

## **COURSE # 8      UNDERSTANDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT: BIRTH THROUGH ADOLESCENCE (Course Notes)**

In order to work effectively with children, it is important that we understand how children grow and develop. It is helpful to note the characteristics of their growth at different age level.

### **The Beginner Child**

#### Physical

- Vary greatly in their physical development
- Are growing rapidly
- Tire easily
- Cannot sit still for long

#### Mental

- Have an attention span of only one or two minutes
- Learn by active involvement and imitation rather than by instruction
- Learn best one mini-step at a time
- Focus attention on what they see and/or touch

#### Emotional

- Are extremely egocentric — centered in themselves
- Fear separation from parents
- Cry easily; one crying child sets other children crying
- Express their needs by crying. The crying usually stops when the child's needs are met
- Become attached to adults who show love and acceptance of them

#### Spiritual

- Senses attitudes of respect, joy, and anticipation in connection with church, the Bible, and Jesus
- Can identify pictures of Jesus and lip His name
- Will fold hands (briefly) for the blessing before meals and kneel (again briefly) for prayer

#### Developmental Needs

- In addition to the basic needs listed on page 24, two-year-olds need to experience:
- Power—to have a chance to manipulate objects, events, people
  - Freedom—to make choices, to interact in learning situations, to sometimes move about at will
  - Independence—to do some things unaided
  - Security—to feel safe

## **The Kindergarten Child**

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the kindergarten division traditionally has included children ages 4-6. Today, we advocate kindergarten for children ages 3-5, because children of that age range usually attend day care together.

The description below is true of children ages 3-5.

### Physical

- Start developing large muscle coordination
- Lack a sure sense of balance
- Are extremely active
- Tire easily; but soon revive after resting
- Lack fine muscle coordination
- Are curious and like to explore their environment
- Learn by exploring

### Mental

- Are capable of limited listening and understanding without the help of a visual cue, such as seeing the object being discussed
- Have a quick memory
- Memorize things they don't understand

A child's attention span, in minutes, is their age plus one. An average 3-year-old has a potential attention span of four minutes, provided they are interested in what is happening.

- Enjoy repetition—provided they don't tire
- Are beginning to reason from simple cause to effect
- Make some generalizations—often incorrectly
- Learn best by active participation
- Have a short attention span—3-6 minutes

### Emotional

- Cry easily
- Are capable of verbalizing emotional responses
- Learn to delay gratification of needs without losing equilibrium
- Experience the full spectrum of negative emotions
- Learn ways to express negative emotions

### Social/Relational

- Are self-centered—the world revolves around them
- Play alone in the presence of their friends, rather than playing with their friends
- Like to make friends and be with friends

### Developmental Needs

In addition to the basic needs listed on page 24, kindergarten children need:

- Freedom—to choose and to explore within limits
- Power—to have some autonomy in learning situations
- Limits—safe boundaries that are set by parents and teachers
- Fun—learning through play; enjoying success
- Discipline and training—to provide safety and structure in their lives

### Spiritual Needs

Kindergarten children need to know:

- God loves and cares for them
- How to show respect for God
- How to respect themselves; this comes from knowing that God made them, knows them, and values them
- The difference between right and wrong
- How to choose the right with God's help

### The Primary Child

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the primary division has traditionally been for children of grades 2-4. Today we recommend including first graders in primary.

Large churches may have two primary divisions:

Primary I - grades 1, 2 (ages 6-7)

Primary II - grades 3, 4 (ages 8-9)

The following characteristics are typical of primary-age children.

### Physical

- Show good muscle coordination and balance
- Behave in a boisterous and energetic manner
- Learn eye-hand coordination for fine-muscle skills
- Willingly practice so as to learn new skills
- Are somewhat far-sighted until 8-years old
- Are good singers

### Mental

- Like to demonstrate their newly-acquired reading skills; however, many through age 9 need help finding and reading Bible texts
- Are literal thinkers; need objects and pictures to help them understand
- Are learning to distinguish between fact and fancy
- Are curious and observant, asking lots of questions
- Learn best from hands-on experience with concrete objects
- Are capable of prolonged interest and concentration
- Apply simple, logical thought to practical situations
- Memorize easily
- Show an interest in the faraway and long ago
- Have limited understanding of time and historical sequence

Children who begin school late or are home-schooled should be promoted with their age or grade level, at the end of the school year. Children should not be held back.

- Are strongly committed to fairness; want those who break the rules to be punished
- Enjoy discussing experiences and new ideas
- Are fond of stories
- Like using new words

#### Emotional

- Appreciate variety within a fairly stable routine; a complete change of program can upset younger primaries.
- Are learning to control negative emotions, expressing them in socially acceptable ways
- Need adults to model self-control
- Fear death and divorce
- Are motivated by recognition

#### Social/Relational

- Enjoy group games, projects, quizzes, and activities
- Are naturally boisterous and energetic
- Like adults and seek relationships with them; want to please them
- Want to make friends, especially best friends, with their peers
- Can be “little legalists”, wanting to know the rules and to apply them to other people
- Want to belong to clubs and groups; family and church are important to them

#### Spiritual

- Understand some simple religious symbolism
- Have an interest in God
- Willingly believe what the church teaches
- Want to be told what to believe
- Understand enough about sin and salvation to choose Jesus as Savior and best

#### Friend

- Want to please God
- Make prayer a part of daily life if encouraged to do so
- Willingly accept their responsibility as stewards if given the opportunity
- Imitate models of Christian living

#### Developmental Needs

- In addition to their basic needs, primary children have a need to:
- Develop a sense of responsibility
  - Develop a sense of accomplishment
  - Grow in self-esteem
  - Learn social and academic skills
  - Balance personal freedom with parental limits

## Spiritual Needs

Primary children need:

- To know God loves and cares for them
- To develop a personal relationship with Jesus, and see Him as their Friend
- Ready access to God through prayer
- To experience forgiveness and mercy
- Assurance of acceptance with God—without it, they experience fear and guilt
- To know the law of God; they will apply it as a standard of living
- Help to offer mercy and forgiveness to those who wrong them

## The Junior Child

In the Adventist Church, juniors are students in grades 5-6 and are about ages 10, 11. Note some characteristics of a junior child's growth and development:

### Physical

- Mature at different rates; some girls may experience the growth spurt that signals adolescence
- Are energetic, loud, talkative, and imaginative
- Have well-developed verbal skills

### Mental

- Are on the brink of doing abstract thinking
- Like to figure cause and effect
- Have a rapidly-increasing attention span
- Discover ways to answer their own questions
- Need to have abstract words and concepts explained to them
- Begin to question authority
- Are capable of thinking and reasoning

### Emotional

- Lack self-esteem
- Are subject to mood swings
- Get bored unless they see the purpose in what they are doing
- Crave success and affirmation
- Are acquiring values
- Take themselves seriously

Do not call juniors or earliteens students “children.” They refer to each other as “kids” and do not mind being referred to as kids, people, team, troops or gang.

### Social/Relational

- Care about pleasing their peers
- Are hero-worshippers
- Are action-oriented

- Start to develop gender roles

#### Spiritual

- Want Bible teaching to be practical, related to their life
- Are ready to make salvation decisions
- Are developing their consciences
- Feel responsibility for their sins
- Are rule-oriented
- Are looking for adult models

#### Developmental Needs

Juniors have the basic needs of childhood plus the need to:

- Be responsible
- Achieve competence
- Grow in self-esteem
- Master social, academic, and physical skills
- Earn from parents a greater measure of personal freedom

#### Spiritual Needs

Juniors need:

- To know God loves and understands them
- A Savior who can give them victory over sin
- Confirmation that God answers prayer and encouragement to trust Him
- To know what God has done for others and what they personally can expect from Him
- To know how God affects their daily lives
- To experience forgiveness and freedom from guilt

#### Try This...

Tape together sheets from a flip chart or from an end roll of newsprint. Ask a child of the age level that you teach to lie on the paper while you draw around him/her. See how much information you can find out about children of this age, by questioning the child or the children in your class. Record your findings within the outline on the paper. Compare what you found from the child/children to the characteristics noted in this chapter. Are there any similarities? Any differences?

#### **The Earliteen Student**

In the Adventist Church, earliteens are students in grades 7-8 (ages 12, 13). Earliteens are preadolescent; they can behave like adolescents one minute and children, the next. And because kids reach puberty at varying ages, it is difficult to list characteristics that will be true for all. Some earliteen students will look and behave much of the time like juniors; others look and behave more like adolescents. Within this wide range of development, however, certain characteristics hold fairly true.

### Physical

- Mature at widely different rates; girls generally experiencing a growth spurt before boys of the same chronological age
- (Most of them) reach puberty during the early teen years
- Want action and want it now
- Can be quite awkward as they cope with growth spurts
- Often look more grown up than they act

### Mental

- Think in the abstract quite well, but still need examples, synonyms, or word pictures to illustrate new concepts
- Understand symbolism once it has been explained
- Capable of engaging in discussion and debate
- Have long attention span—provided they are interested in the topic
- Test the boundaries of convention and knowledge
- Interested in making money (boys more so than girls)
- Beginning to question everything look for authoritative answers
- Reject illogical reasoning or rules

### Emotional

- Lack self-confidence and self-esteem
- Experience wild mood swings
- Get bored easily
- Be always testing the values they grew up with
- Take themselves seriously
- Appreciate adults who are low-keyed and who joke with them Social/Relational
- Cave in to peer pressure; often afraid to take a stand
- Be somewhat clumsy in relating to each other
- Avoid doing anything in isolation from the group
- Extremely interested in the opposite sex
- Fear being singled out as different
- Seek close friendships within a tight group

### Spiritual

- Question spiritual truths that they previously had accepted
- Challenge religious beliefs while at the same time needing help to clarify them
- Need to make a recommitment to God
- Need constant reminders of God's love and grace
- Need to hear adults talk about their personal faith
- Want a practical religion to live by

### Developmental Needs

- Earliteens have the basic needs of childhood, as described on p. 24, plus the need to
- Collect and sift through information

- Make more of their own decisions
- Express their individuality in various ways (usually with varying degrees of success)
- Crave affirmation
- Need increased freedoms from parental control and corresponding increases in their responsibilities
- Need more time with peers
- Need increased emotional distance from parents
- Need authoritative standards by which to judge right from wrong

### Spiritual Needs

Earliteens need:

- To know that there is a God
- To be told again and again that there is nothing they can do to make God love them more or anything they can do to make Him love them less
- A Savior who can give them victory over sin
- To learn how to forgive and to accept forgiveness
- To experience forgiveness and freedom from guilt
- To be told what is in it for them if they commit to living God's way
- What God has done for others and will do for them
- To admit that they need a Savior

### The Developmental Task for Earliteens

Earliteens are beginning to struggle with the task of discovering their inner, personal identity and making decisions based on their own identity instead of their group's identity. They will continue to struggle with their identity through the high school years.

### Resources

- Betz, Charles H. *How to Teach the Bible with Power*. Review and Herald, 1995.
- Constance, Kamii and Janet Ewing. "Basing Teaching on Piaget's Constructivism." *Childhood Education Annual Theme Issue 1996*, pages 260-262.
- Habenicht, Donna and Anne Bell. *How to Teach Children in Sabbath School*. Review and Herald, 1983.
- Habenicht, Donna. *How to Help Your Child Really Love Jesus*. Review and Herald, 1994.
- Holt, Pat and Grace Ketterman. *Choices Are Not Child's Play*. Harold Shaw Publishers, 1990.
- Louv, Richard. *Childhood's Future*. Anchor Books, 1990.



# Faith Development of Children

Luke's simple statement, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature," (Luke 2:52, NIV) sums up Jesus' development through the ages and stages of childhood. Even more important, the statement clearly recognizes wisdom (mental) and stature (physical) as separate areas of development. But Luke adds, "and in favor with God and man," suggesting spiritual and social growth or faith development.

John H. Westerhoff III likens faith to a tree trunk. The young trunk has few rings; older trunks have many. The rings of faith growth occur as a result of life experiences and in interacting with others and with God. Westerhoff identifies four main stages of faith development.

## 1. Experienced Faith

- **The Key** to experienced faith in early childhood is observation and reaction. Children observe love and faith in their interaction with adults and react to what they experience. At this stage, they are too young to consciously think about faith, but they demonstrate unwavering faith.
- **The Needs** at this stage are to experience trust, love, and acceptance. Little children need a few trusted and loving adults in their lives. Sometimes pets provide the love and acceptance adults are too busy to give.
- **Foster Faith** at this stage through warmth, hugs, active listening, and countless experiences of unconditional love.

## 2. Belonging Faith

- **The Key** to faith for a primary-age child is a sense of belonging. Children of this age have a keen sense of the order of things. They are also great "joiners." They want to belong to a church that is bigger than their family and to clubs within the church.
- **The Needs** for children at this stage of faith development are:
  - \* A sense of authority. They are satisfied to have their "why" questions answered, "because the Bible" or "because the Adventist Church" says so.
  - \* A sense of the community they belong to. Stories of God's working in Bible times and in the beginnings of their church feed the child's growing faith.
  - \* Experiences of awe and wonder, which are partly what worship is about.
  - \* A sense of being wanted at church, being accepted by their teachers and peers, and are missed when absent.
- **Foster Faith** by filling the above needs through stories, drama, art, and creative worship experiences in a warm, accepting atmosphere.

### 3. Searching Faith

- **The Key** element of the adolescent's searching faith is critical judgment. For the pre-adolescent, quoting authorities is not enough. They want to examine all the information for themselves.
- **The Needs** at this stage of faith development are:
  - \* To establish their own identity. They are questioning and examining their beliefs, their lifestyle, their appearance, all authority, and anything they identify with, in an effort to define themselves.
  - \* To know that the religion of the head is equal to the religion of the heart. This compels kids to ask searching questions that challenge the adult's beliefs. They become critical of any explanations that cannot be supported by logic, good sense, and scientific inquiry. Adults need to accept the questions without feeling threatened, working with the kids to find the answers.  
To be needed in the faith community.
- **Foster Faith** in adolescents through serious Bible study, short-term journeys, mission trips and service opportunities.

### 4. Owned Faith

- **The Keys** to a lasting faith for the adult are: conversion, witnessing, and discipleship. While conversion in pre-adolescence or childhood was real, the individual experiences it again in terms of a faith that they have taken responsibility for and ownership of.
- **The Needs** in adulthood are to be an example, to find opportunities to witness by word and by lifestyle, and to help others put faith to work.
- **Foster Faith** through teaching opportunities and social action as well as by personal Bible study and prayer.

### How Children Think

Let's take a look at how children think at various stages and relate those patterns to their spiritual experience. Four stages of thinking, from birth through teen years, are briefly described with suggestions on how to instruct learners at each stage.

The model is borrowed from Swiss developmental psychologist, Jean Piaget, who helped us understand how people think at various stages of cognitive development.

"Labeling individuals for their stage of development is not helpful. Neither should one view one stage of faith development as being better or worse than another."  
—Barbara Manspeaker

## **Stage I—Birth to two years**

For the first two years of life a child's ability to understand is based on exploration of the world through the senses. The child learns about objects by placing them into the mouth, banging things together or dropping them on the floor.

The child watches an object being moved about the room and notices if the object remains the same or is changed. Sitting up, crawling, walking, climbing and running are also means of discovery. A Stage I thinker processes only what the senses focus on.

When teaching Stage I Learners...

- Plan physical activities like walking to God's house or having a classroom "nature" walk.
- Give children objects to touch. The objects should be large enough that they cannot swallow.
- Vary activities by alternating action with quiet or listening activities.
- Provide a variety of materials and textures for the child to handle.
- Use familiar materials to attract their attention—relate the object or experience to spiritual concepts, such as: God's love, creation, or their praise and thanksgiving.
- Keep calm in every situation. Speak quietly; avoid hurry. Proceed at a child's pace.
- Model for them how to express their feelings to God. Show a variety of flowers, then pray, "Jesus, we thank you for the flowers." They may try to repeat it with you!
- Give clear impressions by repeating stories in exact words. Use visuals and activities to focus their attention on the story.
- Speak of Jesus as a friend. Help the child feel confident of His love.

## **Stage II—Ages two to seven**

From the ages of two to seven, a child's thinking can operate independently from the body's senses. During this time, a child's imagination seems to know no boundaries—simple objects like a pencil or a block of wood can be transformed instantly into a plane, dog, banana or a shooting star!

Not surprisingly, the child's thinking is quite inaccurate. Space relationships aren't fully understood — tall is big and large is valuable. If asked to choose between a nickel and a dime, the Stage II child will pick up a nickel "because it's bigger" and therefore more valuable.

Gullibility also characterizes a child in Stage II. Santa Claus is a real person and so is the tooth fairy. Talking animals, though unrealistic, fit the ways that children naturally think at this stage. Stage II thinkers find the Bible story of Balaam's donkey and the great fish that swallowed Jonah to be completely appropriate ways for God to communicate. Miracles are entirely credible to these young minds.

No problem is too big for their God to handle—they pray in absolute confidence. This characteristic of children is surely what Jesus referred to in Matthew 18:3, “Except you become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

A Stage II thinker accepts God as a real person and accepts and returns His love. Children at this age want to please God and can choose Jesus as their friend. But they are also very literal. This is illustrated by the little boy who said, when the doctor asked to listen to the boy’s heart, “I don’t have a heart. I gave it to Jesus.”

When Teaching Stage II Learners...

- Plan varied activities by mixing action activities with quiet, “processing” times.
- Teach through dramatic play—they learn by doing!
- Emphasize Bible truths of sharing and helping. Show how they can please Jesus through their acts of kindness. Adopt a class service project (for older members).
- Teach them to express joy and praise to God through music.
- Give them opportunities to think! Present a problem and let them solve it on their level of understanding. Give them time to reason out an answer and then explain their solution.
- Present the lesson so the students can place themselves “in” the story—relate the lesson to their daily life.

### **Stage III—Ages seven to eleven**

From approximately the age of seven to the age of eleven (or even later) a child’s thinking ability centers on what is concrete and tangible. What is real is what is experienced.

As relieved as adults might be that the child has become more realistic, the realism comes with a certain loss. If what is real is what is experienced, then is God real?

These Stage III children seek first-hand confirmation of what they learn. When the pastor shares that Jesus is in heaven interceding on our behalf, these children ask: “If Jesus is in heaven, how can He simultaneously help the person who is homeless or in prison?”

Although some childish perspectives drop away, these years are a fertile time for information storage. This is the age when memorization is quick and facts are easily remembered. Bible quizzes, Bible sword drills and other Scripture contests are popular.

“Loving” God must be spelled out in concrete terms for these students. That’s why simple service projects are so enthusiastically supported. The Ten Commandments can be appreciated because they are so straightforward; but the Sermon on the Mount, with all its multiple applications, is a bit confusing.

“Stage III thinkers are not only literalists: they tend to be little legalists. Preoccupied with questions of right and wrong, they want behavior spelled out in rules—which they galdly apply to others.”

—Noelene Johnsson

Symbols are not well understood at this stage. When you share passionately what the cross means to you, a Stage III student is amazed that anyone can get so emotional about two pieces of wood! And the Communion service is tasteless wheat crackers with only a swallow of grape juice!

Their most difficult questions have to do with whether or not we will need wings to fly in heaven, or if our pets will be there.

When Teaching Stage III Learners...

- Show how they can use their energy for the Lord! Organize a class service project.
- Make handwork purposeful—with practical use and a connection to the lesson.
- Provide variety in your lesson presentation and surprise them by occasionally changing the order of your class routine.
- Use drama, role plays, and readings that pose a situation or problem for them to solve.
- Help them feel secure in God’s love. Affirm their special gifts.
- Explain the “why” of rules.
- Boys this age admire strength and power. Show them how God enabled men and women in the Bible to be strong to do His will. Encourage Bible reading as a “faith-strengthening” exercise.
- Present short biographies of godly heroes for them to imitate.

#### **Stage IV—Age eleven through the teen years**

Stage IV thinking comes gradually. It may begin as early as 11 years of age, but for most it occurs during the teen years. Physiologically, the left and right half of the brain fuse together. The person is finally able to think about thinking! Logic and abstract thought become possible and symbols can be understood rather than just memorized.

How can you tell when a person is moving into Stage IV thinking? They start asking questions! Everything is “Why?” Rather than preventing, ignoring, or disdaining this question, it’s best to encourage their questions so issues can be discussed within the home, school or church. This is the age for using Talk Sheets and discussion starters in a small group setting.

When Teaching Stage IV Learners...

- Listen when they talk.
- Remember your own teen experiences and relate them when relevant.

- Keep a sense of humor.
- Don't overreact. Teens love to share controversial ideas just to see your reaction!
- Truly care about them. Arrange group activities outside of the classroom situation.
- Avoid using abstract Christian jargon.
- Keep the program active and varied to keep their interest.
- Use Bible Learning Activities (see Chapter 7), interactive video, Talk Sheets, etc.

### Buried Alive!

Ahead of time, bring to junior class stacks of newspapers, garbage bags, and a blanket.

Divide the class into groups of 4-6. One person from each group lies on the floor (or blanket) with arms outstretched. The others gather around and toss newspapers on the person until they are completely covered. Halt the activity when the bodies are sufficiently buried. (Make sure they can still breathe!)

The "buried" person stays under the newspapers while classmates discuss the kinds of things kids can feel buried under (parent's expectations, school pressure, work, guilt, sin). Kids now break out from their cover. How does it feel to be free of all the clutter? Read Luke 16:13.

### Try This...

Scan this chart for an overview of the eight life stages, their tasks and resulting virtue.

The Life Stages	How Achieved	Developmental Task	Resulting Virtue
Infants through First Year	Trust is learned when their physical and emotional needs are anticipated and met.*	Hope	To learn trust
Second Year	Autonomy is learned as they begin doing things for themselves.	Right use of the will	To become autonomous
Third through Fifth Years	They gain self-confidence as they take initiative to follow through on tasks.	Self-confidence	To develop initiative
Sixth Year through Puberty	Completing job assignments, learning to become industrious	Competence	To become

recognition for both effort and results.

Adolescence	Learning one's place in family, school and church. Discovering one's gifts and talents.	To identify one's role	Loyalty
Young Adult	Learning the value of shared love and commitment.	To learn intimacy	Love
Middle Age	Taking part in service work; share expertise with others.	To be productive for the good of self and others	Caring
Old Age	By passing on virtues, accepting changes that can and cannot be made; accepting death.	To maintain integrity	Wisdom

Swiss educational psychologist, Jean Piaget, suggested eight stages in a person's life. He named the stages according to the chief developmental task of each stage. The favorable outcome of mastering the task is a virtue—a positive character trait. A person who masters each stage of development is systematically developing character. So perhaps Luke's "in favor with God and man" suggests character development. Notice that faith—as in trust—is foundational to character development. Psychologists tell us that mastery of each successive virtue is dependent upon mastery of the previous tasks.

\*Children who learn to trust that their needs will be met have faith in their providers. This faith, initially conferred on humans, can eventually be transferred to the One who fills all our human needs.

#### Resources

- Betz, Charles H. *How to Teach the Bible with Power*. Review and Herald, 1995.
- Case, Steve. *It's My Choice - Junior Baptismal Guide*. Review and Herald, 1996.
- Children's Ministries Department, North American Division. *Coming to Jesus, Growing in Him* booklet. AdventSource, 1992.
- Habenicht, Donna. *How to Help Your Child Really Love Jesus*. Review and Herald, 1994.
- Habenicht, Donna and Anne Bell. *How to Teach Children in Sabbath School*. Review and Herald, 1983.
- Strommen, Merle P. *Four Imperatives: Youth and Family Ministry*. Augsburg Youth and Family Institute, 1991.







facts and figures

5. I tend to rely on  
\_\_\_\_ a. my feelings    \_\_\_\_ b. my judgment    \_\_\_\_ c. common sense    \_\_\_\_ d. my intuition

6. I most enjoy in a learning situation  
\_\_\_\_ a. small group discussions    \_\_\_\_ b. accuracy and orderliness    \_\_\_\_ c. exploring possible solutions    \_\_\_\_ d. self-reliance

7. When faced with problems, I  
\_\_\_\_ a. seek input from peers    \_\_\_\_ b. seek logical solutions    \_\_\_\_ c. seek practical solutions    \_\_\_\_ d. act on hunches

8. In choosing solutions, I look for  
\_\_\_\_ a. agreement    \_\_\_\_ b. accuracy    \_\_\_\_ c. efficiency    \_\_\_\_ d. predicted results

9. When I buy, I am most influenced by  
\_\_\_\_ a. the salesperson    \_\_\_\_ b. Consumer Reports    \_\_\_\_ c. the test drive plus warranty    \_\_\_\_ d. impulse

10. I identify with  
\_\_\_\_ a. caring people    \_\_\_\_ b. knowledgeable people    \_\_\_\_ c. sensible people—  
problem    \_\_\_\_ d. enterprising people  
solvers, efficient people

11. I am:  
\_\_\_\_ a. a people person    \_\_\_\_ b. a logical person    \_\_\_\_ c. a practical person  
\_\_\_\_ d. an enthusiastic person

12. When dealing with new information, I like to:  
\_\_\_\_ a. file it for future use    \_\_\_\_ b. analyze it    \_\_\_\_ c. apply it to new situations  
\_\_\_\_ d. put it to practical use  
\_\_\_\_ Total Column 1    \_\_\_\_ Total Column 2    \_\_\_\_ Total Column 3    \_\_\_\_ Total Column 4

Preferred Learning Style Inventory

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Whether learning or teaching, you'll feel most comfortable using your preferred learning style. One of the greatest benefits of knowing and using the various learning styles is that we are more able to reach ALL of God's children.

So, what is your learning style? To find out your preferred learning style, take the simple learning style inventory on pp. 56-57.

### Learning Styles Inventory

The four columns relate to the four learning styles. The column with the highest total is your preferred style. You will discover that you use a combination of several learning styles, though one style usually predominates.

Column 1	Innovative Learner	Style 1
Column 2	Analytic Learner	Style 2
Column 3	Common Sense Learner	Style 3
Column 4	Dynamic Learner	Style 4

### Kids with Styles

Do not group your students according to their learning styles.

You do not know for certain what their personal style is. Besides, mixing the various styles enriches the overall learning experience for all members of your class.

### The Four Learning Styles

#### Innovative Learners

Learn by listening and observing. Want reasons to learn.

Strengths: Have imaginative ability. Understand people. Recognize problems.

Brainstorm. These people are often the conscience of the group — prophets. They are usually concerned with relationships between people. They will not walk out of a class or meeting for fear of hurting someone's feelings.

Likes: Small group interaction, mimes, role-playing, team sports, simulation. Use in Sabbath School: arts and crafts, creative writing, role plays.

Dislikes: Timed tests, debates, computer-intensive education, lack of artistic expression.

Weaknesses: Files away information instead of acting on it. Reluctant to make decisions.

Can be paralyzed by alternatives. Sometimes fails to recognize problems and opportunities.

Learning Question: Answer the question "Why do I need to learn this?" at the start of the lesson so the student will be motivated to learn.

Teaching Tip: Respect their feelings, affirm them, take them into your confidence. Let them know what they are supposed to do and assume they are going to follow through.

#### Analytic Learners

Learn by abstract conceptualization. They are usually thinkers. Want to learn content.

Strengths: Good at planning, creating models, defining problems and developing theories.

They like to reason inductively.

Likes: Programmed instruction, well-organized lectures/stories, competition, demonstrations, objective tests. Use in Sabbath School: quizzes, discussions, abstract Bible studies, personal inventories, coded scriptures and puzzles.

Dislikes: Role-playing, group projects, teachers who don't stay on the task, true/false questions.

Weaknesses: Can be so involved in abstract thinking that they don't make good practical applications. When learning to do something, they may read books and study up on it, but never get around to doing it.

Learning Question: "What do I need to learn?"

Teaching Tip: These learners want direct, no-nonsense communication. Explain the reasons for their assignments and rules and give them an opportunity to explain their reasons for behavior that you might question. Back up your explanation with facts and quotes from experts. Style 2 learners respond well to established routines and rules, particularly if they had a say in establishing them.

### Common Sense Learners

Learn through direct hands-on experiences. Want to process the content and apply it to new situations.

Strengths: Good at problem-solving, decision-making, deductive reasoning and applying new ideas to new situations. Likes to help plan a program and carry out instructions with a minimum of adult help.

Likes: Problem-solving, debates, logic problems, independent study, experiments. Use in Sabbath School: experiments, something to make, drama/writing/planning, problems to solve,

role-playing involving application of the lesson to everyday life.

Dislikes: Memorizing, reading assignments, group work, writing assignments.

Weaknesses: May solve the wrong problem; may make hasty decisions; have lack of focus, no testing of ideas, scattered thoughts.

Learning Question: "How do I use the information?"

Teaching Tip: They want to get right to the point! Don't give them a long history of the problem or assignment. These learners respond well to time limits. They appreciate knowing that they have your support. Allow them some latitude, some choice in completing your assignment.

### Dynamic Learners

Learn by starting right in and doing it. Like to see, hear, touch and feel. Want to use content. Want to produce results.

Strengths: Are result-oriented. Like getting things done. They take leadership, are good at explaining policies, make great salespeople. They take risks. May have to redo the job because they didn't plan sufficiently before starting.

Likes: Case studies, reflective thinking, dramatics, producing creative products, assignments requiring originality, multiple choice and true/false questions. Use in Sabbath School: hands-on activities, real-life simulations, carrying out/producing a drama, planning of real-life events, listing and organizing material.

Dislikes: Seating charts, assignments without options, standard routine, activities done in haste.

Weaknesses: Begins lots of jobs but don't complete them on time. Trivial improvements, meaningless activities. Planning is impractical and not always goal-oriented.

Learning Question: Answer the question "What if?" Get students thinking of other possibilities. Let them teach what they have learned.

Teaching Tip: These students often come across as trying to find a way around your directives. They are looking for a "what-if" opportunity. What if I do it differently? What if I do something else? So be firm. Speak with confidence; be businesslike. And spell out the bottom line—what is the minimum requirement? Then offer contests/rewards as an incentive to challenge them to do more. Expect them to be responsible. Seek their advice or opinion on minor things but insist on that bottom line.

### Learning Alert!

If you are a Style 4 teacher, your intuitive or analytic learners are likely to irritate you. Likewise, if you are an intellectual, traditional Style 2 teacher, you are likely to frustrate Style 4 learners, unless you plan for their learning style.

### Learning Styles—So What?

Understanding learning styles helps you make each classroom activity as palatable as possible for all styles. If you mix activities and match activities so as to appeal to different styles you can RELAX. Learners will be happy if at least one activity per class presentation appeals to their learning style.

Finally, learning styles are not meant to predict behavior, attitudes or results. But they do tell us that learners:

- Learn in different ways
- Have varying needs
- Appreciate a choice of activities and approaches
- Need practice using all styles of learning activities

### Try This!

Plan an active family worship around one specific Bible verse. Choose an activity for each learning style. Let everyone choose which activity to do.

For instance: Style 1—create a poster or poem, Style 2—write a prayer or a quiz, Style 3—rewrite the verse in today's kid talk, Style 4—role play the verse's meaning.

### Resources

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McCarthy, Bernice. The 4 Mat. System. Teaching to Learning Styles with Right/Left Mode Techniques. Excel, Inc. 1980, 1987.

Roehlkepartain, Joelene. Children's Ministry That Works! The Basics and Beyond. Group Publishing, Inc., 1991.

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Learning Styles Network Newsletter. St. John's University, Grand Central & Utopia Parkways, Jamaica, NY 11439.

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## XVIII. Modes of Learning

All of us learn through our senses. Our brains process information provided by our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and touch sensors. Just as we each possess a preferred learning style or way of perceiving and dealing with ideas, so we also have a favored mode or vehicle of learning—visual (sight), auditory (sound), kinesthetic (touch) or experiential (experiencing). In a specific learning situation, a person will prefer to use one of the four modes.

The lecture-style class assumes that all prefer the auditory mode. Actually, most people prefer the visual mode over the auditory. They want to see instead of just listening. Others may prefer to touch and feel or even to learn by experiencing and solving real life problems.

“The more we understand ourselves and our own mode of learning, the better equipped we will be to teach others.”

—Barbara Manspeaker

Most learners do not use one mode exclusively but different modes in different learning situations. For instance, a child may learn a memory verse best when hearing it said or sung many times. However, the same person may prefer to study the lesson by reading it from the quarterly.

Everyone has one mode that tends to be dominant. A person pursues that mode in most learning situations because it is the most comfortable and productive. Students learn best and enjoy learning the most when they are learning in the mode for which they have a preference.

### Finding Your Preferred Learning Mode

Directions: Discover your own preferred mode of learning. Circle the letter for the response you would enjoy most.

1. I would prefer to
  - a. Listen to a story on tape
  - b. Watch a story on video
  - c. Prepare a special contribution that kids put on for adults
  - d. Make something to illustrate a story
  
2. When I learn something new, I want to
  - a. Hear someone explain it
  - b. Read the text for myself
  - c. Use the information in real life
  - d. Touch the real thing and maybe take it apart
  
3. When assembling something the first time, I usually need only to
  - a. Hear someone describe what to do
  - b. See a picture or diagram

- c. Read the directions one step at a time as I fit the pieces together
  - d. Figure out what to do by fitting the parts together
4. I prefer a lecturer to
- a. Tell the various points she is making without interruption
  - b. Demonstrate the points she is making so I can see what she is talking about
  - c. Let me get involved with solving a real problem and then make the main points in the context of the problem
  - d. Use models and objects to make the point and let me hold them
5. My favorite learning activity involves
- a. Listening to audio tapes
  - b. Watching a video
  - c. Planning and preparing a TV show
  - d. Making a craft
6. If I need to learn how to get somewhere, I
- a. Ask someone to tell me the best way to go
  - b. Ask someone to draw a simple map
  - c. Get a map, start out, and maybe ask if I get lost
  - d. Ask or read the directions and draw my own map

#### What is Your Mode?

If you scored 6 of one letter, you undoubtedly prefer the learning style listed beside that letter below; 4-5 indicates a probable preference for that style; 1-3 indicates you do not show a strong preference for that style. If your scores were distributed among the three or four styles, you are a multi-sensory learner and like to use all modes.

- a. auditory mode
- b. visual mode
- c. experiential learner
- d. kinesthetic learner

#### Understanding the Modes

In describing the first three modes we could simply say: the visual learner wants to see, the auditory learner wants to hear, and the kinesthetic learner must touch. The experiential learner, on the other hand, gets totally involved in the process of accomplishing a task, often using all three modes simultaneously as she experiences the learning concept in a more practical way.

Hearing, seeing, and touching involve the senses, but the experiential mode involves more; it puts learning into a real life context, thus giving experiential learning a distinction of its own.



We should not categorize any child into a single learning mode. Instead, we should encourage them to try additional ways of comprehending and absorbing knowledge.

#### Learning Takes Place When...

- Visual learners are encouraged to observe something from all angles.
- Kinesthetic learning takes place when we allow children to handle and manipulate something from which they can learn.
- Experiential learning occurs when a student wants to take the object apart to understand how it works or goes together.
- Auditory learning takes place when a child picks up a working model and listens to the sound it makes as well as when the student listens to the teacher's answers to student questions. Auditory learning also takes place when students listen to other students describe what they will make, tell what they have made, or what they learned from an activity.

#### Using the Modes to Give Directions Using the Modes to Give Directions

##### Mode Use When... Example

Auditory Giving routine directions Moving to an activity center, say: "It's time to go (wherever)."

Tell who goes where.

Signaling a transition When it's time for young children to sing, pray, clean up, etc.,

use a song as the cue. The song introduces the required actions.

Giving directions at a self-directed learning center. Record simple directions on audio tape. Leave in a tape player

ready for non-readers to play. At the end of your instructions, tell the user how to rewind and play the tape again.

Visual Explaining a procedure When giving instructions for individual or small group activi-

ties, have the directions written out for the students to read.

Or for non-readers, draw a picture for each step; number the steps. Or demonstrate the procedure so all can see.

**Kinesthetic** Learning the steps in a process      Students work along with the teacher. Tell them the next step when they have completed the previous step. Students then do the whole process.

**Experiential** Kids begin unassisted activities and projects.      The students may be told the expected outcome (e.g. to make a pyramid) but not how to. They figure out a procedure as they accomplish the task. (In so doing, they learn creativity, organizational skills, etc.)\*

\*Note: When students assist in routine tasks, such as assembling and passing out supplies, they are engaged in experiential learning. Cooperation, service, and responsibility are the by-product.

### Alive in a Fiery Furnace

You can tell the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego using all the modes of learning!

**Visual:** Replace the light bulb in your primary classroom with a red light bulb before children arrive. This will create a fiery glow as though they are entering a fiery furnace.

**Auditory:** Give each child a sheet of stiff cellophane paper. As you tell the story, have them crinkle their paper to make the sounds of crackling fire.

**Kinesthetic:** Have kids tell stories about times they touched something very hot, such as a stove. Ask them what happened and how it felt.

**Experiential:** Pour Liquid Smoke (available at grocery stores) into a bowl and have children dip their fingers into it before you tell the story. As you tell the story, have them smell their fingers and imagine what it might have smelled like in the fiery furnace.

### Visual Learners

Who they are. Visual learners approach learning through the eyes. These people see pictures in their heads. The pictures help them to understand and remember. They visualize a Bible event, “seeing” the scene and action as the story is told or read. This helps it become a permanent memory. Imagination enhances the visual learning process. Because visual learners “see” the scene in their minds, they remember what the scenes “look” like. A typical visual learner tends to be good at both observing details and remembering them.

What they say. The visual learner is likely to use the following phrases frequently in conversation:

“Guess what I saw!”  
“Look at it this way...”  
“Picture it...”  
“Do you see...”  
“I see...”  
“Show me...”  
“It looks like ...”

Identifying characteristics. Visual learners are likely to choose a seat where they can see all that is going on. They feel frustrated if they can't see and tend to have a shorter attention span for activities that are not enhanced by visual aids. They will ask you to repeat directions over and over unless they can read them.

Ways to teach visual learners. Paint word pictures when you must speak without visual aids. Explain the unseen by comparing it to something familiar. Provide details of size, shape, and color. Any of the following are helpful for visual learners:

- Felts or pictures to illustrate a story
- Object lessons
- Dramatizations, skits, or role play
- Videos or films
- Illustrated songbooks for teaching songs
- Illustrated poems
- Diagrams, time lines, charts and graphs for older children
- Maps to help locate places
- Decorations that enhance what you teach - banners, posters, photographs
- Flip charts, black/white boards or overheads to record key words
- Overhead transparencies for pictures, silhouettes or writing
- Displays and dioramas to teach mission, Bible settings, and nature
- Printed directions for activities, such as crafts
- Drawings that illustrate steps in a procedure

Try This...

Teach this week's Sabbath School lesson (or an Adventurer Club lesson) using three of the visuals listed above. When the lesson is done, ask the students what they learned and how they felt about the activities. Try to determine whether or not the children are visual learners.

### Auditory Learners

Who they are. Auditory learners are like tape recorders. Their minds record what they hear and also process the information and remember it. Auditory learners often hear sounds, such as voice inflections and word parts, more acutely than others. Generally, they hear it once and remember. Verbal directions are no problem; they don't care in the least whether they are written down or illustrated. Their mental cassette tapes are

generally long enough to remember everything they need to know and they generally have good verbalization skills. Sound effects accompanying a presentation are very effective and enjoyable for them.

What they say. The auditory learner may use the following phrases frequently:

“I hear...”

“It sounds like...”

“Listen to...”

“It says...”

“Something tells me...”

“Tell me...”

“I’d like to hear...”

“Describe what...”

Identifying characteristics. The auditory learner will tend to sit in the back of a classroom because listening is enough for them. They are the ones most likely to “listen” to what the teacher says. When teaching new songs, they need to listen three to four times before singing the song.

Ways to teach auditory learners. Any of the following activities are likely to be effective with auditory learners.

- Brainstorming ideas
- Debates and simulated committees where they take a position and defend it
- Audio cassettes to listen to and to record themselves
- Choral readings or responsive readings
- Oral quizzes
  - Songs that teach, such as Psalm 23 or Books of the Bible
  - Play a game identifying sounds
  - Guided discussions in which they answer questions and share opinions
  - Memory verses set to music (they may even fit a verse to music)
- Tell stories or give a talk
  - Listening games
  - Oral reports of research, trips, experiences
  - Radio/TV interviews, newscasts, talk shows as on-the-spot simulations
  - Scenarios they complete by telling the outcome or giving advice
  - Skits where they have a speaking part

Try This...

Play a story tape for students which they have never heard. When it is over, quiz the children on what they heard and learned. Try to identify your auditory learners.

### Kinesthetic Learners

Who they are. Kinesthetic learners are hands-on people. These are the “muscle” people. The physical and the mental team up together to help the student learn, to give

meaning and purpose to knowledge. As she handles, creates, or takes apart something, her brain is processing the information and memorizing. Her small-motor skills, such as writing and cutting with scissors, develop somewhat earlier than average. She finds enjoyment in coloring, cutting, pasting, and writing. She may have trouble following directions and will become restless and inattentive during long inactive sessions.

What they say. The kinesthetic learner may use the following feeling words or phrases frequently:

- “It feels...”
- “I’m in touch with...”
- “It rubs me...”
- “How do you feel about...”
- “Let me examine...”
- “May I touch...”
- “May I play...”
- “May I handle...”
- “I made...”
- “May I make...”

Learning characteristics. This learner often chooses to sit close to the action so as not to miss any opportunity to touch. She will ask to color, cut, paste, write, take it apart and may sometimes simply sit and touch.

Try This...

Ask students to write a story, draw a picture, or make something that shows Jesus’ love for them. Try to identify your kinesthetic learners.

Ways to teach kinesthetic learners. Use some of the following activities according to the developmental stage of the learner:

- Creative writing projects, such as stories, poems, news stories
- Craft projects including mobiles, balloon art, and modeling with clay
- Activity sheets on the lesson
- Word puzzles, such as coded messages, seek a word, acrostics, etc.
- Diagrams, maps, and cartoons that students make
- Collages to cut and paste
- Interviews, surveys, and evaluations they do
- Research in the Bible, concordance, dictionary, and atlas with written reports
- Written tests
- Posters they make in groups
- Art projects
- Jigsaw and other manipulative puzzles
- Graffiti boards they take charge of
- Lists to make

## The Experiential Learner

Who they are. Students who like to be involved in practical, real life situations. These are the children who like to use a combination of learning modes to achieve something practical. They get totally involved in the learning process. They receive satisfaction from fixing things without help and like to do practical things correctly. One may offer to clean up and put away; another, to make and serve snacks. If the class is doing a skit or play, these are the people who pull the curtains, run the sound system, make and sell tickets, and maybe even direct the play.

Ways to teach experiential learners. Involve them in class projects and situations such as the following:

- Religious TV shows the kids prepare and maybe even videotape themselves
- Creative dramatics, such as skits, role plays, and charades
- Game show simulations
- Hands-on service projects
- Field trips
- Group projects
- Nursing home, hospital, or shut-in visits
- Prayer bands, prayer journals
- Fund raisers for missions, either local or foreign
- Interactive stories with dramatization and sound effects
- Life simulating games
- Programs for adults, such as open house at their Sabbath School

“We should seek to make learning both experiential and multi-sensory in approach as often as possible.”

—Barbara Manspeaker

## Planning Multi-sensory, Active Learning for All Modes

Multi-sensory learning provides activities and experiences for all modes of learning so students can learn the way they prefer. To teach an effective Bible lesson, the teacher need not identify each child's preferred mode. Instead, the teacher plans learning activities making sure each mode is favored in at least one activity.

For example, when teaching young children the story of Christ's birth, the children might listen (auditory mode) to the story and at the same time see (visual mode) a picture of it. They might help to act out the Bible story (experiential mode) before they listen (auditory mode) to a memory verse song tape. Finally they will make (kinesthetic mode) a memory verse bookmark to take home and share (experiential mode) with a neighbor.

Educators recommend a multi-sensory, active learning environment to help children use all their available modes of learning—a challenge to every Children's Ministries leader and teacher!

Try This...

Get a copy of Linnea Torkelsen's, *Who Cares? A Zillion Ways You Can Meet the Needs of People Around You* (AdventSource). This little book contains dozens of service projects that have been adult approved and kid tested! They are a great way to let kids experience service. Choose a project that matches the unique gifts in your local group and follow through to the completion of the project in a live setting.

#### Resources

Case, Steve and Fred Cornforth. *Hands-On Service Ideas for Youth Groups*. Group Publishing, 1996.

Torkelsen, Linnea. *Who Cares? A Zillion Ways You Can Meet the Needs of People Around You*. AdventSource, 1996.

## Active Learning

“OK, there’s a child that sits in your Sabbath School or Pathfinder class that begins to irritate the daylights out of all the other children. They begin to distract, punch or kick to get attention and you’re saying: ‘Johnnie, be still, dear. Johnnie...Johnnie, now listen...’

And because you had to keep talking to him, by the end of class, you’re ready to string him up by his toenails. Have you had this experience?

“Many times I work with teachers who come in and say they are doing the same things with children they were doing in the 50’s or 60’s. Somehow they don’t seem able to manage. The class is falling apart, and they say to me ‘Why? I’m not doing anything different than I was when I started. I’m doing the same thing I did back then (in the 60’s). How come it’s not working now?’

I have to tell them, ‘You’re dealing in a very different time, and that’s exactly your problem. You’re not doing anything differently.’”

—Mayra Rodriguez

So we need to teach differently. How different? What are we supposed to do? Before answering that question, we must look closely at how children learn.

### Children Remember What They Do

The Sunoco Company sponsored research to study how people learn. They first instructed a group of adults by using a tape recording. Three hours later, the adults could remember 70 percent of what they had heard. But three days later, they could recall only 10 percent of the content.

The next learning session involved visual learning only. Three hours later the adults remembered 72 percent of the material; three days later 20 percent.

In the third learning test both hearing and seeing were involved. Three hours later recall was up to 85 percent; 3 days later, 65 percent.

The fourth test involved learning by doing. Immediate recall was 95 percent; after three days, 90 percent.

The study clearly shows that people learn best by doing (experiencing) and least well by listening to a lecture. However, visual aids can dramatically increase the learning value of a lecture. The implications for Children’s Ministries are clear:

- There must be less teacher talk and more student participation in learning.
- Teachers should be more like coaches than lecturers.
- The task of the teacher is not to deliver knowledge but to create learning situations for the students.

Sometimes referred to as active, inductive or discovery learning, this style of teaching creates an environment where students are presented with an activity or problem



and then engaged in responding to or solving it. Teachers can then guide students through a process of self-discovery.

### The Discovery-style Lesson

In discovery learning the teacher has a goal (objective) to help students understand specific Bible truth based on a specific Bible story and scripture texts. Having clearly understood the objective, the teacher plans activities that will help students explore the meaning of the scripture.

The object of the discovery learning activities is to help prepare kids' minds for the concept you want them to understand, or to familiarize them with the text. The activities may also help kids to relate the lesson to their own life experience.

When each activity is completed, the teacher debriefs the student by asking questions about what the student learned. Sometimes what the kids learn is quite different from what the teacher had in mind. Knowing this helps the teacher to either carry on in the direction the kids are headed, or to focus them in another direction.

### How to Make Active Learning Work

In order for students to learn from an activity, they must have clear directions, the necessary materials, a chance to do the activity, and a chance to discuss what they learned.

### Healing the Centurion's Servant: Discovery Learning Activities

The following readiness activities are designed to help children understand the Centurion's faith in the healing of his servant, in Matthew 8:5-13. (You would probably use only one of them in your lesson.)

#### Making Cottage Cheese. (Kindergarten/Primary)

Give 1/4 cup of warm milk and a half lemon to each student. Remind the kids that when babies are hungry, they are fed milk. Ask why they are given a drink when they need to eat. If babies could talk they might even object—just as kids their age do when they don't understand why parents do something. Tell the kids to squeeze the lemon juice into the milk, stir it, and see what happens (the milk thickens). Collect their milk in a pan and show some cottage cheese. Explain that if they were to slowly heat the thickened milk in a pan, it would turn into cottage cheese.

To debrief. Ask if cottage cheese is a drink or a food (a food). Explain that milk undergoes a similar change in a baby's stomach. Read Matthew 8:10. Ask how do babies demonstrate faith when they are hungry? (They drink the milk.) How do children demonstrate faith at mealtime? (They eat.) When they pray? (They believe God hears and answers.) How is faith like trust? (It's the same.)

#### Faith in a Bottle. (Juniors)

Give 3 or 4 volunteers identical spoons and the same amount of water, dry rice or beans. Give each a different container: a jug with a small neck, a half-liter pop bottle, a half-gallon milk carton, or a large pan. Tell them you want to see who will be first, at the starting signal, to empty all their water (rice or beans) into their container and put the empty container up-side-down on their head. Set up the race and appoint the other kids to judge the winners, noting if the contents are spilled.

To debrief. Ask the contestants to tell how they felt about the race. (It was fun—for the winner, OK, unfair for others). Ask the person with the pop bottle to tell why she thought it unfair. (The narrow neck slowed her down.) Ask them how construction on a highway can cause a bottleneck at rush hour. How did the busy centurion try to prevent a bottleneck in Matthew 8:8? (If Jesus just said the word, it would save Him a lot of time and all the other people would not have to wait to be healed.) How was the centurion's suggestion an act of faith? (He believed Jesus had the power to heal by just giving the command.)

### Starfish Faith. (Primary)

Have the children twice fold in half a 3" square of industrial strength, brown paper towel. Using the only pair of scissors available, cut a deep V as shown. They then open out the starfish and fold back each arm, its tip over the center. They drop the folded starfish in a pan of water, watching the arms unfold. Tell them you want to see who can make the most starfish in 3-4 minutes. The object is to create a frustrating bottleneck so that the children in their frustration, suggest you get more scissors.

To debrief. After a while, gather the kids and talk about how they felt (mad, slow, sad, frustrated) and why. (They wanted to get the most, but had to wait.) Tell the kids that as you read Matthew 8:5-13 they should look for similarities and differences in their situation and that of the centurion. (There is no bottleneck; Jesus takes the centurion's advice where you did not take theirs.) Ask what if a multitude of sick or homeless people had suddenly surrounded Jesus. What would have happened to the centurion? (He would have to wait.)

### Try This...

Choose one of these activities to try with your class.

### Giving Directions

Giving directions is an art that can be learned with practice. Clear directions use simple language, and break down the task into steps. Good directions spell out the steps in the order they will be followed. The directions can be written on construction paper and taped up where everyone can read them, or the teacher can give the steps one at a time, waiting for everyone to complete a step before telling the next one. The more mature the student, the more independently they like to work and the more important to

have directions written out. If directions are given orally, the students are likely to ask for the directions be told over and over again.

### Providing Materials

Providing materials can be greatly facilitated by keeping supplies of much-used materials on hand in the classroom. Materials most often used include: pens, pencils, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, typing paper, construction paper, newspaper, cotton balls, yarn and string. Keep baskets or boxes of supplies for each class group in an easily accessible place; students can quickly get and distribute them for you.

### Doing the Activity

A chance to do the activity is safeguarded when children are supplied materials and instructions and then allowed to carry them out alone or with a friend. Teachers, acting as coaches, stand ready to offer suggestions when needed. Remember:

- Don't do the activity for the kids.
- Allow children flexibility (there is more than one way to do an activity). Affirm students for their creativity and the uniqueness of their finished product.

### Debriefing the Activity

Debrief the students by discussing what was learned. This is the best way to ensure that learning has taken place. To debrief the students, do the following in the order given:

- Question the students as to how they feel about the activity.
- Ask them what they learned about the Bible text or the main idea you are teaching.

For students to get the main idea of an activity, the teacher needs to focus learning to that idea and articulate it. If the same idea comes out in more than one activity, the students are more likely to remember it. The best remembered lessons are those in which all the learning activities and the lesson center around one idea.

### Try This...

Based on the descriptions given above, write student directions for the activities. Then try them out on a group of students. When the students are done with the activity, evaluate your direction-giving skills as follows:

- Great—students did as you expected without asking you to explain what the directions meant.
- Good—students asked only once for clarification.
- So-so—two or more points of the directions had to be clarified.
- Uh-oh!—they continually asked for clarification

## Bible Learning Activities

Bible learning activities (BLAs) are just what the name implies—activities that help kids learn about the Bible. Each word of the generic title “Bible learning activity” has special meaning, as illustrated by the statements below that qualify each word of the title. BLAs are meant to lead students into the Word.

## Bible

The word “Bible” is not tacked on as a buzz word indicating an activity approved for Sabbath.

- BLAs are designed with a specific Bible text or story in mind.
- The goal of the activity is to help kids better understand the text.
- When the activity is completed, the students are asked to read the text.
- The students explain how the activity helps them understand the text.

“Sometimes activities fail or fizzle. One cannot always predict or prevent disaster, but the creative teacher learns to go with the flow. Echo the feelings of the students. Groan or laugh when they do, recovering quickly to turn the disaster into a learning situation. Ask what they learned from the situation; follow up on their line of thought.”

—Noelene Johnsson

## Learning

BLAs are for learning, not for entertainment. Nevertheless...

- Learning should be enjoyable.
- When evaluating an activity for its learning value, ask:  
Did real learning take place? What did the students learn?

## Activities

Activities imply that kids are deeply involved in what goes on...

- They do something in order to discover more about a concept. When teaching with activities:
  - Plan to involve all of the senses in the course of the lesson.
  - Help kids experience a concept.
- Use pencil and paper activities as a way to process prior experiences. Activity sheets are particularly useful when they encourage kids to look inside themselves.

“Activities aren’t over when they are done. Discussion needs to follow an activity; discussion helps to “cement” the learning process. Discussion is not the activity.”

—Jerry Bartram

## Using Bible Learning Activities

BLAs can be used to make any part of a lesson or program active: mission, prayer, singing, memory work, Bible story, lesson readiness, lesson application. Children do not need every part of the program or lesson to be made active.

Activities can be done in large groups or small. Ideally, everyone should have a chance to get involved in an activity. But if the room is too crowded and the activity

requires movement, you might have a group come up and do the activity while the others watch. Then involve everyone in a discussion of the activity, huddling in tight groups with their teachers to answer your questions. Be sure to give each group a chance to report their group's conclusions.

Activities do not have to be completed for learning to take place. Some students will want to stay and finish craft-type activities after class or they can finish them at home.

### Readiness Activities

Readiness activities prepare the mind for the main idea of the lesson; they precede the Bible study, connecting the students with something they already know about the subject. Readiness activities help students activate the appropriate file drawer of their mind's knowledge and past experiences. Unless they put the new information in context, students may not know how to apply the Bible truth they learn.

Typical readiness activities involve students in activities such as the following:

- Remembering an early experience relevant to the new concept
  - Doing an interview to ask someone else about related experiences
  - Finding examples of related experiences in a newspaper or magazine
  - Rating themselves on skills related to the concept
  - Discovering Bible texts that relate to the concept
  - Guessing definitions of the concept
  - Finding definitions or facts in dictionary, encyclopedia, or maps
- The three "Healing the Centurion's Servant" activities described above were all designed as readiness activities.

### Application Activities

After studying the Bible lesson, we use application activities to help the students make practical use of the new Bible truth. Role plays, simulated committee meetings, board meetings, and elections can help students relate what they learned to real life. One of the best application activities involves setting up a scenario— a setting in which somebody has a problem. Kids figure out their advice for solving the problem. For example:

**Simon's Struggle Scenario.** Simon's mother died after a brief but painful illness. Simon, his brother, and their dad are devastated. Simon wants to know why God took his mother. How could your knowledge of God's love help Simon? What might you say to him?

The scenario idea can be expanded into an activity where kids get involved in detailed planning for an imaginary situation. For instance, they can imagine themselves given the charge of bringing up a 3-year-old and make lists of what they would buy the child for his diet, clothing, recreation, and education. After the kids report their plans and get excited about the child, tell them of a temptation that has come to the child. Ask them to tell how their plans would have helped the child prepare for the temptation. (Probably

they would be of little help. Realizing their omission, students suddenly understand why their parents make some of the rules they do.)

### Types of Bible Learning Activities

- Artistic Activities

Activities that allow artistic expression involve kids in making things like posters, collages, booklets, greeting cards, pictures and sculptures using different materials. Also carvings, crafts, models, etc.

- Creative Writing Activities

Writing letters, invitations, poems, songs, greeting cards, news reports, stories, resumes, advertisements, scripts, paraphrasing Bible verses and retelling stories in a modern setting are typical creative writing activities. Tip: Some students dislike creative writing, so give them the option of planning the ideas and telling them to you or the group, or allow them to work with a partner.

- Dramatized Activities

These activities allow kids to express themselves by acting out a parts, e.g. skits, charades, plays, motion songs and verses, role playing and any form of reenactment.

- Research Activities

Research activities typically involve kids in study and searching out information. Examples are: dictionary use, concordance or map studies, Bible searches, newspaper checks, looking up statistics, and perhaps surveys.

Use activity sheets sparingly.

- Puzzles and Games

Rebuses, word puzzles, coded texts, and a variety of word games can be used for learning purposes. When games from childhood are resurrected for a learning purpose, the object is not in playing or winning, but in discovering something new and unexpected.

- Experiential Activities

When kids do something for the sake of experiencing a given situation, we call it an experiential activity. This category might include: life simulations, experiments, physical exercise or manipulation, relays, hunts, surveys, etc.

### Using Games as a Learning Tool

Games have a limited use in learning. The competitive aspect of many games, such as Bible baseball, make them popular with some kids, but kids can become so obsessed with winning that learning is crowded out.

Non-competitive games, however, are useful in teaching rote learning and in reviewing facts. But care needs to be taken lest the game trivializes the material being learned or reviewed.

## Bible Learning Centers

Learning centers are learning situations, set up so small groups of children can learn by self-directed Bible learning activities or under the supervision of a teacher. The teacher explains the directions for young children in terms of what the group is doing. (We are making a road for Jesus to ride His donkey.) Older students, however, read and follow the directions without help. Learning centers contribute to the objectives of the lesson. The learning may be debriefed later, after the entire class has a chance to get involved.

Any traditional program can be broken down into learning centers. The various program components can each be done at a different learning center. Ideally the children are given an opportunity to choose which learning center to join. They rotate around the centers, spending 5-7 minutes at each.

At each center, students are involved in an age-appropriate Bible learning activity, individual activity sheets, making something, or solving a problem. (For example, the "Healing the Centurion's Servant" activities described earlier could each be set up at a different learning center.)

After students have rotated around the centers for 35-40 minutes, they come together as a large group for worship. At the appropriate time, the teacher asks the students to tell what they learned at each center, weaving their experiences at the center into a Bible study about the lesson.

## Resources

Many books of Bible learning activities are available. While the program helps for Children's Ministries often suggest BLAs, sometimes they do not fit your needs or interests. That's when you will appreciate having some resources on hand to consult. The following are recommended for your personal or church library.

Christian Crafts from Egg Cartons. Shining Star, 1991.

Christian Crafts from Paper Plates. Shining Star, 1989.

Christian Crafts-Paper Bag Puppets. Shining Star, 1990.

Cornforth, Fred and Kelly Blue Cornforth. Creative Bible Learning Activities for Junior Teens - 101 Ideas for Junior Teen Leaders. AdventSource, 1995.

Haystead, Wes. Design for Teaching Young Children. Standard Publishing, 1992.

How To Do Bible Learning Activities, Ages 2-5. Gospel Light, 1995.

How To Do Bible Learning Activities, Grades 1-6. Gospel Light, 1995.

Opitz, Dr. Michael F. Learning Centers, Grades K-4. Scholastic Professional Books. (The twelve introductory pages provide excellent information about organizing learning centers.)