

Gospel Story Preschool Curriculum

FOLLOWING JESUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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ILLUSTRATED BY

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Using the Gospel Story Curriculum

Welcome to the *Gospel Story* curriculum! The *Gospel Story* curriculum is a three-year program comprising 156 lessons divided equally between Old Testament and New Testament—78 lessons in each. On any given week, the *Gospel Story* curriculum presents the same Bible story at three distinct levels: preschool (3- to 5-year-olds), lower elementary (grades 1–3), and upper elementary (grades 4–6). The learning levels are flexible and the program can be tailored to meet your needs. For instance, you could include first grade students in the preschool curriculum or fourth grade students in the lower elementary program if that works more effectively for the structure of your Sunday school.

Because all children in preschool through the sixth grade are taught the same Bible story each week, follow-up for a family with children in different grade levels is simplified. In addition, the companion devotionals, *Long Story Short* (Old Testament) and *Old Story New* (New Testament), as well as *The Gospel Story Bible*, follow the same scope and sequence as the curriculum and are designed to be used together.

A 3-year-old who begins with lesson one would finish the first learning level at age 5 before moving up to the lower elementary level where he or she would start all over again with lesson one. After another three years, at age 9, he or she would advance to the upper elementary program and begin a third and final time with lesson one. The idea is to provide a survey of the Bible three times over the course of nine years, each time jumping up a learning level, increasing the depth and challenge of the material as well as adjusting the age-appropriate activities to keep the lessons fun and challenging.

Each learning level of the *Gospel Story* curriculum was written with a specific learning objective. With the youngest group, the preschool children, we are looking to familiarize the children with the Bible stories and help them see God's big plan of salvation in the Bible. The next level, lower elementary, takes a more detailed look at how each of the Bible stories connects to the gospel and to God's larger plan of redemption. With the upper elementary level, we review the same basic instruction but incorporate activities designed to challenge the older child's developing mind, encouraging them to search the Bible text and analyze Scripture for themselves.

Quick Start Guide

AN EASY-TO-FOLLOW LIST TO HELP YOU **P-R-E-P-A-R-E**

P—PRINT OUT THE LESSON.

A printed lesson allows you to make highlights and pencil-in notes to follow in the classroom.

R—READ THE BIBLE PASSAGE AND REVIEW THE LESSON OUTLINE.

Review the lesson and read the assigned Bible passage early in the week to give you time to think through creative ways to present the lesson.

E—EFFICIENTLY GATHER THE ITEMS YOU NEED FOR THE ACTIVITIES.

Gather items in a box or plastic bin during the week as you go about your normally scheduled routine to avoid the last minute rush and extra work.

P—PRACTICE TEACHING ONCE THROUGH AT HOME.

Practice helps you to learn the lesson yourself so that when you present it to your class you will not be so tied down to your notes.

A—ALWAYS REVIEW THE "WHERE IS JESUS?" / "WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?" LESSON PREPARATION SECTIONS.

Understanding how an individual story relates to God's larger plan of redemption is the most important component of your preparation. Know it well so you can fold it into multiple parts of your lesson.

R—READY THE THINGS YOU'LL NEED TO BRING.

Add items you will need for class, e.g., your Bible, to the bin of supplies and inventory your materials the night before you teach.

E—END YOUR WEEK OF PREPARATION WITH A TIME OF PRAYER FOR YOUR CLASS.

Never forget that we are dependent upon God to transform the hearts and lives of the children in our classes.

A Step-by-Step Preschool Lesson Guide

A closer look at the components of a preschool lesson.

LESSON TITLE

The lesson starts out with the lesson number, title, scripture passage, and the main truth the lesson is written to communicate. In the Old Testament curriculum, the lesson number corresponds to the devotional week number and *The Gospel Story Bible* story number. In the New Testament curriculum, the lesson number corresponds to the devotional week number, but *The Gospel Story Bible* number is inserted in your lesson.

LESSON SNAPSHOT

The preschool lesson snapshot provides, at a glance, a simple lesson plan, a timeline for the class, and a list of all the materials you will need to complete the activities and object lessons. If you print out a copy of the Lesson Snapshot you can use it as your lesson plan. You can highlight the object lessons you are planning to use and adjust the times based on the size of your class or the amount of time you are planning to allot for a particular activity.

OPENING ACTIVITY AND INTRODUCTION

Each preschool lesson begins with an opening activity to introduce the Bible lesson for that day. The activities in this section use everyday classroom items like paper and paper clips or common items you would have on hand like a set of keys or a coin. If you are short on time you can always count on the opening activity to be simple and easy to do without much preparation.

BIBLE STORY

Every lesson in the *Gospel Story* curriculum has a corresponding story in *The Gospel Story Bible*. Use the Bible story time to engage the children. Gather the children around you on a rug. Use creativity when reading the story by changing your voice to match that of the characters who are speaking. For example, Goliath would have a deep gruff voice while young David would have a boy's voice. At some point in the story, turn the book around to show the children

the illustration. When you've finished reading the story, show the children the illustration again as you ask them the questions found in the "Let's talk about it" text box.

BIBLE STORY DISCUSSION

Along with the questions in *The Gospel Story Bible*, we've provided additional Bible story questions for every lesson in the curriculum. If you are working with younger preschool children provide them the help they need to answer the questions. Remember, the questions are teaching tools not a test. Consider one of the following creative ways to use these questions with younger children:

- Ask the question and have an adult helper prompt the children with the correct answer.
- Use a puppet and ask it the questions. The puppet can respond with the correct answer quickly on some and enlist the help of the children on others.
- Once you ask a question, give the children clues to help them. If for instance you want them to tell you what God created first you could say, "When we turn on the wall switch at night we get _____?"
- You can tell children the answers to the questions before you read the story, then quiz them when you are through by asking the very same questions. Remember that repetition is an important key to learning.

WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

This section is written to help instruct you as the teacher on how to connect a particular story to God's larger plan of redemption. It is not designed for you to read verbatim to the class. The goal is for you to study and understand how each lesson connects to the broader story line of the Bible. Sometimes this section will give you a related passage that helps to connect the passage of the day with the gospel. Read through this section and look for opportunities to use the information you learn to teach the children how the lesson connects to the gospel.

SNACK AND SNACK QUESTIONS

Younger kids love a snack break. You don't have to prepare elaborate snacks. Simple cookies and juice or pretzels and water are a welcome treat for the children. Always be aware of food allergy restrictions in choosing snacks. We've provided additional questions for you to ask during snack time. Like the Bible story discussion, don't expect them to be able to answer all the questions without help.

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

The Sword Bible Memory program is designed to help families memorize God's Word together month by month. Since we memorize a passage over the course of a month, verses do not always connect to a particular classroom lesson. But, by spending more time on one passage rather than a short time on a new one each week, the children are better able to remember and retain what they memorize.

- Everyone, regardless of age, memorizes verses from the same Bible passage each month.
- The preschool children memorize one verse, the lower elementary school children memorize three verses, and the older elementary school children and their parents memorize the whole passage.
- The verses of each memorization level stand alone.
- As the children move through the curriculum every three years they will have the opportunity to add to passages they have already memorized.
- By the end of the curriculum each child will have memorized 36 passages for a total of over 200 verses. For example, this is how Psalm 23 breaks down:
 - *Preschool*. “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1).
 - *Lower elementary*. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake” (Psalm 23:1-3).
 - *Upper elementary* and parents memorize the entire psalm.

Notice how, at each successive level, a child builds on what she has already learned, and everyone in the family memorizes the same Bible passage together.

ACTIVITIES AND OBJECT LESSONS

The activities and object lessons are designed to help you add creativity to your lesson. Although they are listed in the lesson snapshot toward the end of the lesson, you can use an object lesson any place in your instruction. Consider these options:

- Use the coloring sheet as the opening activity while all of the children arrive.
- Use an object lesson or activity after you finish your Bible story discussion, before the snack.
- Use an object lesson or activity after the snack time before the memory verse.

- Use the object lessons as the curriculum for a large group meeting where you bring two smaller classes together for activities. In that case, you could use the opening activity, Bible story, and discussion portions of the lesson with a smaller group before assembling the kids together for the larger group program.

PRAY

Don't underestimate the importance of demonstrating prayer in your classroom. Prayer at the beginning of the class, after the opening activity and introduction, invites God to bless your class time. Prayer at the end of your class provides an opportunity to invite the children's participation by having one or more of the students thank God for the day's lesson. Prayer also gives you an opportunity to remind the children of the key points of the lesson as you thank God specifically for each one. Finally, remember to pray for the Holy Spirit to touch the hearts and lives of the children.

ADD YOUR OWN TALENTS AND CREATIVITY

Consider using the gifts God has given you to add your own personal touch to the lessons in the following ways:

- **Worship and singing.** If you are gifted musically, you can easily add a time of singing at the beginning or end of the lesson. Children love to sing.
- **Puppets.** Just about every component of the lesson can be enhanced with the use of simple puppets. Children love interacting with puppets. The puppets can help answer questions by giving the children hints, or give the children instructions before an activity, or draw the children in to read from *The Gospel Story Bible*.
- **Props.** A lesson's object lessons and activities are meant to spark your own creativity. Always feel free to enhance an activity or object lesson to make it a better fit for the children. There is nothing like bringing a few extra props to enhance a lesson and help keep a child's interest.
- **Costumes.** Start a costume box where you keep a half-dozen children's costumes. This could be a large plastic storage bin, an old hard side suitcase, or even an old steamer trunk. Fill it with used flat sheets cut to size with neck holes for simple costumes. Include accessories like belts, plastic swords, a king's crown, a few hats or bandannas, and a few phony beards. When you find a good walking staff, add it to your collection by placing it in the corner of a classroom closet or in a corner. Then when it comes time to teach the lesson, throw a few costumes on the kids and move them around acting out the story as you read it from the Bible or *The Gospel Story Bible*. Simple dramas with children do not need scripts, lines, or practice. You will be amazed at how many Bible stories come to life with a simple flat sheet costume and a staff.

Four Key Ingredients of a Well-Taught Lesson

There are four key ingredients to keep in mind when using any grade level of the *Gospel Story* curriculum. If you learn these four key ingredients and incorporate them, you will be amazed at how God will transform the lives of the children in your classroom over time. We start with prayer and end with God's power. In between we prepare our lessons well and present them enthusiastically. The results are in God's hands, but he promises to match our presentation of the gospel with working of his Spirit to change lives. Let's explore these four key ingredients.

INGREDIENT 1: PRAYER

Our work is a partnership with God. We need his grace to reach the children in our class. Solomon said it this way, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). Prayer is a great way to admit our weakness and call out to God for help with the preparation and presentation of our lesson and to move in power in the lives of the children in our class. Consider the amazing promises of Scripture regarding prayer: "This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (1 John 5:14). There is no doubt that it is God's will to reach the next generation with the gospel. So spend time in prayer before each lesson and watch God move in the hearts and lives of your children.

- Pray that God would help you in your preparation.
- Pray that God would help you in your presentation.
- Pray that God would move in power to open the ears and eyes of your children to the gospel message.

INGREDIENT 2: PREPARATION

God tells us in Deuteronomy 6 that we should teach the words of his law diligently to our children. Diligent instruction demands careful preparation. Don't be content with just getting by. The children might not notice that you were flying by the seat of your pants in class, but you'll know. Truth is, teaching a well-prepared lesson is a whole lot more fun than trying to wing it.

Preparation takes time and we are all busy, yet consider these simple tips to help you prepare your lesson without crippling your schedule.

- Read your lesson a week ahead as a part of your Monday morning devotions.
- Make a list of all the items you need for the object lessons you are going to teach and gather them as you travel through your week.
- If you can, practice the object lessons with children, yours or someone else's. Don't worry, they love getting the inside scoop on what is going to happen on Sunday morning.
- After your first run-through with the lesson in hand, try presenting it again to an imaginary classroom audience without reading from your lesson. This is particularly helpful in going through an object lesson with the kids. If you don't review the object lesson and practice you will likely have your eyes focused on the paper instead of engaging the children. Get the main point but do not be tied down to saying everything just as written.

INGREDIENT 3: PRESENTATION

In teaching, Jesus used object lessons and so do we. When Jesus wanted to teach the disciples about God's provision, he told them to consider the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28). When he wanted to make a point about paying taxes, he used a Roman coin and asked the Pharisees whose likeness was stamped on the coin (Matthew 22:20). This method of teaching with stories and object lessons made a deep impression on his audience. Matthew reports "the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28–29).

The *Gospel Story* curriculum is filled with object lessons that are fun for the students and that will help even an inexperienced teacher to look like an expert in the classroom. Here are a few presentation pointers to consider when planning your lesson.

- Remember that you are teaching children, not adults. Children love it when you change your voice to match the character of the person speaking or when you use facial expressions to overstate emotion.
- Stretch your comfort zone. Don't be afraid to put on a simple costume to make a point or to use a puppet with younger children to help them ask or answer a question.
- Repetition is your friend. If there are two object lessons that teach the same thing, don't be afraid to use them both, even back to back. Repetition helps children to retain the truth of the lesson.
- Get the children involved. Ask them questions as you go or have them repeat the main thrust of your lesson.

INGREDIENT 4: POWER

In all our preparation before class and hard work to present our lesson to the class remember that “neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7). Here is the bottom line: we need God’s power to effect change in the hearts and lives of our children. The power to transform a hard heart into a heart for God is found in the message of the gospel directed by the Holy Spirit to the mind of a person. The apostle Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Consider these pointers:

- You don’t have to be an eloquent speaker for God to work mightily through you when you teach. Paul said, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:17–18).
- Expect God to move in the hearts and lives of your children. Share the gospel with confidence. Don’t expect the children to respond immediately. Think of the illustration of the farmer sowing seed and watering the crop: the farmer doesn’t expect to see the shoots spring up the next day, and not every seed planted on the same day sprouts at the same time.
- Avoid calling for immediate outward demonstrations of faith like raising hands as an indication of a decision for Christ. Children are all too eager to please you as their teacher. Watch their lives over time instead. When God saves them, their lives will change. Instead of having them raise their hand, send them back to talk to their mom or dad. Parents are the ones best positioned to discern their child’s true repentance.

Notice how our work, preparation, and presentation, is bracketed by God’s work, first in our asking for his help and lastly in us looking for his power. The *Gospel Story* curriculum is filled with great object lessons but none of them has any power to change the life of a single child. That is why we’ve included gospel connections in every lesson. Remember, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes so that even the least eloquent of teachers can present a life-changing message with eternal results.

A FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that he didn’t come with eloquent wisdom or skilled speech yet he brought a message of power and knew that it was God working through the proclamation of the gospel that changed people’s lives. We teachers simply need to faithfully present the gospel and watch God work. Consider how the hardest granite is worn away by the flow of the smallest stream. Before you too harshly critique any one day’s presentation, rejoice in the fact that a change depends not on you but on God.