers (Ages 6–8)

Activity 1:

- Choose a story and main idea and do some preparation for retelling the story.
- Tell the story into a tape recorder or to another person.
- Listen and do a self-critique or ask for feedback from your listeners, referring to the storytelling checklist.
- Now plan ahead by developing a story you can use for Christmas or Easter.

- a) Genesis 12:1-9—Abraham and Sarah move from their home

Young Listener: Abraham and Sarah’s new experiences are like new experiences we all have in life.

Budding Reader: Abraham and Sarah trusted God and moved out in obedience.

- b) Genesis 25:27-34; 27:25-29; 32:22-31—Jacob and Esau

Young Listener: Families have very different kinds of people and we don’t always get along.

Budding Reader: The twins were different; one made choices through which God could work.

- c) Mark 1:16-20—Jesus’ Friends

Young Listener: Jesus asked lots of different kinds of people to work with him.

Budding Reader: Jesus needed people like Andrew, Peter, John, and James who would leave what they were doing to travel and learn from him.

Activity 2:

- Create a simple song based on a key verse, such as:

- a) “Always and for everything giving thanks.”—Ephesians 5:20

- b) “Jesus said ‘Let the children come to me and do not stop them.’”—Matthew 19:14

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LEARNING CENTER WORKSHEET / YOUNG LISTENERS

Storytelling Checklist

Preparation

- Did you prepare a story suitable for the listeners in terms of:
vocabulary,
length,
concepts (understandable and related to the listeners' experiences)?
- Do you like the story yourself?

Telling

- Were you able to tell it without uncomfortable pauses? If not, what techniques might help you remember better?
- Did you have an introduction (including any needed background)?
- Was your voice pleasantly pitched?
- Was your pronunciation clear?
- Was the pacing varied—sometimes slow, other times fast?
- Did you keep the action moving?
- Did you describe sounds, smells, and sights?
- Did you create suspense through pauses and dramatic inflection?
- Did you bring the story quickly to its end after the climax?
- Did you avoid moralizing or saying something, such as “This tells us that . . .”? (Children think narratively, so unpacking the story for them diminishes its power.)
- Did you have eye contact with all the listeners?

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LEARNING CENTER INSTRUCTIONS

Budding Readers (Ages 6–10) and New Owners (Ages 8–10)

Create a rebus based on the healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19) or the feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6: 35-44; Luke 9:12-17; or John 6:5-15).

A rebus is writing in which some of the words or parts of words have been replaced with pictures or symbols. Think television's game show "Concentration." For instance, a rebus of the statement "The Wise men saw a star" might be composed of:

The word "The"
followed by a picture of three wise men
followed by a picture of a saw
followed by the letter "a"
followed by the picture of a star.

You can use stick figures or cut and paste images from magazines or old calendars.

To make a rebus, it is necessary to pay attention to the words and ideas in a given text. It is an activity that children can do themselves. Since all children appreciate the opportunity to teach others, "New Owners" may want to create simple rebuses for "Budding Readers."

LEARNING CENTER INSTRUCTIONS

New Owners (Ages 8–10)

Activity 1:

- To play a game that helps children learn the books of the Bible (you'll play it once first to see how it's done), review the Learning Center Worksheet for New Owners—the “Books of the Bible in Categories” chart.
- Use the provided set of matching cards to play to learn the books that make up the Law. (At this workshop there should be a total of ten cards, each with one name of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy and each of those books of the Bible represented on two cards.)
- Shuffle the cards and place them face down, spread out side by side.
- Turn over two cards. If they match, leave the titles exposed and give yourself a point. If the titles do not match, turn the cards over again and the next player takes a turn.
- This is a game idea that you can take back to your churches and play with New Owners. You could create matching cards within a few or even all of the categories (2 cards per each book of the Bible) and have the children match the books of the Bible within a few or all of the categories. The matching game would help the children learn the books of the Bible.

Activity 2:

Make or plan a game using Bible content for an upcoming teaching session. For instance, plan a bingo game or race in which teams spell out books of the Bible. From the sample curriculum that is provided, you may want to adapt a lesson into a learning game.

Activity 3:

Using a familiar tune, create a song that presents the books of the Bible within categories, or several category songs, such as “The Law song,” “The Prophet song,” or “The Gospel song.”

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LEARNING CENTER WORKSHEET / NEW OWNERS

Books of the Bible in Categories

Law	History	Poetry	Prophets	Gospels	Letters
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Matthew	Romans
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Mark	1 Corinthians
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Luke/Acts	2 Corinthians
Numbers	1 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	John	Galatians
Deuteronomy	2 Samuel	Song of Solomon	Daniel		Ephesians
	1 Kings		Hosea		Philippians
	2 Kings		Joel		Colossians
	1 Chronicles		Amos		1 Thessalonians
	2 Chronicles		Obadiah		2 Thessalonians
	Ezra		Jonah		1 Timothy
	Nehemiah		Micah		2 Timothy
	Esther		Nahum		Titus
			Habakkuk		Philemon
			Zephaniah		Hebrews
			Haggai		James
			Zechariah		1 Peter
			Malachi		2 Peter
					1 John
					2 John
					3 John
					Jude
					Revelation

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LEARNING CENTER INSTRUCTIONS

Investigators (Ages 10–12)

Activity 1:

A. Sort out the Christmas stories.

Here are some people mentioned in the stories about how Jesus was born. Some of them are only in Matthew's story, some are only in Luke's story, and some are in both. Review the stories from Matthew 1:18-2:12 and Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20 and write down the Scripture reference where you find the people. (Beware: there may be a trick here!)

Mary	Elizabeth
Joseph	The Inn Keeper
The Angel or Messenger Gabriel	Joseph
Shepherds	Teachers of the Law
Holy Spirit	Elizabeth's Baby
Heavenly Angels or Hosts	Wise men or Astrologers
Jesus	Emperor Augustus
Chief Priests	Herod

B. Answer the following questions*:

1. How many astrologers/wise men came to visit Jesus?
2. What were Mary's feelings at first when the angel told her she was going to have a baby? How did Mary feel after she visited Elizabeth?

C. Using a Concordance, Bible dictionary, or index, find and compare three lists of the apostles, noting how the lists differ and are the same.

Activity 2:

Plan some similar exercises for material you expect to be teaching soon or for another special season in the church year.

*Answers

- B. 1. The Bible does not say how many; tradition suggests three.
2. Troubled and afraid after the angel told her she was going to have a baby. Happy after she visited Elizabeth.
- C. Scripture references: Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16.

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