

Gospel Story
Upper Elementary
Curriculum

FINDING JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

MARTY MACHOWSKI

ILLUSTRATED BY
A.E. MACHA



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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 Upper Elementary Lesson Guide

A closer look at the components of the upper elementary lessons.

LESSON TITLE

The lesson starts out with the lesson number, title, scripture passage, and the main truth the lesson is written to communicate. The lesson number corresponds to the devotional week number and *The Gospel Story Bible* story number.

LESSON SNAPSHOT

The upper elementary 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.

PREPARING TO TEACH

This section summarizes the Bible passage and gives suggested teaching points. Because everyone instructs children differently we have not provided a script. This is where a bit of good old-fashioned preparation is needed. Each lesson contains three or more points of instruction to help you prepare to teach the class. Try not to read these points directly from the curriculum to your students, but use them instead to teach the important points in the story. Here are a few ideas to help you use these points to prepare a time of instruction for your class:

- *Use an organizing question.* Create a simple question you will answer in your teaching. For instance, in lesson one you say to the class, “Today I want to teach you four things we learn about God from this story.” Then, use each of the four teaching points listed to help you answer the question.
- *Use the “Bible Truth”* from the top of the lesson as the key idea you support with the teaching you present.

- *Take the children back to the Bible.* Have the children open up their Bibles and look at the story in Scripture. Use the teaching points to help you point out the important truths we learn about the passage. Selectively read portions of the story right from the biblical text.
- *Throw in an object lesson.* The object lessons listed in the Activities and Object Lessons section of your lesson will often fit well to illustrate one of the instruction points listed. You can mix and match object lessons with any part of the lesson.
- *Create a children's sermon.* Use the instruction points to create a children's sermon where you first read an excerpt from the text, then give a mini 5–10 minute sermon to the children. You can use an object lesson to open, close, or for a break in the middle. The more you change things up for the children the longer you will hold their attention.
- *Create a discussion.* You can use the instruction points to create a discussion. Pretend the instructional point is the answer and simply give the class the corresponding question. See if they can tell you the answer based on the Bible story you read.

A LITTLE BIT MORE

We've included more detailed facts that you can present in the upper elementary curriculum as part of your teaching preparation. Feel free to drop this extra information into your teaching or save these fun facts for the end if you have extra time.

WHERE IS JESUS?

The “Where Is Jesus?” section helps you connect the Bible story to God's larger plan of redemption. Use it like you would the instructional points. Sometimes “Where Is Jesus?” will give you a second, 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.

OPENING REVIEW

The first component in the Lesson Snapshot is called the Opening Review. During the week it is helpful to review the prior week's lesson and come prepared to ask the children a few review questions to see what they remember. If their family is using one of the companion family devotionals, *Long Story Short* or *Old Story New*, you will be amazed at how much the children can remember. The questions you come up with for review shouldn't be complicated. Always a great way to start is to ask, “Does anyone remember what last week's lesson was about?” The review should not be too formal. Play off the children's answers. If anyone gives a wrong answer simply ask the rest of the class if they can give that particular child a little help.

BIBLE STORY

Since the lesson scripture may be several chapters long, we've suggested scripture excerpts to read as a class. It is usually best that you either read this yourself as even the strongest readers in the upper elementary grades have difficulty with names and places that can bog down the reading of the scripture to the class. If you do utilize children to read the passage, pick the best readers rather than go one by one through the class.

OBJECT LESSONS 1 AND 2

The object lessons are designed to help you add creativity to your lesson. We've tried to place the object lessons in the snapshot in a logical sequence. Those listed as object lesson 1 work best to introduce the lesson or within the context of the teaching. Object lesson 2 is designed to add interest and depth to the teaching. The Lesson Snapshot is only a suggested classroom order. You can reorder the lesson plan to suit your preferences. Consider some of these pointers:

- Make sure to review the supply lists ahead of time and provide what you need for your class.
- There are suggested times next to each object lesson. These times take into consideration both the length of time it will take you to teach through the lesson as well as the administrative time it will take to pass out materials. Remember that the larger your class, the more time it will take.
- If you include a time of singing in your children's ministry program, object lessons work well as a transition to the teaching segment.
- Use an object lesson to break up two blocks of verbal teaching to help keep the children's attention.
- Don't be afraid to get the upper elementary children writing. Writing is a great tool to help you see who comprehends the ideas presented. It promotes the participation of everyone in the class. Be sensitive to those who struggle with writing by only calling on those you are certain have successfully completed a writing task.
- Use an object lesson to illustrate one of the points in your presentation to the children. You can break halfway through to use either object lesson 1 or 2. Or end the time of instruction with an object lesson to see if the children can guess how it connects to all they learned that day.

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 memorize 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!

ACTIVITY TIME

Children love to do activities. Suggested activities will range from drawing a picture or a scene from the Bible story to a more lengthy project the children can do in class. Consider activity time an optional part of the lesson, but if you need to occupy the children for a bit more time, the activity time can help fill that gap.

BONUS OBJECT LESSON

For each lesson we’ve included a bonus object lesson that you can use if you have more time or as a substitute for one of the others. You can use this object lesson anywhere you want or keep it in reserve just in case you finish up with your lesson early and want a time filler. Be sure to monitor the time listed next to the object lesson to help you schedule it into the time you have allotted.

PRAY

Don't underestimate the importance of demonstrating prayer in your classroom. 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.
- **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.