



THE GOAL OF TEACHING CHILDREN

Our goal in children's ministry is for every child to come to know God, and out of that knowledge, to love him, and out of that love, seek to live for him.

1) Know God. Our first aim is for the children to learn about God, which is why we teach them the Bible which is God's written word. In it we find all we need to know about God, what he has done for us, and how to live a life that pleases him in response.

2) Love God. But it isn't enough for children to just know about God; we long for them to love God completely and totally and joyfully, with all that is in them, for their entire lives.

3) Live for God. True love is life changing. If children are made to love God, then they are also made to live for him, serving him, submitting to his loving rule over their lives. Acknowledging God's greatness means acknowledging our littleness; his wisdom, and our foolishness; his righteousness, and our sin. Because our instincts, desires, and priorities lead us astray, we need to be taught and shown what it looks like to live for God, even as we are growing in love for him. Loving God and living for God have a co-dependent relationship. The more we love him, the more we live for him. The more we live for him, the more we love him.

But there is an added element of complication around teaching a child how to live for God. Any of you with a young child will know what happens the first time you attempt to teach them something they should do. Even if they love you, even if they really WANT to do what you ask – they forget. Over and over and over again. Children by definition are young and immature. They need time to grow up in Christ and produce fruit. If loving God comes a little easier for children than to adults, then living for God is the opposite. Children need our patience, guidance, reminders, love, and forgiveness, over and over again as they grow in their ability to live for God, as habits are formed and right action becomes instinct.

HOW DO WE ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS IN THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN?

The LORD is our God. The LORD is the only God. You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Always remember these commands that I give you today. Be sure to teach them to your children. Talk about these commands when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road. Talk about them when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them on your hands and wear them on your foreheads to help you remember my teachings. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9

1. BY TEACHING

We can teach “love” as a concept, but we can’t teach a child to love God. We can, however, teach them WHO God is, so that they come to love him as they come to know him. They need to KNOW God, in order to LOVE God. And this is where we really see the Spirit at work in God’s Living and Active Word. As we teach children the Bible, in context, being true to what God is revealing to us in each narrative account, they DO come to know God. As we reinforce these stories with doctrine – clear biblically rooted statements about who God is and what he has done, the picture of who he is becomes even clearer.

As we teach our children who God is, we also teach them how to live for God. We do this not because it makes our lives easier if our children are good and obedient and not because it calms any fear or worry that our child is not following Christ if their behaviour isn’t falling into line. We teach them how to live for God because it is the BEST thing for them to live within God's loving design and purpose for their lives.

GBS does not seek to provide moral applications for children. We believe that revealing who God is and what he has done **is** the application. Our hope is that children go home seeing our promise-keeping, loving, righteous, humble, sacrificial, creative, vast God for who He is and what he has done for them.

2. BY EXAMPLE

Children learn far more from what we DO than what we say. The example we set and the environment we create are a HUGE part of teaching and what we teach verbally should also to be lived out by example. We teach the child to know and love and live for God by the way we read His word to them; the way we talk to him as we pray; the way we speak of him when they ask us questions; the way we worship him in our lives and together in church; the way we, ourselves, prioritize BEING WITH God in our own devotional and prayer time. Children will connect what they see in our lives with what we teach. Therefore they should see that we love Jesus and follow him. They should see us living our lives in line with the gospel of grace and forgiveness, acknowledging our own imperfection and complete dependence on God for all our needs. Our children should view us fellow travelers, sinners who have been saved and loved by Jesus just as they are.

Modeling Christian faith and life doesn't mean living and teaching perfectly in the eyes of the children in your care. It means demonstrating your love for God and DESIRE to serve and live for him. It means modeling a right posture before God and continually turn to him for his forgiveness, love, and help! Ultimately we teach the child to love and live for God by loving and living for him ourselves.

3. BY ALLOWING THEM TO RESPOND

A children's minister is so much more than a school teacher trying to make sure their students have knowledge about a subject. We want to reach the heart of a child not just their mind.

But how do we do this? J.I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* says this, *"How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God? The rule for doing this is simple but demanding. It is that we that we turn each truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God." Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart."*

Meditation – it seems like a very mystical word and not one used to describe a typical Sunday Morning with a bunch of 6 year olds, but it may just be what is missing in today's typical children's ministry. If our goal is to for children to come to love God and out of that love, seek to live for him, we need give children the time and space within our Sunday school time to let the truth of the gospel make its full impact on their hearts and minds. We cannot rush this process! Therefore GBS schedules time each week for the children to be drawn into meditating on the things they have learned that morning.

Meditation takes two forms in the GBS curriculum:

a) RESPONSE TIME. It is the large chunk of time after the lesson that children have the option to do a variety of activities to help them to consider and think more deeply about what they have learned from the Bible Story, what it demonstrated about God, and how it applies in their lives.

Meditating over truth looks very different in children than in adults. For children it is very physical. Meditation looks like this....

- reading from a children's bible,
- drawing a picture
- tracing out a picture of their Lord in sand
- writing words
- drawing a picture

- sculpting with playdough
- working together to build something from the story
- acting out the story
- re-creating the story with blocks and wooden figures.
- sitting quietly thinking and praying.

While adults can direct their own contemplation, children are helped greatly by teachers who serves as a guide during the response time, asking questions and allowing children to share back what they have been thinking about.

b) WORSHIP: While our whole time together with the children is a time of worship, GBS intentionally incorporates Anglican liturgy, singing and prayer into the lessons. As J.I. Packer said, "We should never forget that *theology is for doxology*: the truest expression of trust in a great God will always be worship, and it will always be proper worship to praise God for being far greater than we can know."¹ We must teach clear Biblical truth about who God is and what he has done in Jesus Christ our Lord, as well as allow room for children to contemplate and respond to these truths with appropriate praise and worship. *We need to "turn each truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God."*²

¹ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide To Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 53.

² J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*:



EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

So what makes an effective teacher?

Most importantly an effective teacher is **faithful**. They are obedient and worshiping Christians who live what they teach. They know the Lord Jesus personally and they understand the gospel.

An effective teacher **loves children**. They personally know the children they are working with. They know them by name. They see children as unique individuals. They cultivate genuine relationships with them.

An effective teacher is **knowledgeable**. They understand the gospel and the overarching Biblical narrative and how the old and new testaments fit together. They understand basic theology. You can't know everything but you should be growing in your knowledge and understanding of God. You don't need to be a theological scholar but you do need to be doing all you can to grow in faith. That means being disciples yourselves. It means going to church, going to Bible Study, reading your Bible.

An effective teacher is **engaging**. They are creative and know how to teach in a way that children can best learn.

An effective Christian teacher is **prayerful**. They pray for themselves and the children by name. They know they can't do this work without God! They pray with other teachers and parents. They pray with the children.

Effective Teaching does not bring about maturity in Christ. Christ does.

We all know that even if we are the greatest and most effective teachers the outcome is not guaranteed. The Bible is full of stories where people – seeing the Lord, seeing his power and hearing His word do not respond with love and faith but turn away sad or angry. And as children's teachers we are planting and nurturing the seeds of faith. We may or may not see any results. Children may or may not come to faith or they may come to faith much later in their lives. We don't know.

The Lord has called us to preach the gospel and teach the Christian faith to the best of our abilities and in a way that makes it possible for children to believe. We need to remember who is really bringing about change in these kid's lives? Do we do it with our excellent teaching? No. God does it. These are God's children. They are ultimately in His hands. It is God who has chosen them and it is He who continues His work in them to bring about maturity. Teachers, along with parents and the whole church are responsible to teach children, but it is the Lord we trust in for their salvation. It doesn't come from us – but from God.