

Show Them Jesus

Children's hearts need to be trained to comprehend their deep need for the gospel of Jesus Christ for sanctification. They must learn early on that when they sin there is a place to run (avoiding despair) and when they do well there is a place to run (avoiding pride). There can be a tendency for the Christian parent and teacher to call young hearts to character-building merely by hard work merely...the net result of hard work apart from grace is moralism, and one does not need the filling or the leading of the Spirit for mere moralism. Children are born with independent hearts and they will lean towards self-sufficiency in increasing degrees as time goes by. They need Jesus before and after salvation. "For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people, training us . . ." (Titus 2:11–12).

A child who sees his need for Jesus, and who by grace comes to him and keeps coming will treasure Christ above all things. This child "won't have to pretend God is easily satisfied with a little churchy behavior, but he will dare to draw ever nearer to a holy God. This is because his sin and God's holiness just show him how much more he's been forgiven. They enlarge his love for Jesus." A child who is growing in love for Jesus will find himself thinking primarily "I don't want to break his heart" as opposed to "I don't want to break his rules" Both are fitting statements, but one is driven by affection, which gives rise to joy—evidence of life transforming grace and the ministry of the Spirit in the heart.

(Consider) asking a few questions upon reading an OT story in anticipation of Christ: "what is God doing for his people in this story . . . how does God do the same for us—only better in Jesus . . . how does believing this good news change how we live?" Children's hearts are guarded against moralistic teaching while in the OT, as parents and teachers (often just one step ahead of them) themselves learn how to turn to Jesus while in the OT. We want our children to feel a little restless in the OT, which is intended to lead them to the glory of the Son and the good news he brings. "Anywhere you turn in the Bible, God's saving work forms the backdrop. Laws, prophecies, poems—all exist within the story of salvation. The good news is the Bible's drumbeat. To ignore it at any point is to misplay the theme song"

We want our children to delight in Jesus resisting pride in their good, resisting despair in their bad. On both accounts they are dependent upon the good news that Jesus has brought us, and at a personal level they are dependent upon Jesus himself. But we desire hearts that are joyfully dependent. A joyful heart is a worshipping heart. "We who have felt the power of the good news know that we're most eager to obey when we're most delighted with Jesus. Although we still struggle with sin, we're destined to worship eternally with the best of motivations, and by God's grace our lives today already display some of that wonder," and that wonder and delight in Jesus is being seen and heard by young watching eyes and listening ears.

From thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/show-them-jesus-teaching-the-gospel-to-kids - excerpts of book review "Show Them Jesus" by J. Klumpennhower

Avoiding Moralism

Moralism characterized most of my early Christian life. I lived a number of years with a constant sense of guilt that I did not measure up. I praise God for the people He brought into my life to show me that no, I do not measure up, but Jesus does. God sent Jesus to live the life I couldn't live, take the punishment I deserved, and give me a righteousness I did not earn. God accepts me because of Jesus, not my own moral record (or lack thereof).

Now, you may think that I look back on my upbringing with scorn, but I do not. I think back to all the amazing Sunday School teachers I had through the years. I know that they loved Jesus, and I know that they loved me. No one intentionally set out to teach me morals instead of pointing me to the gospel, but that is what happened.

Years ago, I heard Dr. Russell Moore speak on a [panel](#) regarding teaching children and youth the gospel story. He talked about how in trying to make the gospel more palatable for children, teachers can easily default to turning a Bible story into a lesson on moral principles. Unintentionally, kids end up recognizing the cross is important, but only because it gets you to the moral lesson. I'm sure that is what happened in my Sunday School classrooms growing up and tens of thousands of others around the world.

- 1. God is the central figure of every story.** When I work on a session, I ask myself over and over again, "What does God do in this story?" This question keeps me oriented on the main point of the story. If I make David the main figure of the David and Goliath story, David's "bravery" naturally becomes the point. When I remember that God is the central figure, I show kids that God used a young man who seemed insignificant even to his own family to defeat His people's enemies.
- 2. Draw attention to what we learn of God's character and ways in each story.** Children are forming their understanding of who God is. In every story, we get to show them the greatness of God. In the David and Goliath story, we see that God is strongest of all. God uses people whom other people do not think are important in His great plan. God keeps His promises. God cares for His people and protects them. God always wins. God humbles the proud. I could go on, but I think you get the idea.
- 3. Point to Jesus.** I know I am a little biased, but what I think sets The Gospel Project apart from other curricula is the way we make it easy to show kids Jesus in every story through our Christ Connections. Overlooking Jesus in a Bible story can be easy to do, particularly in the Old Testament, but the Christ Connection lays it out for you. In writing the preschool materials, I try to weave the Christ Connection through the "say" portion of each activity to make it easy for leaders to show their kids Jesus even during activity time.
Here's the preschool Christ Connection for this week:
David did not look like someone who could beat a giant. But David trusted God, and God gave David power. Jesus did not look like someone who could save people either. But when Jesus died and came back to life, He showed His power to rescue people from sin.
Here's the Kids Christ Connection for this week:
David was not a big or strong warrior, but he trusted God. God gave David power. When God sent His Son to earth, Jesus did not look like a strong warrior either. But by dying on the cross and coming back to life, Jesus showed His power to save sinners.
- 4. Teach morals by rooting them in the gospel.** When you hear me deride moralistic teaching, please do not hear me dismiss morals altogether. Quite frankly, the Bible is full of moral principles. A lesson becomes moralistic, though, when we don't root the teaching of morals in the gospel. The concept of the indicative and the imperative has been paramount to me in learning how to do that. This concept probably deserves its own blog post, but in short, *indicatives* tell me what Jesus has done for me. *Imperatives* tell me what I am to do in light of what Jesus has done. The order is critical. When we put the imperative before the indicative, we get moralism. When we put the indicative before the imperative where it belongs, we get joyful obedience to God's commands.
- 5. Weave the gospel throughout your teaching.** Because "gospel-centered" is such a buzz word, people will stick a gospel presentation at the end of a teaching session and call it gospel-centered. A friend of mine calls this the "gospel sticker." You can put a gospel sticker on a moralistic lesson, but it is still moralistic. Kids will leave burdened rather than more in love with Jesus. A gospel-centered session is one that is centered on the gospel. That means that the truths of the gospel are weaved throughout the session. It isn't just a part of the session. It *is* the session. There is no formula to learn this. Time and personal exposure to gospel-centered teaching is the only way to learn this. As you see Jesus more beautiful, it will naturally translate into how you teach kids.