

APPENDIX E

25 Lessons I've Learned in Children's Ministry at Capitol Hill Baptist Church

*with application questions for
your ministry setting*

The Twenty-Five Lessons

GENERAL

- #1: Four Fundamentals from Psalm 66
- #2: Parents are the primary spiritual care-givers of their children, but the whole, local church helps equip them in this role.
- #3: Know your “critters.”
- #4: Children’s ministry works best when guided by the church leaders.
- #5: God has given us the job of praying, nurturing, and educating children, but it is He who brings the fruit of saving faith.

SUPPORTING PARENTS AS THEY TRAIN THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME

- #6: Shoot for what happens after hours.
- #7: Be careful what you catechize.

SUPPORTING PARENTS BY PROVIDING SAFE CHILD CARE AT CHURCH

- #8: Be safe before you are sorry. Put a child protection policy in place now!

SUPPORTING THE PARENTS AS WE CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN AT CHURCH BASICS:

- #9: Practice finiteness. Start with less and do it well.
- #10: Twirl with your swirls.
- #11: Prepare the children to gather together for worship with the whole congregation.
- #12: Pray! Pray! Pray! There are eyes that watch and minds that remember, even when there seems to be no ears to hear.

CURRICULUM AND TEACHING:

- #13: Think outside of the boxed curriculum box.
- #14: Two Dead Men and a Diamond
- #15: The remarkable results of repetition.
- #16: Think like a missionary.
- #17: “Oh, I know that old story...or do I?” Fight Bible boredom in well-taught children.
- #18: Change your activities from time-fillers to conduits of truth.
- #19: Pray Bible-based, life-expanding ACTS prayers.
- #20: Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater! Go pirating, instead!
- #21: Skip the chaos! Plan your transitions between activities.
- #22: Skip the chaos! Teach with a predictable schedule.
- #23: The Triple-Crown of Teaching

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORTING TEACHERS:

- #24: A few, good men are hard to come by... but they go a long way!
- #25: Care well for your teachers and they will come back.

Lesson #1:

“Four Fundamentals from Psalm 66”

Psalm 66 points to four fundamentals of how we try to teach the children and how we encourage our parents in their spiritual nurturing of their children.

Fundamental One:

Live joyful lives

“Shout for joy to God, all the earth.” -- Psalm 66:1, ESV

We can live joyful lives in light of what God has done. True joy is a gift of the Spirit. It is remarkable. It cannot be reproduced by any other religion. It reflects the Spirit of God working within us, giving life where there was death. It is living in faith, despite trials and despite having to let go of what the world holds to be true and dear. And so, as we teach and parent, we ask God to make our joy in Him evident. It is a very potent witness of the truth and power of the gospel to the children watching us.

Fundamental Two:

Live to glorify God in all things...regardless of the outcome!

“Sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds! ... All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.’” --Psalm 66:2,3,4, ESV

We live to glorify God in all that we do. We do not have control over the conversion of the children who we love, parent and teach. Their conversion is a work of God’s Holy Spirit that we pray for and yearn for, but we cannot use it as the measure of success. On the other hand, seeking to glorify God in how we teach, raise and live among the children is a “success” we can strive for. This is freeing! We can strive to please God as we declare the greatness of His name to these children. We can strive to please God as we do, to the best of our ability, all He calls us to do, including raising these children. It makes teaching and parenting yet another venue for glorifying God, regardless of who is converted. And, it makes conversion a matter of trust in God...just where it should be.

Fundamental Three:

Teach the children God’s awesome works, as revealed in the Bible

“Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.” --Psalm 66:5, ESV

From before the creation of the world, God has had one, big plan to redeem His people as a magnificent display of His glory. We read of it in the Bible—the record of “His awesome works on man’s behalf.” And so, the Bible is our primary “textbook” for teaching our children about God, and for how we parent. The Bible is central to all we do and long to teach the children.

Fundamental Four:**Tell the children the gospel that has saved us and can save them**

“Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip... Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!” --Psalm 66:8-9,16-20, ESV

As Christians, God has given us grace to hear and believe the gospel. We have repented of our sins and trusted in Him as our Savior. We have the testimony of His good work in our lives...and so, as we teach and parent, we want to testify to the children of God's work in our own lives. This is not a God only of history and past acts. This is the living God who is at work today...and in us! What a story we have to tell to these children every day, of the God whose mercies to us are new every morning!

Lesson #1: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. How can we show the joy we have in the Lord to our children at home or in the classroom? Why is this so important? Why can this be so compelling?

2. How does teaching children to glorify God free us up in the classroom and/or as parents? Does it mean that we no longer care whether the children are converted or not? Why or why not?

3. Why is it so important that the Bible, not simply moralistic, character-building lessons, be central to all we teach? Does the curriculum you use reflect this? How or how not? If not, how could you help it do this?

4. What is the difference between sharing the gospel with the children and sharing the gospel that saved us with them? How would that difference show up in how you teach or share with the children?

Lesson #2:

“Parents are the primary spiritual care-givers of their children, but the whole, local church equips and aids them in this role.”

Scripture clearly teaches that parents have the primary responsibility to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This includes parents teaching their children about God from His Word, disciplining them at home and at church, disciplining them, and striving to honor God before them by the witness of their lives.

But primary is not the same as only caregiver, nor does it mean that parents are to somehow equip themselves for this job. Scripture is just as clear that God intends parents, like every other Christian, to be equipped at church through the preaching of the Word and the encouragement and prayers of fellow believers. It can be a very simple model of God’s people gathering together to hear the Word preached, to worship God and to encourage and pray for one other in the church service and in their fellowship time. Or, it can be much fuller bodied through the support of additional classes for parents and children. The children’s ministry team here at CHBC sees itself as a support team to parents. It seeks to aid and encourage parents in the nurturing of their children, in accordance with Scripture and the vision of our God-given elders. Whatever your church leaders decide is best for your church, the point is to equip parents for the calling God has given them.

It is very important for parents to realize that your church’s children’s ministry program isn’t a way for them to out-source their own responsibility to their children, even when they feel ill-equipped or overwhelmed. The great news is that the God who calls them to this task will also equip them...and He uses the church leaders, the members and even the children’s ministry team of the local church to do this.

PASTORS can teach parents about their role as primary spiritual caregivers and can equip them for it:

- in their preaching and other teaching times.
- in their public prayers.
- by providing parenting classes, workshops and resources.
- in counseling.
- in conversation.
- in providing an example as they raise their own children.

CHILDREN’S MINISTRY can teach parents about their role as primary spiritual caregivers and can equip them for it by:

Prayer

- Regularly praying for the families of the church.

Feedback

- giving the parents feedback about how their children act and respond in class.
- staying connected with parents, face-to-face, through email, before and after class.

In the Worship Service

- providing resources (such as kids’ bulletins) and advice to parents as they help their children worship alongside of them in the worship service.

A Safe Place

- providing safe child-care for their children that allows parents to learn and grow in their own classes. It may look like baby-sitting, but it's an invaluable service to the preaching of God's Word whose impact can echo in huge ways through a family as parents are able to worship and learn undistractedly. This is the equipment they need to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Resources to Use at Home

- providing partner curriculum resources that help the parents discuss with their children at home what they have been learning in their classes at church.
- exposing the parents to good resources they can use with their children, through a book stall, lending library,

Protecting Family Time

- not filling the regular church schedule so full of programs that there is little time for families to spend time together.

OTHER MEMBERS can teach parents about their role as primary spiritual care-givers and can equip them for it by:

Discipling One Another

- discipling each other, helping each other grow in their love and knowledge of God and His ways.

Mentoring Children

- mentoring and providing examples through older, more experienced parents inviting younger parents (or even singles or couples who do not yet have children) to come to their homes and observe them with their children.

Honest Sharing, Prayer and Advice

- younger parents asking older, more experienced parents for feedback on how to best parent their children.
- sharing and praying for each other.

Learning How to Teach and Train Kids

- serving in child-care/children's ministry classes and learning how to teach and train children.

IN CHILDREN'S CLASSES AT CHURCH, parents can be supported, without being usurped, in their primary role by:

- the witness, influence, love and prayers of other fellow, godly members for the children who teach in their classes.
- providing the children with meaty teaching that builds upon what the parents are teaching their children can be very helpful, especially for less-mature Christian parents who need help most of all.

Family Integrated or Family Equipping?

There has been a recent movement called “family-integrated church” that emphasizes the parents’ role as primary spiritual care-givers to such an extent that it seems to exclude the local church’s support in this task. I appreciate the seriousness with which people who hold this position take concerning parents’ responsibility before God to teach and train their children. But, I think that Scripture clearly calls the members of the local church, under the guidance of the church leaders, to work together to encourage and equip each other in the faith. I believe this naturally includes equipping believers for their role as spiritual care-givers of their children. See the article on the Praise Factory website in the Church-Shaped Children’s Ministry resources for more reflections on this topic.

Lesson #2: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What does it mean to be a primary, spiritual care-giver of children?
2. Who do you see as the primary spiritual caregivers of the children in your church?
3. Would parents be surprised to hear that they are the primary spiritual caregivers of their children? Why or why not?
4. Would your children’s ministry team be surprised to hear that they are NOT the primary spiritual caregivers of the children of the church? Why or why not?
5. How does your pastoral staff educate parents in this role? Do they do this regularly?
6. How does your children’s ministry team educate parents in this role?
7. Who would your children’s ministry program say is the primary caregiver of the children in your church? How does your children’s ministry team’s decisions, prayers and programs reflect this view?
8. Look at your weekly children’s ministry program. When do your families have time to spend together?
9. How does your children’s ministry program support your parents in their role....at church? at home?
10. How do you regularly connect with parents? How do you communicate with them about resources or learning opportunities for their children or for themselves as parents?
11. What (if anything) would you like to do to improve your support of the parents in your church?
12. How does your church provide or expose parents to resources to use with their children at home? What are some ways you would like to improve in this? How might you do this?

Lesson #3: “Know your critters”

A “critter”, in case you didn’t know, is just a down-home, backwoods, slang word for creature. The point of this lesson is that you first need to know WHO you are supporting and teaching, if you are going to know HOW to best support and teach them.

The two types of “critters” you most want to know are your parents and their children. Here are some types of things it might be helpful to know about them:

Parents:

- Are they type “A” driven or laid back?
- Are they spiritually mature or just baby Christians?
- Do they come from a Christian background or other?
- Do they have very little disposable income or are they able to afford extras (like biblical resources to use with their children)?
- Is English their first or second language?
- Are they single-parents or are they married? Do they both work outside the home?
- Are they very involved in church or sporadic attenders?
- Do they like to communicate by email, phone or in person?
- Do they tend to use the take-home resources you give out or not?
- Do they have a transient occupation (student, military, etc) or one that allows them to settle more permanently in one place?
- Do they have much family support in the area or are they on their own?
- How do they educate their children: home-school, private, public school?

Answers to questions like these can help you better understand how to support parents and their children. For example, parents who are spiritually mature themselves will probably have a naturally easier time in teaching truths to their children. A young Christian or one from a non-Christian background might be hungry for a lot more help. Understanding that a parent appreciates receiving take home sheets and newsletters through email rather than being handed them on Sunday morning will help you better communicate resources and opportunities to him. Or, knowing that a family has very little disposable income might lead you to giving a Bible or other devotional resources (and pointing them to resources in your church library) that they could not otherwise afford.

Children:

- Do they have any special needs?
- Have they/their family been experiencing a particularly difficult situation that the child is trying to understand?
- What kinds of learning activities do they respond best to: movement/music/workbooks/etc.?
- Are they showing signs of spiritual hunger or boredom?
- Are they often a hand-full, behavior-wise?
- How familiar are they with the Bible?
- Can they read and write yet?
- What do they like to do?

Questions like these can help your Children’s Ministry team/teachers better understand how to care for the children and reach them with the gospel, when they are under their care in class. It also can help them suggest resources to support the parents in spiritually caring for their children, too.

Lesson #3: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. How well could you answer these questions about the parents/children in your church?
2. What other questions would you add to these?
3. How might you find out this information?
4. Do you see trends in any area? Do a lot of your parents seem to fall in the same categories? How could noticing any trends affect how you support the parents and their children?
5. Do you see any trends among the children? How might this affect the curriculum you use or how you train your teachers to teach the children?

Lesson #4:

“Children’s Ministry works best when guided by the church leaders.”

Here are four, big reasons why your children’s ministry should be under the direct and regular guidance of your church leaders:

REASON 1

Because your church leaders are specially gifted and responsible before God for the teaching that takes place in the church—even to the children.

REASON 2

Because children are being raised by the adults under their pastoral care and raising children is an important part of God’s calling on their lives.

REASON 3

Because children’s ministry often involves a high percentage of your church membership, and your church leaders are responsible to make sure that those members are receiving the care they themselves need, even as they are serving the children.

REASON 4

If your church leaders don’t provide leadership, someone else will, and too many times this leads to pockets of friction, division and sometimes poor teaching.

What does direct and regular guidance look like? Here are some ideas:

- The leaders decide upon (or review and approve suggestions from the children’s ministry team) teaching themes and resources used with the children at church.
- The leaders set guidelines for who can volunteer in children’s ministry and how frequently they can serve to make sure that no one is over-serving and thereby under-feeding their own souls.
- The leaders approve any major program changes, making sure that the church is not becoming too program- centered and thereby starving families of time together.
- One church leader is given particular oversight of the children’s ministry team, having regular meetings with them, praying with them, receiving updates on children, parents, teachers, resources and programs. He is the point person to talk with teachers, parents or the children’s ministry team as situations in children’s ministry arise. He keeps any other pastors updated with children’s ministry issues.
- The leaders decide upon important issues, such as the baptism and church membership for children/ youth and putting their decisions in writing and making them available to parents, teachers and the children’s ministry team.

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At CHBC, we enjoy the guidance of our elders in all of these ways. Here's what it looks like for us:
The elders have given us four teaching emphases:

1. Chronological study of the Bible (OT/NT overviews)
2. Prepare the children to gather together with the church body
3. God's One Big Plan of Redemption/Missions
4. Biblical Theology

They have set guidelines for members wanting to serve in children's ministry that they think will provide enough continuity for the children being taught, while also being sensitive to ensuring that the volunteers, themselves, are in a position of being taken good care of, spiritually.

Our elders' have written up their wisdom on the baptism of children at CHBC and give it out to all parents who are seeking membership at CHBC. They do this because not everyone has come to the same conclusion as them and they want to be up-front with their conclusions, in case a family would rather go to a church with a different view on this matter.

(Our elders' paper on the baptism of children at CHBC can be found in Appendix A on p.197.)

Lesson #4: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. How would you describe the current guidance/oversight your children's ministry team receives from your church leaders? What do you appreciate about this? Is there anything else would you like to see them do?
2. What would be hard about receiving more spiritual oversight from the church leaders? Are there areas of individualism among the children's ministry program that either does not receive enough oversight from the church leaders? How does this show? What changes could be made?
3. What issues, such as baptism of children, would you like to see your church leaders give your team spiritual guidance upon?
4. Who decides upon the teaching emphases, the curriculum and the programs that children's ministry implements?
5. Do you have a statement of faith that provides a foundation for the truths you believe and teach? If not, what are the Biblical truths that under-gird your ministry?
6. Do you have a mission statement for what you hope to do within this ministry? If not, what would it be?
7. Do you have guidelines for who or how often someone can serve in children's ministry? Do you have a few members who over-serve?
8. Who takes care of difficult, pastoral issues that arise with children or with parents?

Lesson #5:

“God has given us the job of praying, nurturing, and educating children, but it is He who brings the fruit of saving faith.”

Oh, how we love our children! Oh, how we desire for them to know the Lord and to be saved from their sins! This leads us to pray for our children, to teach our children, to catechize our children and talk to our children. This is a great blessing to the children, to their families and to those here at church who work with their children. How wonderful it is to work with children who are so well taught!

The Caution

But with all this diligence, there is an important word of warning we give to both the parents and the teachers of these children: **Doing all these things educates the children and fertilizes their souls with the great things of God, but they neither guarantee nor bring about conversion! It is God who brings the fruit of saving knowledge of and faith in Him, in His way and in His timing.**

Sometimes our small, pea-sized minds and anxious, un-trusting hearts are not too happy about this fact. This may be a temptation especially among those whose children get older and older and still show little or no desire for God. But the truth is, God is far wiser and good than we are. We can rest in Him... or at times, fight to rest in Him... even about the salvation of our children. It is certainly very important that we, as parents and as teachers, do the best job we can of training up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But, it is just as important that we are on our knees, asking for God to work, in His perfect timing, in the hearts of those children. And it is important for God to work in us, right now, a restful, hopeful, trusting, joyful spirit that acknowledges Him as the good, powerful Giver of faith. We should ask Him to show us our heart concerning these matters...and grow them in all of these graces.

Yes, conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit alone! There is no “to-do list” which, when completed, guarantees that their children will come to a saving knowledge of God. Nor are there any certain, three behaviors, if cultivated enough by faithful teachers and parents, will guarantee that the children will become followers of Christ and will godly lives. And unfortunately, sometimes knowledge of more facts—even Bible facts and Bible verses-- can breed arrogance, just as much as lack of facts can lead to ignorance. And good behavior—even good, Christian behavior--can breed legalism, just as lack of discipline can breed selfishness and foolishness.

So what do we do? Do we hold back on how much we teach the children about God because we can't know that it will produce the desired effect? No! Believing comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ! We will teach and pray that God works in their hearts through His Word! Do we stop trying to build good, godly character in their lives, because there's no guarantee that we can make it “stick”? Of course not! God calls us to be faithful teachers of His ways and beckon everyone—including children--to turn to Him and live for Him. Let's us fully use the means God typically uses to convert people! But, let us rest in God in our good God who alone can change their hearts!

Another way parents' and teachers' strong desire for salvation assurance comes out in the form of baptism pressure. That is, baptizing children at their early signs of spiritual interest, but before the child is truly converted. At CHBC, we have prospective members share their testimony with the elders before being put forward for membership. Too many times, the testimony includes the story of how they “made a profession of faith as a child and were baptized, but then “fell away from the Lord” for years. And now, just recently, sought the Lord and desire to walk with Him truly now”—or something like that. Was the child truly converted back then, or only now, as an adult who is bearing the fruit of true conversion? Only God knows...

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and we certainly never question a person's childhood experience. But, it has caused our church leaders to help our teachers and Children's Ministry team learn to both encourage children on towards trusting faith in Christ, while also being patient to wait for fruit of true conversion before baptism takes place. Baptized is a command for the converted, but it does not mean someone is converted. In our eagerness, we may wind up actually creating greater difficulty for our children by baptizing them too soon. If they think they are converted when they are not, then they think that have tasted all there is to a relationship with God, when in truth, they have never tasted it at all.

God made children to want to please their parents. What pleases a Christian parent more than a child's decision for the Lord? "Hallelujah! My child is safe!" I know those feelings all too well. But, we have come to recognize that if we can encourage the child's desire and teach them what it means for them to be a disciple who loves the Lord and lives for Him...but wait until he/she is older and shows signs of true conversion to the congregation at large and in his life as he feels the tug of the world and says "no" to it, that we are far more likely to have less of these false decisions. This is so important for everyone involved. It is important for the church to look like Jesus by, as closely as we can, recognizing, baptizing and including in membership those who truly have repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus as their Savior. And for the children, baptizing them too early, maybe before they truly have become Christians makes them think they know what life with God really is. There are so many people in the world who think they are Christians because they made a decision as a child, often at VBS it seems, were baptized and hardly ever darken the door of a church again or think about living a Christ-honoring life. Jesus spoke of the fruit being the best indication of a type of tree. That's simply what we have chosen to do here at CHBC for our children.

Do we put pressure on ourselves or on our children to do more or say more to help "force" them to make a decision that is not much more than a façade? What the world needs now is not more hypocrites. Be faithful. Be prayerful. Point them to Christ in your words and your life. Encourage them where you see signs of life. Teach them as you sit and as you rise. As you walk, and as you wait in carpool. But watch your heart! Keep watching your heart!

For more information on our elders' decision about the baptism of children, see Appendix A.

Lesson #5: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What are ways you as a parent or as a teacher can raise up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?
2. What have been effective means of doing this? (examples: worship services or Sunday School classes at church, catechisms and other memory work, music, family devotions, etc.)
3. Where do you see symptoms of worry or pressure from parents/teachers for their children to make a profession of faith?
4. How do your church leaders think through the baptism of children?

5. If you are a baptistic church that baptizes young children frequently, do you find these children straying away as they grow up? Or, do you find many wanting to be “re-baptized” when they are young adults because they felt the first baptism (at the younger age) didn’t “count”? How does this affect the witness of the church and what true Christians look like? How does this confuse these children concerning their spiritual state? What could you do to help with these issues?
6. What signs of conversion do you look for in children before proceeding with baptism?
7. How can you encourage the children who seem to be seeking the Lord and may have actually been converted, even if you do choose to wait for them to grow up and show fruit across their lives?
8. How do you talk to parents when they want their child baptized? How can you help them to understand what it means for the child to be baptized and why you might choose to have them wait for clear fruit to be borne?

Lesson #6:

“Shoot for What Happens After Hours”

Remarkably little children’s ministry actually takes place at church, under our care. If you want to support parents in their roles as primary spiritual care-givers, you need to focus on more than the few hours of teaching time you have with their children at church. Focus on the time the children have with their parents!

We like to think of our church as a sit-down, eat-in restaurant that fills our members’ spiritual “bellies” with great food while at church, yet also gives so much food that they have plenty to take home in “doggie bags” to keep feeding themselves and their children on the rest of the week.

Here’s some of the ways we do this:

- Regularly hosting special events: parent lunches, panels/speakers on various topics relevant to parenting.
- Offering Core Seminar classes (Sunday School for adults a la CHBC), both on parenting as well as a wide variety of important topics which aid parents in their own spiritual growth. (See p.97 for a listing of some of these core seminars. Core seminar content is available for free download at the CHBC website.)
- Strongly encourage parents’ church attendance and accountability with others to foster spiritual growth through discipleship and the preaching of the Word.
- Planning times for our Pastor for Families to be available to speak with them and give advice.
- Encouraging teachers/caregivers to give deliberate, regular feedback to parents about their children.
- Hosting “Daddy” breakfasts and other informal, member-initiated meetings to encourage fathers in godly leadership of their families.
- Offering resources in the bookstall and library.
- Pastors mentioning and even giving out (for free) good books for families from the pulpit during announcement time.
- Giving out take home resources of what the children are being taught in their church classes so that parents can review and reinforce the concepts at home.
- Offering online curriculum resources and quarterly newsletter of what the children will be learning.
- Encouraging members to share honestly and deeply with each other about what is going on in their lives. Encourage them to truly support each other in what they are going through. Helping them make connections with others who are going through/have gone through similar seasons and issues with their children.

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- Holding an annual book fair and giving out a resource of articles and good books for parents to use at home with their children. This book list is called Truths to Teach, Stories to Tell: Books and other resources for your family. We make it available through our website: www.capitolhillbaptist.org. It is also available on the praisefactory.org website. The booklists are substantial and updated annually as more good books come on the market. I have included some of our favorite books and some helpful articles from this book starting on p.99 as well as p.303 of this book.

Lesson #6: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. How is your church like a sit-down, eat-in restaurant of spiritual food for your parents and children? How would you like to improve this?
2. What kinds of spiritual “doggie bags” do you send them home with?
3. Do you think parents are aware of good resources to use at home with their children? If not, what could you do to educate them better?
4. Is there an atmosphere of honesty about struggles and questions that parents have in raising their children? Why or why not? What could be done to improve this, if there is not?

Lesson #7: “Be Careful How You Catechize”

No one can dispute that young children have an amazing ability to learn and memorize--often the quickest and easiest in their whole lives! Why not harness this skill for the sake of learning Bible truths?

Bible memory verses and catechisms are concise ways of putting a whole library of Bible truth in children's heads. While some people balk at the idea of helping children memorize concepts deeper than they can fully understand, others see the goal not so much as achieving full, immediate understanding in a young child today, but leaving it as a legacy in his head for the future. Many are the stories of conversions of even elderly people by truths memorized decades earlier in their childhood!

But on the other hand, don't exasperate your child! Yes, they may be little memory sponges, but you can harden their hearts and discourage them with the very truths you want them to love by forcing them to do too much, too soon...and in a format that just isn't appropriate or effective for them.

Remember: your point isn't just to check off the list that you taught these truths to your children. It's to try to make them stick in places where they will stay for years. Better to do less and do it well, than to think you've done it all and done it poorly or at the cost of a soft heart.

And don't forget: there is more than one way to skin a rabbit! Bible memory and catechism doesn't always have to take a recitation format. There are many Bible verses and catechism-like questions and answers put to song. There is now even a completely sung version of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. And don't miss the New City Catechism with app--one of my favorites. There are games you can play to help them learn, too. Look for things your kids love and ways they learn easily and try to harness them for your goal of feeding your kids with truth.

Lesson #7: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. Do you emphasize the catechism of children at your church? Why or why not?
2. What blessings and what difficulties have your parents found in using catechisms with their children?
3. What resources have you found that help children who have difficulty with tradition forms of catechism?
4. How could you share with parents the benefits and the difficulties of catechizing their children?

Lesson #8:

“Be safe before you are sorry”

Develop a Child Protection Policy that protects both children and teachers. Develop it BEFORE you think you need it. It's never too early to put a policy in place. An incident of child abuse not only hurts little lives, but it can destroy your church and its gospel witness.

At our church, some parents of younger children choose to have their children in the worship service with them from their birth on up. Others have decided that the opportunity for them to have an undistracted worship and teaching time in God's Word at church helps them to better spiritually care for their family. As they are better equipped themselves, they have more to pour into their children.

So, our first goal is to provide safe, caring childcare for these parents, so that they are not worried about their children, but can focus on learning and worshipping God, themselves. This had led to the development of our child protection policy.

Some key points of this policy:

GOOD SHEPHERDING

- Oversight of all childcare by our Pastor of Families, our Children's Ministry Administrator, and the Deacon of Children's Ministry.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

- An interview process and background checks for all potential caregivers.
- Requiring all teachers/caregivers to be a member at least six months before serving in direct contact ministry with the children. This gives us a chance to know them; and, gives them uninterrupted time getting to know people/the church before serving.

BASIC TRAINING

- Requiring child training classes and posting safety/evacuation procedures in all classrooms.

ADULT/CHILD RATIOS

- Keeping to safe and effective teacher/student ratios, enlisting extra teachers or closing classes when the ratios are in danger of being exceeded.

TEAM BUILDING

- Enlisting team leaders for each group of children to help train less experienced workers.
- Usually starting out new volunteers with basic nursery duty, then watching for signs of teaching ability (unless someone is already known to be a teacher, etc).
- Mentoring new teachers under the tutelage of experienced teachers who are teaching, whenever possible.

ROAMING THE HALLS

- Enlisting volunteer hall monitors who are on alert for suspicious strangers and are available for emergency help within the classroom during Sunday School and church services.

KEEPING IN CONTACT

- Assigning family numbers to each family which flash up on small display boards in the worship hall when a parent is needed during the service.
- Using numbered wrist bands and other sign-in/sign-out systems which identify both child and parent/s and make sure the children go home with the right adults.

We consider ourselves successful if we have achieved just this goal...and we encourage our teachers with this fact, too. It is no small thing to help provide the children's primary spiritual caregivers (their parents) with a way to get a big, spiritually nutritious meal from God's Word and the encouragement of other believers. Kinda like a spiritual date-night. And yes, of course, we want our children to be well-taught in their classes while they are in our care. But, if everyone goes home happy, healthy and in one piece, with parents whose spiritual bellies are bulging out a little, that is a great accomplishment....and one with spiritual health benefits that can trickle down to even the youngest member of those families. Yes, safety is a job well done!

TIPS TO HELP TEACHERS REMEMBER THE POLICY

- Review one Children Protection Policy procedure each week with your teachers.
- Post regular used/commonly forgotten procedures in the classrooms.
- Quietly observe your teachers as they take the children to bathroom breaks, do check-in/check-out of children, or at other times when important policy procedures are used. If you notice they are not doing them, then find a chance to speak to them about it. Ask the teachers what you could do to help them follow through with the procedures more completely.

SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Children Desiring God workshops at their national conference (go to this conference or listen online)
- On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church by Deepak Reju (our Pastor to Families)
- Contact Children's Ministry staff at other churches within your state who might be able to give you advice or let you come observe their procedures in action. Mega churches are particularly savvy about safe childcare.

Lesson #8: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What parameters guide your current safety procedures? (insurance, child protection policy, church leaders, other?)
2. What teacher-student ratios do you use, if any?
3. Do you have emergency evacuation routes and procedures marked? Do the teachers know what the procedures are?
4. What do you consider the biggest safety risks in your ministry situation? How can you safeguard against these?

LESSON #8

5. Do you have a child protection policy? When was it made? Is it up to date with the size and needs of your church now?
6. How do you screen children's workers?
7. How do you check in-check out...infants, preschoolers, elementary school kids, middle schoolers?
8. What failures in carrying out your child protection policy are most likely to occur? (don't check out children properly, forget the bathroom policy, etc.)? How could you remedy these?
9. What do you do if only one teacher shows up to care for children?
10. What about your building makes safety difficult? How do you work with these difficulties?
11. What resources have you used to decide upon your child protection policy? Who have you consulted with? Is there any issue that you wish you could find more information on?
12. What would ideal child protection policy look like at your church? What steps could you take to get there? How much would it cost?
13. Do you train your teachers/caregivers in the child protection policy? How? When? Do you give them refreshers? How? When?
14. Do you teachers follow child protection policy procedures? Why or why not?
15. Do parents know your church's child protection policy? Are they willing to carry it out?
16. Do many children have food allergies at your church? How does your church deal with them?
17. What kinds of special needs require special access or facilities? Are you able to meet those needs? What would you need to do to meet them?

Lesson #9:

“Practice finiteness. Start with less and do it well.”

It's easy to want to provide a ton of programs for children. These programs are often seen as a drawing card for new families. If the kids are happy, the parents will stay at your church. But, I would caution you to start small and do that well. Don't just think of the programs that children enjoy or that parents might expect. Think of feeding the whole church well. Each one of those programs takes volunteers. The more programs, the more volunteers...or the more hours from the same volunteers. Those volunteers have their own spiritual needs and their own life obligations. You want to make sure that you aren't building a church of spiritually “fat” kids,” but “starving” adults. This is why it is wise to have the church leaders make decisions about what children's programs the church will provide. Inform the leaders of the practical information they will need about volunteers needed, and what kind of commitment is expected in order for them to be able to truly decide what is healthy for the church.

This is especially hard in small church/church planting situations. I know of one pastor's wife, when their church was very small, led the only children's class there was. To make the situation even more complicated, this class took place during the church service. Other volunteers were few and far between. Needless to say, she started melting down. So, as hard as it was, this church decided to practice finiteness. They prayed for more volunteers, kept making the need known. But as they waited for the volunteer pool to grow, they chose to cut back the classes from weekly to every other week. This was as much as this woman could manage. Interestingly enough, more volunteers eventually did step forward and the class was once more offered weekly. This was a great decision!

That being said, what you do (and however often you do it), do it well! And this is certainly easier to do, if you when you aren't spread so thin! More on doing a good job to follow....

Lesson #9: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What programs does your church/ministry setting have for children?
2. When are these programs offered?
3. For what ages of children are they offered?
4. How would you prioritize your programs? Why?
5. What group of parents/children do you think are most vulnerable to not being well fed spiritually? What could you/what do you do to help support them, especially?
6. Do you have a hard time getting volunteers for all your programs or certain programs? Why?
7. Why might it actually be spiritually healthier if your church does not offer every program that parents might want or children might enjoy?

LESSON #9

8. Why might it be better for families to leave nights free rather than offer another program?
9. How can we help support families, even if they are not at a program at church?
10. How do you care for the volunteers who care for your children, making sure they are not over-serving?

Lesson #10:

“Twirl with your swirls”

Life is a busy swirl for most families, but usually there is a discernible pattern to the swirl. Lesson #9 was a caution to start small and not try to do more than you can do well. This lesson is an encouragement to maximize what you do within those limits. This comes by taking a careful look at those discernible patterns in family schedules and figuring out how you can twirl along with the families in them.

Here are some examples of swirl patterns in children:

TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

Do better with morning activities or late afternoon after nap-time. Preschoolers frequently get very tired in the afternoons and fall apart in the evenings. You may have opportunities during weekdays to offer teaching time for preschoolers, while their moms (if they do not have to work) attend a day-time small group or Bible study.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

Are usually busy with school during the day. Even weekday afternoons and Saturdays can be filled with music lessons, sports, or family time. Many churches offer programs on Wednesday nights when adult Bible study take place. Home-schoolers frequently are looking for an extra, outside supplement to their curriculum at home. You can offer classes to them during the school day. Sunday mornings or evenings are frequently the best times for classes for this age range. Some children have two, working parents (or are raised by a single parent) and may be after-school care. This can be a great time to reach these kids with the gospel. Elementary school children are off of school during the summer. This can be a great time for longer events, such as camps or VBS for these kids.

But it's not just family swirls that we need to think about. Your church: ministry schedule, resources available and facility type is another area where there is usually quite a swirl of activity. It's important to consider how you can work with what goes on at your church to make a great fit.

Here are some examples:

MINISTRY SCHEDULE

You are a church (like us) that has only one, main worship service (i.e., if you miss the preaching, because you are caring for/teaching children during that time, there is no second service to catch what you missed.) Then, on one hand, you have a lot of children and potential teachers all at church at the same time, but you need to be careful how frequently these teachers serve and miss the service. So, you could offer Sunday School (before or after that worship service), and you will be reaching the children/supporting the parents, but at a time when volunteers will not be missing the preaching.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

You found a curriculum you love, but it's very expensive or it requires a lot of teachers. That makes that curriculum “too expensive” (in money or in manpower) than your church can afford to spend. You might want to choose to find another curriculum that better fits these constraints.

FACILITY TYPE

Your church meets in a school and you have a lot of kids. You only have Sunday morning access. You have little storage space, but you do have a gym and great classrooms. You have a Sunday School program, but would really love to have some sort of second, missions-related program for your children. You choose to ask for use of the school during summer break (or even spring break) and have something more like a VBS-style missions program. Or, you offer smaller, back-yard Missions clubs held in homes of church members during summer break.

Working alongside who/what you have, rather than straining for what you don't have, will help you support families more effectively and more sustainably.

Lesson #10: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. Who are you families? What are their typical swirl patterns?
2. Do the programs you offer them “twirl” with those patterns or do create more “swirl”?
3. What resources (teachers, money, staff time, etc) do you have plenty of? Which ones are tight?
4. What programs use most of your available resources? Do you think that are good “bang for your buck”? If not, what would you change?
5. What are your facilities like? When can you use them? What kinds of programs work best in them? What difficulties do you face? Is there any way you can better use them, giving these difficulties?
6. Are there other programs you would like to offer, but have chosen not to? Why? Limited availability from families? Limited resources? Limited facilities? Is there any good way to incorporate the curriculum, but in a different format that better fits these “swirls”?

Lesson #11:

“Prepare the children to gather together for worship with the whole congregation.”

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” Revelation 7:9-10, ESV

I love this passage! I love this picture! The great, numberless gathering of God’s people from every time, every tongue, every tribe, at last all together, praising God for their salvation through Jesus. This gathering is our goal. What an amazing experience that will be! Every Sunday, when we gather together as a whole congregation, we have a little dress rehearsal for that great Day.

These weekly dress rehearsals are not just encouraging for us. They can be a wonderfully attractive witness of the gospel for non-Christians and for our children. But how do we do this when they are sitting bored and fidgety through the singing and the prayers....let alone the hour-long sermon (like at our church)? Do we just throw in the towel and give them their own, customized Children’s Church, while we have our grown-up one...followed by their own, customized middle school service, then their own high school service...then their college fellowship at university? If so, when do they ever get to see the beauty of the body of Christ in this weekly dress rehearsal? When do they ever have their attention spans stretched to take in these bigger truths? Are we homogenizing our kids’ worship experience in a way that does not point them to and prepare them for Revelation 7.

Or, do we take the hard line and just force them to sit and stand and listen, put on a happy face and like it?

Hmmm... No one wants to turn off kids from God and the gospel. So what do you do with the little ones who might not be old enough to sit through a long service or who are bored or even show signs of hating going to church because they cannot connect with the big words? What have we done to prepare them for the real local church—a body of believers that include people who are very different from us?

I think there are ways to both be sensitive to the limits of a child’s attention span and level of understanding, and yet also to be progressively, deliberately preparing them to gather with the congregation as a whole in an understandable, hopefully memorable way as they grow up. And in doing so, always be keeping the goal a little bit of Revelation 7.

Here are some ways that we have done this at CHBC:

SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR EVERYONE

We offer Sunday School classes that do not over-lap with the worship services. Children can attend these, then attend all of the worship service. The middle school Sunday School teachers sometimes bring in the bulletin for the morning worship service and use it to go through the songs, Bible readings and sermon text before the kids go into the service.

LESSON #11

MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE (We have only one so the whole church can gather together)

We do offer classes for preschoolers that run through the church service. Some parents bring their children into the worship service with them for the singing, prayers and reading of Scripture (about 45 minutes at our church), but sign them into their class for the sermon portion of the worship service (another hour). This exposes these children to the congregation gathered together in a way that most closely matches their attention span.

Our elementary school kids (K-3rd grade) join their parents for the first part of the service (singing, prayers, Bible readings), then some stay in for the sermon, while others are dismissed for Praise Factory Investigators (which takes place only during the sermon portion of the service.) Even those who do go to Praise Factory during the sermon, we are teaching them in ways which will better prepare them to stay in and gather with the rest of the congregation one day. We don't mind stretching the children's attention span a bit with the story length. We include hymns that we regularly sing in our worship services. And, the hymn activity involves not just learning to sing the songs, but takes a close look at the words and what they mean. This, in turn, helps the children better understand what they are singing in the worship services, which also helps them to gather with the church in a more meaningful way.

Children who are in 4th grade and higher are in the whole service, from beginning to end.

We also provide two worship bulletin (one for younger kids; one for older kids) that helps them interact with what's going on in the service, space to write down sermon notes and also gives them a coloring sheet and puzzle activity. Our Children's Ministry administrator and pastor of families create these each week, based on the music, Bible readings and Scripture passage being preached on.

As well as being able to sit in the worship hall with everyone else, we also provide special rooms with video feed just for parents with kids. This allows even parents with very wiggling, noisy kids to hear the service... and for them to help their children to participate in the service without being a huge distraction to others.

SUNDAY EVENING SERVICE

This 1.5 hour service is focused on sharing, prayer and singing, with a much shorter (15 minute) devotion on Scripture. Except for the long time of silence needed during the prayer time (20-25 minutes), it is an easier service for younger children to take part in. We provide a child care for pre-schoolers for the whole service; and, a class for children only K-2nd grade, that starts after the initial singing time (first 15 minutes) ends. Again, this exposes K-2nd graders to part of the church service and all 3rd graders to all of it.

Lesson #11: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. How are you helping children to prepare to gather with the congregation?
2. How can you help them learn more about what goes on during the worship services?
3. How could you help your parents help their children during the worship services?
4. What parts of the worship services do children regularly take part in?
5. Do you only offer children's classes during the church hour? The whole service? Just the sermon portion? What difficulties does that cause when children transition into the service? Is there anything you could do to help that transition?

Lesson #12:
“Pray! Pray! Pray!”
There are eyes that watch and minds that remember,
even when there seems to be no ears to hear.”

Humans are big lovers of “Right Now”! But we serve a God to whom a thousand years is as a day. His plans are magnificent and big and they come about in His own, perfect time. And so, it’s not surprise that while some children come to faith as children, there are many more who hear the gospel and learn the Bible, but who never come to faith until years, even decades later.

We are grateful for the encouragement of those children who become Christians at an early age! Yes, we are so grateful... both for their sake and the sake of those who pour their lives into teaching them in the things of God. We should pray for that fruit and thank God for that fruit.

But, we should pray just as much for those seeds sown by parents and teachers today, but that seem to simply lay dormant. It doesn’t mean they are duds, just because they have not yet sprung to life. We serve a wonder-working, prayer-answering God! We must not give up. We must keep on praying!

Check your attitude! It is “What you see (right now) is what you get?” Mine so often reverts back to this, as I pray and pray for some and still they have not come to faith. One pastor friend said recently in a sermon: “How much are you praying for the lost? Have you given up? If God so willed to save everyone you prayed for this week, how many people would be saved?” It was a telling question. My impatience to see fruit now often turns into hopelessness and prayerlessness.

So, keep on being faithful! By God’s grace, live out a godly life before the children. Let them see your relationship with the living God. Teach them all in the most memorable and understandable ways that you can. Don’t give up doing your best! Don’t give up praying! Pray for the parents, the teachers; pray for these little lives.

As Alfred Tennyson once said, “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

The elders, children’s ministry team, teachers and parents praying for the children, as you might expect. But we also encourage our whole congregation to regularly pray for families is by including the names of the children with the parents in a special section in the back of our membership directory. This helps reminds members like our college students or older singles, who might not usually think much of the children, to pray for them. Together, we support families!

So much of working with kids is like filling time capsules. Who knows when they will be opened by the Holy Spirit in a way that brings the truth of the gospel to life in a saving way? God has chosen to weave our prayers into the outworking of His great and glorious plans...even for these children.

Lesson #12: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. Who regularly prays for the children and parents in your church?
2. How do you encourage people to pray? What else could you do?
3. Do you struggle with impatience or discouragement over children who have not yet become Christians? Does this show up in your prayers?
4. Do you know of anyone who heard the gospel as a child and many years later came to faith?

Lesson #13:

“Think outside of the boxed curriculum box.”

Curriculum (almost) always needs customizing. It is but a set of tools, sitting in a toolbox, ready to be picked and worked with. Curriculum is a starting point, not a final product! It needs to be molded to fit your children, your teaching style and your teaching situation. The curriculum that you just purchased or downloaded needs a carpenter to really become useful... and that carpenter is YOU! It takes time, knowledge of your situation, and a bit of trial and error to make something that works well. Treat curriculum with the limitations it has and you will be on your way to building something beautiful with it. If you are looking for the perfect straight-out-of-the-box resource for your church, I doubt you will find it. I created the Praise Factory family of curriculums for use at our church, CHBC, and they STILL have to make changes and customize even more to fit our children, teachers, classrooms and parents!

Here are some steps that can help you customize a curriculum to best fit your ministry setting:

STEP 1

Know Yourself (Your Church, Your Teachers, Your Families, etc.)

Think about your teachers' experience and teaching styles. Make sure you know the church leaders' vision for what they want the children to learn. Think about how much teaching time the teachers have each week; the pros and cons of their teaching environment; and, what teaching formats and activities best lend themselves to these parameters. Develop a good understanding of the families/children you are serving: their needs and abilities. How can you best support them, given what you know of them?

You may want to use the “Children’s Ministry Questionnaire,” found in Section 2 of this book. It has been created to help you get a good picture of your ministry setting and the families you are wanting to support. Discuss your answers as a group with your church leaders/children’s ministry team. Ask God to give you a clear picture of where your church is and what He wants you to teach the children. The more you can understand about who you are wanting to teach, the better you will be able to customize the curriculum to reach that goal.

STEP 2

Know the Curriculum

Read through a sample of the curriculum and any introductory materials a few times. Talk to someone who has used it already or observe it being taught. Get a good sense of what resources the curriculum includes and how they are used.

STEP 3

Choose Your Resources

Now comes the “tools in the toolbox” part of your work. Review your answers to the questionnaire. Think about how to shape the curriculum resources to best fit your situation and your children. Is your session shorter than the time allotted in the lesson plan? Then take a highlighter and cut out elements. It is longer than the time allotted in the lesson plan? Think of what kind of resources you might be able to add to the curriculum to extend it. Are you using it for a VBS or another ministry setting different from the one it was originally intended for? Then you may need to re-group the resources into a rotation of activities. etc.

STEP 4**Prepare Your First Session**

Choose a sample session of the curriculum and prepare any Bible study, visuals, crafts, games or other resources you would need to teach your typical class. Notice how much time it takes to prepare these things. Are the instructions easy to follow? Are the resources required reasonable in price? Is the prep a do-able amount for your teachers? Do the activities seem to be a good fit for your teachers and kids? Do the activities seem like fluff or do they help reinforce the key teaching points?

STEP 5**Make a Maiden Voyage**

Try out your customized version of the curriculum on the kids. Our favorite way to try out a new curriculum is with a pair of very experienced teachers and a smaller group of children, when there is an opportunity to do so. This gives the curriculum its best test-run. Ideally, you want to give any curriculum a few sessions trial period. New curriculum is new curriculum. Teachers will be getting used to it as will the kids. The lesson plans for all three of the Praise Factory curriculum follow the same order, session after session. As this routine kicks in, it provides a structure helpful to teachers and children. But of course, it takes a number of sessions for the routine to become routine.

STEP 6**Evaluate and Make Adjustments**

As you test-run the curriculum, you will probably want to evaluate and make changes. Perhaps some activities typically take longer than anticipated. Perhaps your children would do better by switching the order suggested in the lesson plan.

STEP 7**Train Others**

Once you feel that you have adjusted the curriculum to a good fit for teacher and children, begin to teach others how to teach it, too. Ideally, this starts as a mentoring experience, with the teachers who have been teaching during the trial period lead the children and the new teachers observe. Gradually, you can hand over teaching to the new teachers, with you observing/aiding them. Do your volunteers a huge favor and always be looking for new help. Even the most eager teacher who gets no break will burn out. Many hands make light work...and work that keeps on working!

See Eleven Steps for Making a Curriculum Custom Fit for even more information on this topic. (Appendix D)

Lesson #13: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What are key factors about your teachers, parents, children, ministry setting and facilities that will affect what curriculum you use and how you use it?
2. Given what you have learned about your families and ministry setting, what characteristics are top priority for choosing and shaping a curriculum to best fit?
3. What kind of preparation work do you think your teachers should be expected to do? How much time do you think they will most likely commit/need to commit to prepare well for their class time?
4. Is there any of the preparation that can be done by someone on the children's ministry team (or other volunteer) besides teachers that would help make the teachers' load easier?
5. What are the greatest difficulties and greatest advantages to the curriculum you are trying out? Are any of them because the curriculum is new to teachers and children? How could you "fix" any of the persistent problems?
6. What would be the best way to introduce and train new teachers to use the new curriculum?

Lesson #14:

“Two Dead Men and a Diamond”

As we develop or purchase curriculum the first three, key questions we ask are:

- 1. Is it sound theologically? Is it God-centered?**
- 2. Is it developmentally appropriate for the children?**
- 3. Does it reinforce key truths about God in different ways?**

These questions are summarized by “Two Dead Men and a Diamond.”

DEAD MAN #1: MARTIN LUTHER

Luther spoke of theology—the study of God—as not just dry, heady stuff, but how you live and how you die. Children want to learn real, solid truths about God because He created them to know Him. They want to know about the world, God and His great plans for the world and their lives. Teaching biblical truth is how they can know these things.

DEAD MAN #2: JOHN BUNYAN

Bunyan spoke of reaching people through the gates to their heart. We want to use every gate we can to reach the children. The eye gate, the ear gate, the hand gate, the feet gate, even the stomach gate. The more gates used, the better the chance for the learning time to be enjoyable, understandable and memorable.

A DIAMOND

The great Puritan preachers meditated upon a single truth from many different facets, seeking to expand their knowledge of God and the implications and applications of this knowledge to their lives. We strive to lead children in thinking upon God in ways that might expand their own understanding of Him, and help them see implications and applications of this knowledge to their lives. We find that curriculum which reinforces the same biblical truths in different ways and at different levels helps to achieve this goal.

Lesson #14: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What deep truths about God would you most want the children to learn?
2. What “gates” to the heart do your teachers/curriculum use? What gates might you add to these? Are there any gates that are consistently more effective with your children? Why do you think this is the case? Do most teachers realize which gates are most effective or is it just a few teachers? How could you write in these gates into the curriculum if they are not suggested?
3. How can you help the teachers think about these gates to the heart and develop their use with the curriculum you are using?
4. Does your curriculum provide opportunities for ideas to be reinforced or does it just “move on” to the next truth the next session? How could you provide repetition to help the children truly remember and understand each concept, yet keep the learning fresh?

Lesson #15:

“The remarkable results of repeating”

While it might sound boring to revisit the same Bible truth, verse and story, we have found that repetition allows children to actually understand and remember the truths we are teaching them.

Repetition can take come in a number of forms:

#1 REPEAT WITHIN THE SAME LESSON

Repeating a truth in different ways within the same lesson provides reinforcement, without boredom. This would include teaching a truth, then singing a song about it, doing a craft that illustrates it or playing a game that includes questions that review the truth. Using different activities to repeat the same truth keep the learning fresh.

#2 REPEAT OVER MULTIPLE LESSONS

Most curriculums take the take the one-new-concept-every-lesson approach, but we have found that if we repeat a truth over multiple sessions, the children are actually far more likely to remember it. Of course, this is exactly what is going on in their schoolrooms each week. No teacher would teach multiplication tables one day and assume the children have learned it. And don't most preschoolers drive their parents crazy by asking them to read the same story over and over and over again? There is a world of different between introducing a new concept and understanding it and retaining it.

#3 REPEAT AT HOME

By sending home a take home sheet of the truths or even copies of the story the children are learning in class, you provide an opportunity for them to be repeated and learned more deeply in families.

The Praise Factory curriculums repeat truths and even Bible stories for multiple lessons. Hide 'n' Seek Kids--for the youngest children-- provides five lessons on the same Bible truth, Bible verse and Bible story. Deep Down Detectives --for older preschoolers and early elementary--provides three lessons on the same Bible truth, verse and story. PFI--for elementary age children-- provides three lessons on the same Bible truth and verse, though it uses a different story for each of the three lessons. By using new activities each session, the children get the variety they also enjoy, while getting enough time to grasp the truths being taught. Take home sheets of the key concepts and even the stories are available to send home for the families to continue to learn from.

Lesson #15: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. Do your children retain the truths you are trying to teach them?
2. Does the curriculum you use include repetition? How?
3. Are there ways more repetition might help your children better learn and remember the truths you want them to know? What would those be?
4. Does your curriculum provide take-home sheets? If not, how difficult would it be to create them from your resources?

Lesson #16:

“Think like a missionary”

Missionaries know that if they are to effectively share the gospel with people from another country, they will have to think cross-culturally. They spend time learning the language and the culture of the people they want to reach. They study the people they want to reach, trying to figure out how best to translate Biblical truths into understandable concepts. They look at themselves as communicators, the message they want to communicate, and the people they want to receive it and understand it. They know that all three parts of this chain need to be in place for them to make a connection.

This same cross-cultural way of thinking is very helpful when we want to communicate Biblical truths to children, too. Thinking about what we are like as teachers; understanding the message we want to communicate; taking time to understand what the children we teach are like and how they think, can help us to not just speak these truths to them, but help them understand them. Being aware of the developmental norms for a group of children can help us to give them activities that they enjoy and are suitable for their age.

You can find many great resources for what behavior and abilities to expect in preschoolers and elementary school children. On the Praise Factory website, I've posted two papers on what to expect from preschool children and elementary age children can be helpful in reminding us how these little children think. They give a development snapshot of two through five year olds, as well as behavior to expect of these preschool age children as well as elementary school age children. This kind of information is important for curriculum developers as well as teachers to be familiar with and use as they work with the children.

Lesson #16: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What are the characteristics and developmental abilities of the children you are trying to reach?
2. What are some ways that the children you teach are different from you in their ability to think and understand?
3. What are some ways that the children you teach are different from you in activities that help them learn?
4. How do these differences in characteristics/developmental abilities affect how you present truth in an understandable way to the children?
5. What has helped you in getting a grasp of the differences and even barriers to communicating with the children in your class?

Lesson #17:

“Oh, I know that old story...or do I? Fight Bible boredom in well-taught children.”

How many times have you seen it? That glazed look or know-it-all expression; that groan or sigh that comes when you introduce the story of Daniel in the lion's den to a 3rd grader who has heard it from the time he was a two-year-old. I've seen it frequently. To make matters worse, many times curriculum love to recycle the same Bible stories, year after year, creating a situation in which de-sensitization, not deeper appreciation, seems to be the outcome.

When you are faced with this situation, here are four things to consider doing:

#1 DIG DEEPER YOURSELF!

Get a commentary, word-studies book, or a Bible backgrounds book on your passage; listen to a sermon; talk to a pastor; or, look online (be careful you find a reputable source!) Usually there are many interesting details you can add (about the city, the people, the word choices, etc.) that bring depth and life to a story that they have heard before.

#2 PLAY THE HIDDEN NAME GAME

Sometimes use the Hebrew/Greek root name of the familiar people involved so the children won't hear the name and tune out immediately. For instance, Iobi is the Hebrew word for Job. Substitute Iobi and tell the story. It will let the children hear the story with new ears.

#3 TRY TO REMEMBER

#3 Split the children into two groups, asking each group to write down the story, the best they can remember. Then read the story to them and give them another chance to modify their story to come closer to the real text. Read both teams' versions and decide who came closest to the actual text. Then, continue your class session with a discussion of the Bible truths and applications.

#3 CHANGE IT UP

#4 Change how you present the story. For example, with the story of Esther, instead of reading and telling it at the beginning, make a set of props of key elements from the story and ask the kids to guess what story they come from. After they identify the story, have the children tell what each of the props had to do with the story. Ask them questions to help the kids tell the significance of each prop and a deeper, spiritual application. For example, if the king's scepter was one of the props, you could ask them to identify it as the scepter that the king had to hold out to accept someone who entered his throne room with asking. When you ask them the significance of this in the story, they could tell you that Esther asked Mordecai and the Jewish people to pray for the Lord to work in the king's heart so that when she went to see the king without asking, he would treat her favorably. The application questions that go with the scepter could be: Why did Esther ask the people to pray? What does this tell you about who Esther knew was even more powerful than the king? What should we do when we are faced with a seemingly impossible situation, against an enemy that seems to be too big for us? etc.

Lesson #17: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. Do you have many children who have been well-taught? How often do you run into a bored attitude from children like these? What age does this boredom start to appear?

2. What have you done to help fight Bible boredom?

Lesson #18:

“Change your activities from time-fillers to conduits of truth.”

Conduits of Truth

Praise God, there is a lot of curriculum on the market now that seeks to teach Biblical truths to children in an understandable, enjoyable and memorable way! However, we have found, especially in the response activity area, that you need to look closely to see if the activities actually help the children retain the key, biblical truths of the lesson we most want them to remember.

So, when we create or look at a curriculum, we are not only looking for enjoyable, age-appropriate activities, but at whether these activities are filled with truth or whether they just fill the time. Those which are filled with truth are what we call “conduits of truth.” A conduit of truth activity is one that uses the enjoyable-ness of the activity to fill the children with the important truths of your lesson.

For example, if the lesson was on Noah’s Ark and the children were asked to pair up and mimic animals entering the ark, the children may have a great time, but only go home making elephant noises. This game would not be a conduit of truth. But, if the children were asked to pair up and mimic animals entering the ark, but asked to freeze each time you blow a whistle, then you ask them a question related to the day’s story for them to answer, then you have made the same game into a conduit of truth. You are using the enjoyable-ness of the activity to provide an opportunity to reinforce the biblical truths you want them to understand and remember.

Lesson #18: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What kinds of activities does your curriculum typically use?

2. Do the children enjoy them?

3. Do the children learn from them?

4. If they enjoy them, but do not learn from them, how could you change them to make them conduits of truth?

Lesson #19:

“Pray Bible-based, life-expanding ACTS prayers.”

Using the ACTS structure for prayers has been one of the most surprisingly, remarkably effective tools we have encountered in teaching children to look at the Bible and learn more about who God is, who they are, themselves as sinners; Christ’s work for sinners; and, how God wants us to live. And not only to help the children do this in class, but actually take this skill home and keep on using it.

ACTS is an acronym that stands for the four, basic ways we talk to God:

- Adoration (praising God for who He is)
- Confession (telling God about our sins and asking His forgiveness)
- Thanksgiving (thanking God for His many good gifts--especially those He’s giving us through Christ)
- Supplication (asking God for what we need to live the way He wants us to live and to see His kingdom come)

We include an ACTS prayer with every Bible truth in all the curriculum we use, starting even with our two-year-olds. As the children get older, we continue to include the ACTS prayer, but we ask them to help think of an A, C, T, S from the Bible truth. This helps develop an ability to ask good questions about any Bible truth or Bible text. And, not just in any way...but in four, very important ways: Who is God? Who am I? Why do I need a Savior? What has God done, especially through Jesus that I am thankful for? And, how does God want me to live?

The ACTS format makes for an easy, ready-on-the-spot, spiritually-rich, thought-provoking devotion for families, too. Really, you can read any passage and ask these four questions and glean a lot of truth and good application from it.

Of course, the problem with introducing a structure to prayer is if the structure becomes a “must” instead of an “aid.” To help avoid this mindset, we also make sure to pray with the children in ways that are not structured like this, to help them understand that prayer is talking to God and He does not require a certain format to listen and answer!

Lesson #19: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. When do you pray with the children in your ministry setting?
2. Have you ever used the ACTS prayer format with them?
3. How could you introduce children and families to this prayer tool?
4. What cautions would you give to them about over-use of this tool?

Lesson #20:

“Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater!

Be a pirate!”

A little bit of pirate-ing from other sources can go a long way in “fixing” a curriculum’s weaknesses. Few, if any, curriculums will have everything you want, just the way you want it. One curriculum might have fun activities, but they are fluffy, time-fillers. Another one may have outstanding teaching, but many workbook/seat-work activity...and you have a bunch of wiggle monkeys! Yet another may have great teaching and good activities, just not enough. A fourth might have great activities, but the truths presented are very shallow or moralistic. Is there any way to use curriculums like these?

Many times, yes! Here are some suggested fixes for different problems:

1. BAD THEOLOGY

There is definitely curriculum on the market that at first seems to have everything you want; but, at closer inspection, is theologically off-base. Sometimes, it’s possible to re-write the sections/phrases that are off, and be able to keep all the parts you like.

2. WHERE’S THE GOSPEL?

Sometimes, curriculum presumes the gospel. Never a good idea! But, one that is easily fixed. Include a copy of the gospel, appropriate for the children’s age group in the teacher’s binder and/or add it to the lesson plan. I make sure to weave in the gospel every lesson at some point, if at all possible. You never know whose ears the Lord might be opening to believe that day!

3. IMPORT IT

Sometimes curriculums have meaty content, but emphasizes “written seat-work” in its response activities... and you have bouncy kids that need to move.; or crafty kids who want to be artistic. Add crafts, music or games from other sources, along with your own discussion questions, to combine movement with reinforcement of the truths learned.

Two particular good resources for adding extra games: [Great Games for Preschoolers](http://www.praisefactory.org) and [Great Games for Elementary School Children](http://www.praisefactory.org) are two resources available through www.praisefactory.org. They each contain dozens of games that can be used in any Bible story or with any Bible verse. Save the seat-work for a take-home sheet or for the opening minutes of the next Sunday’s session as children are arriving into class. A great way to reinforce truths from the previous week!

4. SWITCH IT UP, THROW IT OUT

Sometimes the content is great, but the order doesn’t fit you. Other times, there’s more than you need. Don’t be tied to the structure someone else has mind! Simply take what they have created and move the pieces around to suit your kids or eliminate parts you don’t need. I promise you: no one will be offended.

5. AIN’T GOIN’ HOME

Sometimes there are no parent hand outs for review and discussion at home. Save some of the seat-work and give it out as a take home instead. Type up the Bible passage used and a few discussion questions for the parents to use with their children to review at home. Or, give them a memory verse to learn. Or, give them a coloring sheet and type the Bible passage and discussion questions on the back for the children to take home.

7. OVER THEIR HEADS

Sometimes, the curriculum presumes too much reading or writing ability. Teachers can read passages instead of the students. Or, they can take the questions from a written assignment and uses them in a game, instead. (See Praise Factory games on the website for lots of simple, game possibilities.)

Lesson #20: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What do you like about your current curriculum?
2. Are there any areas that need “fixing”? What are they?
3. How could you keep what you like and fix what you don’t like?

Lesson #21:

“Skip the chaos!

Plan your transitions between activities.”

Last time I checked, kids are not mind readers. Furthermore, if given the chance, they will do things in a way you didn't expect, and often times, in a way that is disruptive to the learning environment. So, help them by telling them what you want them to do before they do it. A great example is transition from one activity to another within the class. For example, say they have been sitting in chairs listening to a story and next they will be going over to tables to do a craft activity. Before they move, tell them where you want them to go, how you want them to go there and what you want them to do (or not do) when they get there. You might say, “Class, next we are going to do a craft activity over at the tables. When I tell you to get up, I want you to quietly walk over to the tables and sit down. Please do not touch any of the coloring supplies. When everyone is settled, I will tell you what to do next.” These instructions make it clear what the children should do and make it clear what mis-behavior is. It won't take care of all your problems, but it will certainly help some of them.

The Praise Factory website includes two articles on classroom behavior (one for preschool classes, the other for elementary school classes) that help teachers manage transitions and many other common classroom scenarios. Check those out if you need some ideas. Or, find a seasoned school teacher and pick their brain (or better yet, ask them to come observe you or lead the class one session) for good transition ideas. You will be amazed at how much taming the transitions helps the whole feel of the class.

Lesson #21: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. When are your children most likely to misbehave in class? Are they predictable? Are they a pattern? Do you set clear expectations during these times before they happen? How do you respond to them?

2. Does the children's behavior vary depending on the training of the teacher in charge? What is the difference between how the best teacher manages the class and how the worst teachers manage it? How could you teach the worst teachers these techniques or establish the best teacher's strategies as regular rules or write them into the curriculum you use?

3. What are the transition points in your curriculum? What could you do to help the children make these transitions more smoothly? How could you introduce these ideas to your teachers?

Lesson #22:

“Skip the chaos!

Teach with a predictable schedule.”

A predictable schedule is like an extra helper that is always present in your classroom.

Kids love doing and seeing new things, but they thrive in predictability. Why not give them both? Create a regular structure for your classes that both teachers and kids come to expect. Fill that structure with rich learning experiences that bring the truths you are teaching to life. And, you will find that even when a different teacher teaches, the familiar structure helps create continuity that in turn helps create a great learning environment. We call the predictable schedule the extra, invisible helper that comes to every class. The more you switch out your volunteer teachers, the more you will find it helpful to have this invisible Superman in place!

Lesson #22: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What is the session time like for your ministry setting?
2. Is there a regular order to what activities happen when?
3. If there is not, what benefit might there be to creating one?
4. If you do try to create one, what order would be most helpful?
5. Have you observed a certain order being better with the children? Why was that better?
6. Have you observed a certain order being worse with the children? Why was it worse?
7. If you use a rotation of teachers to teach the children, does everyone use the same schedule? How does this make teaching more difficult? How could you systematize the schedule from teacher to teacher?

Lesson #23:

“The Triple Crown of Teaching”

The Triple Crown is considered by many to be the greatest accomplishment in thoroughbred racing. And rightly so, only twelve horses in the last one-hundred years have been able to do it. It takes pedigree, training and versatility...not to mention being at the right place, in the right weather, at the right time, experts say. It is a summary of greatness as the same horse, in the same year, wins the Kentucky Derby, then the Preakness, and finally, the Belmont Stakes.

I think there's a Triple Crown of teaching, too--a summary of great teaching. I'm putting this lesson at the end of the curriculum and teaching section because of that. And the good news is, this Triple Crown is fair more attainable; you can try for it every time you teach; and there's no horse to clean up after (though probably quite a few children).

Here's my Triple Crown:

CROWN #1

Teaching that is Faithfully Understandable

Here is my Kentucky Derby: the sort of first race of the Triple Crown. This is teaching that is true to the God's Word. And, that is presented in a way that the children can grasp. You won't even get out of the starting gate if you leave God's Word behind. We have to make sure we aren't just teaching moralism or what we would like the Bible to say. The children (like us) need the gospel if they are to be saved. That means teaching them about the Great and Good God who created them and is king over them and is worthy of all their worship. That means understanding they are sinners who rebel against this Great and Good King and face His eternal judgment. That means knowing about Jesus, the Son of God, the perfect Savior who came to pay for the sins of all who turn from their sins and trust in as their Savior. Who died on the cross and who rose from the dead in victory on the third day. And this means, hearing the call to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus, themselves. And, as they do so, to live the rest of their lives, not their own way, but God's way and with His help. Yes, we must be faithful to teach all of this, displayed through every page of the Bible.

But to be faithful AND to present it in a (usually simplified) way that children can understand is the half to this challenge. It is something that takes prayer, and practice...and some training certainly does not hurt! Like Lesson #16 reminded us, we might know truth, but we have to think about who we are telling it to, if we want them to know it, too. Children, especially preschoolers and younger elementary-aged children, don't understand abstract ideas like we do. They are very concrete thinkers. That makes some ideas tricky to get across to them. The two papers on what to expect from preschool children and elementary age children (also mentioned in Lesson #16,) can be helpful in reminding us how these little children think. These can be found on the Praise Factory website.

CROWN #2

Teaching that is Enjoyably Rich

Winning the Kentucky Derby is just the first trophy need. Next comes the Preakness: teaching in a way that the children enjoy, yet is deeply rich with Biblical truth. “Enjoyable” is usually not so hard to come by. Most every curriculum has it. Most every teacher can figure that out (even just bring cupcakes to class and see if that doesn't up the enjoyable factor!). But enjoyable that is rich in truth take a bit more forethought. It means thinking about what those children enjoy doing AND what you want them to do and marrying them right there in your classroom. These are the “Conduits of Truth” from Lesson #18. Don't settle with being everyone's favorite teacher because you are fun or funny! Use all that is enjoyable in you and all that the kids

enjoy to display truth and bring them back to it again and again.

And that thought, of course, brings us to the crunch race, the Belmont Stakes:

CROWN #3

Teaching that is Deeply Rememberable

We cannot be the Holy Spirit. We cannot save the children we teach. But, by God's grace, we can leave a testimony and a trail in their hearts. The testimony of the truths of God's Word. The testimony of His work in the lives of person after person after person through every page of the Bible. And, the testimony of His work in our lives-- who He is living in right before them, right now! And the trail of how to come, find and know this great God through faith in Christ.

We want to teach children truths today in a way that it might stay in their minds the rest of their lives. Who knows what day is the day of salvation for any child in our class? How wonderful to think God can use us to plant seeds ready to spring up into salvation, in His perfect timing!

How do we do this? Well, like the Triple Crown, you won't get to the Belmont Stakes and get to try for the Triple Crown if you didn't first win the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness first. So, you need to strive to teach in an understandable way. (You cannot believe that which you do not understand). And, when you use enjoyable activities to help reinforce those truths they are learning, that repetition will help cement the ideas in place. And lastly, you need to keep on persevering in these things and in prayer.

By the time those three-year-old thoroughbreds get to the Belmont Stakes, tiredness is becoming a factor. Athletes train to peak for the "big race." These horses have to train to peak for three big races that take place over six weeks. So with us, perhaps we can pull off these wonderful, enthusiastic ideals for one or two sessions, but what do we do to stay the course to the end? It is by God's grace! So we must pray for ourselves and pray for the children. Ask God to help you to be faithful week after week you teach. Ask Him to help you better understand the children and better understand His truth..and how to make a connection. Ask Him, by His Holy Spirit, to be making that connection, even when you are not sure that you know how to. Ask Him to show you how to make good conduits of truth with enjoyable activities. Ask Him to use your time with the children to plant many seeds...and plant them deep and securely. Ask Him to bring them to life.

There's a wonderful way this analogy breaks down. Any horse that attempts the Triple Crown and fails is forgotten. But with our Triple Crown of teaching, we know that God is Himself at work in us to will and to act according to His good purposes. We know that He has given us good works He prepared for us in advance...even teaching these children. We know that He can do imaginably more than we can think or ask for the glory of His name. We know that all things work for the good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes. We know that all our righteousness is as filthy rags. Our work with the children may never reach full Triple Crown proportions...or at least not every week. But God is faithful and He is at work! Yes, we should continue to strive for the prize, but we can be confident that because of who God is, He will use even our most feeble attempts to do great things, for His glory, for our good and for the good of the children we teach! Press on!

Lesson #23: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. Do your parents/teachers have a good understanding of the Bible truths they are called to teach to the children? If not, how could they learn them better? How could you help them?
2. Do your parents/teachers feel confident in conveying Bible truths in a way that is understandable to their children? Are there resources that could help them grow in this skill? How could your curriculum help your teachers improve in this?
3. Are there key, Biblical truths that you, your teachers or your curriculum avoid? If so, why? What benefit would it be to include them? What harm does it do to leave them out? How can you add them into the curriculum in a way that is appropriate for the children?
4. What do your children enjoy doing?
5. Do the teachers know what the children they teach enjoy doing? How does know this/would knowing this help them teach the children better?
6. How could you use the things the children enjoy doing to help reinforce the truths you teach?
7. Does the curriculum you use incorporate the enjoyable things the children do? Does it do it in a way that is only enjoyable, or that makes it a conduit of truth?
8. What helps you to persevere in your work in children's ministry?
9. What is hardest for you to keep persevering in doing in children's ministry? What about your volunteers, in general?
10. How does your curriculum help you persevere?
11. How do the church leaders help you persevere?
12. How has God been faithful to answer your prayers for perseverance?
13. How likely are you /your teachers to pray for the children's families and teachers during the week?
14. How has God been faithful to answer your prayers for the families? teachers?

Lesson #24:

“A few, good men are hard to come by... ...but they go a long way!”

Most Children's Ministry programs have a high percentage of women volunteers and a low percentage of men volunteers. God uses women to do wonderful things in Children's Ministry.. at least I hope so, because, of course, I'm a woman!

But... there is something very special that happens when men help in Children's Ministry. We have seen it over and over again. Perhaps it's seeing them tenderly care for the children. Perhaps it's the authority and leadership their presence brings to the classroom. Perhaps it's because there tends to be less of them volunteering. Perhaps it's that extra reflection of the loving Heavenly Father that a godly man can give. I can't say I have anything really solid to go on here, but I know it's true.

Not only is it good for the children in the classroom, but it's great for the men, too. We have found that Children's Ministry is a wonderful place for men to develop their teaching skills (and maybe one day become a small group leader or even a pastor). We have seen man after man grow in his teaching ability with the children and before long, be asked to teach the adults in some capacity. And, it is great for men who hope to be fathers one day or who are fathers already and who want to grow in their understanding of children of various ages. It's even been good for men looking to find a wife (Yep! Many a dating relationship, then marriage has had its first spark as teachers teach together.). And lastly, we have seen men grow in their own relationship with God as His child, as they work with the children. It has grown their understanding of what it means to be a child: their needs, the way they think; and their dependence upon others to take care of them.

How do you get men to serve? Here's a few ways we do it:

1. PREACH FOR THEM

- The pastors preach and encourage it from the pulpit.

2. LEADER ACTION

- The church leader who oversees Children's Ministry (the pastor of families, in our case) calls men and asks them to serve.

3. DEACON THEM

- We use men in our Children's Ministry leadership—specifically, the deacon of Children's Ministry. We make sure that he is a godly, SINGLE (yes, single) male—and usually we choose a man who is fairly clueless, but very willing to learn, about Children's Ministry when he starts. As he serves the Children's Ministry every week, other men—even those hard to get single men—see him serve and are much more willing to serve themselves. He has been effective in getting men volunteers than the women on our team. And, because he, himself, comes to serve in Children's Ministry with little or no experience and survives...even thrives, he can make a powerful case to other single men to do the same.

4. MAKE IT EASIER

- We provide mentoring situations so that they know will have help learning what to do.
- We provide novice-level, short term volunteer opportunities so they can dip their toe in the water and try it out, instead of throwing them in the deep end and refusing to give them a helping hand out for a whole Sunday School year.

Lesson #24: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. Do you have difficulty getting men to serve in your ministry setting? Why?
2. Have you asked (many) men why they don't serve?
3. What could you do to get rid of any of your men's barriers to serving?
4. What do/what could your church leaders do to encourage men to serve in Children's Ministry?
5. Do you have any men who do serve who could share with the congregation and encourage other men to serve, too?
6. What fruit have you seen from men serving in Children's Ministry... in the children's lives? in men's lives? in families' lives?

Lesson #25:

“Care well for your teachers and they will come back.”

Teaching is a big responsibility and often a tiring one. Many teachers burn out from frustration or lack of support. We try to train our teachers so they will be well prepared. And, we try not to overtax them by asking for a commitment from them that is greater than is reasonable or spiritually good for them. Here are ways we try to care for our teachers....and it helps them be ready to come back again and again.

1. MENTOR YOUR TEACHERS

We try to mentor all new teachers, so that they see a teaching model before they start teaching themselves. This gives us a chance to observe their teaching before they teach to see if they are suited to teach. And, it allows them to try out teaching before committing to a class. As new teachers watch more experienced teachers, they can become familiarized with the curriculum and with effective teaching skills. This brings both greater continuity to the classroom and greater success among new teachers, which in turn helps our children learn.

2. MODEL TEACH FOR YOUR TEACHERS

At least once a year, we model-teach in each classroom. We walk the teachers through lesson preparation before class, then have them watch us teach the lesson. Afterwards, we talk about what went well and what could have gone better. This give-and-take of loving criticism fosters an atmosphere of humility and teachability as well as helps us become better teachers. As teachers (and perhaps even more importantly as fellow believers in community together), we think it is important to model soliciting, giving and receiving this kind of healthy criticism. How will we grow if we are not willing to ask others to help us see not only areas in which we do well, but also those in which we need to grow?

3. OBSERVE AND ENCOURAGE YOUR TEACHERS

We try to observe teachers at least once a year. The point is not to be the perfection police, but to encourage them. Yes, often this also provides opportunities to give helpful feedback that will make for a better teaching and learning experience. If it causes too much anxiety in the teachers to be observed, we resort back to model teaching.

4. TEACH THEM HOW TO MANAGE BEHAVIOR

We give our teachers tips on how to manage children's behavior in ways that help everyone learn and foster respect for the teacher and for the other students. Two articles full of these suggestions are found on the Praise Factory website.

5. GIVE THEM TEACHER-FRIENDLY CURRICULUM

We try to carefully choose materials that will help our volunteer teachers understand what to teach and how best to teach it.

6. OVER-SIZED TEAMS MAKE THE PERFECT FIT

We recruit teachers so that they don't have to teach every week. These teams of teachers partner together/switch off teaching a particular class of children. A typical team of Sunday School teachers at CHBC commits to one year of teaching. But because they are part of a team of four teachers, with only two teaching any week, they are really teaching twenty-six Sundays rather than all fifty-two Sundays of the year. This allows for teachers to teach a full year without getting burned out and provides built-in substitutes. In our other classroom settings, we have 2 to 6 teachers teaching at a time (depending on class sizes and ages of children). This also allows less experienced teachers to partner and learn from more experienced

teachers, making hands-on teacher training a regular part of the classroom experience. It also creates the opportunity for teaching responsibilities within the classroom to rotate from week to week.

7. DEACON SUPPORT

Each Sunday, our Deacon of Children's Ministry faithfully checks in with our Sunday School teachers and Praise Factory teachers (both preschool and elementary classes). He is on hand to find any needed supplies, extra volunteers or other help a teacher might need. He keeps an eye out for issues that would be important for the rest of the Children's Ministry team to know about, usually communicating these through a weekly e-mail. A deacon volunteers for three years. This long term commitment allows the deacon to gain quite a bit of institutional knowledge as well as becomes a familiar, reliable face to teachers and parents.

8. LIMIT YOUR TEACHERS

Out of spiritual care for the teachers, the elders have set limits on how much any one member can spend teaching the children.

First of all, any volunteer who works directly with children must have been in membership for 6 months. This is so they are well-fed, well-adjusted, and well-known before serving. Their spiritual health is a priority.

For approved, child-care volunteers who have been members at least six months:

Childcare teachers:	Volunteer 1 Sunday a month
Sunday School teachers:	Volunteer 1 year at a time, on a team of 4 to allow for substitutes
Worship Service teachers:	Volunteer for 2 nonconsecutive* months a year
Hall monitors:	Volunteer 1 Sunday a month
Children's Ministry Deacon:	Volunteer for 3 years

9. DON'T BE AFRAID TO SHUT DOWN OR LIMIT

This is where many children's ministry leaders gasp.... we are willing to shut down programs or change age limits on classes to protect our teachers from over-serving. Because we have only one Sunday morning service and one Sunday evening service, the elders are especially careful about how much time members spend away from regular preaching. If we have a consistent, month after month, lack of volunteers, our elders may suggest that we shut down a particular program or change the age limits (such as changing a program for K-4th graders to K-3rd graders, making less volunteers needed to teach the class) for a time.

They have decided that this action is best for the spiritual welfare of the teachers, who too many times are asked to miss yet another service just to keep a program going--to their own spiritual detriment. We want to support our parents, but not at the expense of over-taxing and under-feeding of the rest of the body. Our elders have developed an order of priority of programs, making child care for infants and toddlers during the two Sunday morning and evening services the top priority.

Saying this, the process to shutting a program or changing an age limit is broached with the congregation for months before it happens. The elders give the membership time to volunteer to serve, so that the changes might not be made. But, if there is not enough help to sustain the current programs in a way that is healthy for the teachers, then the elders will make the changes.

We have had to make these changes many times, and that in a church with many, eager volunteers. Fluctuations in membership, usually due to church plants is a major cause. One time, we even had to shut down all of Sunday School for a year! But, every time (thus far), sustainable numbers have come back and we have been able to re-open what was shut.

LESSON #25

The congregation certainly feels these changes and would prefer to not suffer through them; but, they have begun to understand the elders' wisdom and love for the whole congregation as good.

Lesson #25: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting

1. What programs does your church/ministry setting have for children?
2. How many teachers are required to teach each session?
3. How do you support your teachers? Mentoring? Modeling? Observing? Training? Teams of teachers? Deacon support? Limit the time they serve? other? What works best? What else would you like to do?
4. What are the typical problems your teachers run into in their classes? How could they be helped with those?
5. Do you have much teacher burn-out? How do you group your teachers to teach? Do you build in a way for them to have a break?
6. How do you get substitutes for your teachers? Do they find them or do you?
7. Do you frequently run short on the number of teachers you need?
8. Do you frequently depend upon a small group of teachers to teach over and over again without giving them a break?
9. Do you have teachers who are not getting an opportunity to be well-fed themselves?
10. If you were to shut down or limit a program/s to better serve your volunteers, which one/s would they be? Why? What programs are most crucial to serve the families in your ministry setting?