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Children's Ministry Understanding God in the World Relational Developmentally Appropriate Equipping Leaders & Caregivers

Marie Woog

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CHILDREN'S MINISTRY:
UNDERSTANDING GOD IN THE WORLD
RELATIONAL
DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE
EQUIPPING LEADERS & CAREGIVERS

by

MARIE WOOG

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Children's Ministry:
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Marie Woog
Readers: Prof. Andrew Root and Prof. Vicky Goplin
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God in the world

God is active in the world and can be found all over. Particularly God is with each and every person. The Bible says in Genesis, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.... And it was so. God saw everything that he made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Genesis 1, NRSV) God has created every person, and so all people are as God called them when he made them, “good.” Being part of God’s good creation does not mean that people are perfect; there is still evil and sin in the world. Not only has God made the world, but also God is loose in the world.

In a story told around Christmas time by radio personality, Paul Harvey, a farmer is trying to save a flock of birds from the cold, but they will not listen to him. He tries to get them to fly into his warm barn, and he thinks if only he was one of them, he could show them the way, and at that moment he realized why Jesus came. In the story the farmer needed a connection between himself and the birds. Jesus is the link between the divine and the human, and takes on the characteristics of both. While on earth, Jesus taught and performed miracles, he feasted, he slept, he laughed, he cried. Jesus taught about how humans should treat each other, and He taught about the nature of God. Jesus came to earth and lived in a way that other humans cannot because of sin. Also, He died and conquered death for all sinful humans. Jesus’ sacrifice was humiliating, people jeered at Him, and he was left on a cross. Jesus lived in such a way that He had no place to rest, He wandered, washed His disciple’s feet. Jesus came not just to serve humans, but also to give His life for them. Jesus lived the righteous life and sacrificed himself so we, incredibly flawed humans do not have to. Martin Luther says in his “The Freedom of a

Christian,” “This, then, is how through faith alone without works the soul is justified by the Word of God, sanctified, and made true, peaceful, and free, filled with every blessing and truly made a child of God.” (Lull, 396.) This means that people receive all that Jesus had and has through faith alone, works are not needed, but are done in response to this blessing. Jesus didn’t stop caring for us when he left, He sent the Holy Spirit to still be with us.

Acts 2 says, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability.” (Acts 2:4, NRSV) The Holy Spirit is God loose in the world. The Holy Spirit works with us and through us. Martin Luther describes the Holy Spirit in the Small Catechism, “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus, my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts made me holy and kept me the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens me with His gifts, made me holy and kept me true in the faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.” (Lull, 323). The Holy Spirit helps us to prepare for this fantastic time yet to come. The Holy Spirit forgives sins, the sins of all believers. In addition we will be raised on the last day by the Holy Spirit to be a part of the new creation. (Lull, 323) Also the Holy Spirit supports us while we are here on earth. Similarly, in loving families, parents support and provide for their children while they are young. Parents give their children wisdom and then hope that they continue as they grow up to do good things. The Holy Spirit provides us with the tools we need to both believe in God and share that faith with others.

All parts of the Holy Trinity work together in communion. They do have their own “jobs” and characteristics, but they make one whole together. Perichoresis is a word to help describe this. Perichoresis is an “ancient concept for community without uniformity, and personality without individualism.” (Moltmann, 113) This is even closer knit than a family. Each member of a family can function on it’s own without the other member, maybe not as well as it does with the family but it still functions. When it comes to God and the Trinity it is almost more like if you lose one part it’s like taking a wheel from a bike. They just never function the same after that, and the wheel without the rest of the bike barely functions at all.

So what does this mean for living in the world, or more specifically doing ministry with children in the world? Jesus died for the sake of our sins. He takes our sins upon himself and in return gives us the opportunity for eternal life. It’s called a happy exchange. Jesus welcomes us into communion with the Trinity. In Galatians 3, Paul talks about how in Jesus there are neither Jews nor Greeks, men nor women, slaves nor free. (NRSV) In Christ’s family there are no outcasts, and so nobody should be treated as such. It is our responsibility to stand up for those who are outcast and to notice the language that dehumanizes our fellow children of God. In the Bible it says that God gives us the commandments for our own sake. Deuteronomy 10:12-13 says, “So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.” Obeying God's commandments

helps humans to survive. Each person has times in their life when they are suffering and having the support of our fellow members of the family of Christ is a comfort on its own.

After knowing that there is so much we should be doing for others it is important to remember that we are justified by faith alone. This means that by confessing belief or faith in God, we are saved. However this does not mean that Christians should do whatever they want or ignore God's commands. When people have faith, they do good works; justification does not come because of these works. As Christians, young and old, good works are important for our neighbors to, in a way, show appreciation to God for what He has done for us, and to be co-creators by taking care of God's wonderful creation. All Christians are called to be disciples of Jesus.

Children as Disciples

A working definition of a disciple is someone who is called to follow Jesus, follows Jesus with others, and takes care of and honors God's creation. With this definition of a disciple, children can fit right in. Starting with children being called by Jesus. In Mark 10:14 children are called. "Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." (NRSV) Through baptism children are also called to be disciples. Martin Luther describes the significance of baptism in the Small Catechism, "It signifies the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance,

and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (Kolb & Wengert, 360)

With the working definition of discipleship given, children can also be considered disciples in that they follow Jesus with others. Through baptism there are many people that commit to the child being brought up in the faith, including parents, sponsors and the congregation. In the Lutheran tradition, all people present proclaim the words of the creed and make promises to bring the child being baptized up in the Christian faith. Not only through baptism are children joined to a group of believers, but children who are part of any group within the faith community also are part of a group of fellow believers and disciples. In cooperate worship children are joined to others, through Sunday school classes, and even through other groups.

The final part of the working definition of being a disciple is “ takes care of and honors God’s creation.” Children can definitely do this and even enjoy it. There are plenty of children that love helping mom or dad or grandma out in the kitchen baking cookies. They also like planting and watering flowers. These are just simple ways that kids take care of and honor creation. “All Christians are able to minister in the name of Christ. Children as well as adults are called to vocation. For those Christian bodies that baptize infants Christian community includes being welcomed into service, mission and ministry. Children, part of the laos, included in the priesthood of all believers, are called to ministry in daily life.” (Everist, 298-299) This is saying that children are called to mission and to serve others, just as adults are. Each child has their own gifts they can share and use to help do God’s work in the world.

A part that is left out of this definition of discipleship is also the need for God's grace. All people young and old need God's grace. Every person makes mistakes and bad decisions and therefore needs God's grace. Children are prone, just like adults to make mistakes and bad decisions. Remembering grace and forgiveness during these instances is essential. When a child behaves in a way that adults don't approve of, it doesn't make them any less of a disciple of Christ. An example might be a 9-year-old boy deciding to play with his electronic noisemaker while his infant sister is taking a nap. The decision to play with his toy probably wasn't the best decision he's ever made, but it doesn't make him any less of a disciple than when he changed his little sister's diaper to give his mom a break. Being a disciple doesn't mean doing exactly what Jesus did or behaving like Jesus did. Being a disciple is understanding the importance of what Jesus did and does and that it's okay to make mistakes, but with that in mind disciples try to be good followers of God's will.

Recently, I heard a story about a 6-year-old girl named Emma. Emma was having a conversation with her grandmother, and she said something like this, "Mommy and I were looking at the pictures in Time Magazine National Geographic. There was a picture of a baby with its mommy. They didn't have enough food or clothes or even a house, so that baby was sleeping between its mommy's legs to stay warm. So, Mary and I talked and we decided to pray for that mommy and baby before we went to bed last night." Mary is Emma's 4-year-old sister. Emma is taking the step with her faith that many adults forget to take; she saw a concern in the world, and turns to God to help solve it. This is just one of many examples of a child being a disciple of Jesus.

Love and Friendship as experiences of God's love

God's love can be experienced through different kinds of relationships. "There is no selfhood that is not formed in relation to others and to the culture of shared social meanings and institutions. Similarly there is no faith that is not awakened and formed in the matrix of relationship, language, ritual and symbol. In the practical theological effort to account for the dynamics of selfhood and faith by which we become subjects in relation to God..." (Fowler, 55) Faith is developed in relationship with God and in relationships with others. The relationships with others can help people to understand a relationship with God.

One human relationship that can help in understanding God's relationship is that of a lover or a very dear friend. There is a Bible camp that has a practice to help teenage girls understand God's love through relationship with others. They have a night that the girls were separated from the boys for their own special activity. They are brought into the dining hall, and there were place mats with a story on each one and paper roses in each spot. The story goes along explaining how people tend to ignore Jesus, even though they make promises to pray and spend time with Him. Each time a person forgets or neglects to do these things, it is like standing Jesus up on a date, and even though it makes Him sad He still waits.

Isaiah 43:4 "Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life." Brueggemann states that this Bible passage "articulates, as forcefully and compellingly as anywhere in the Bible, Yahweh's defining and uncompromising love for Israel, a commitment and devotion that completely repositions Israel's life in the world." (Brueggemann, 52) The

kind of devotion shown in this passage is an excellent illustration of God's love. This shows that God has always loved this much. Another typical example of God's love is from John 3:16 "for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but shall have eternal life." When working with older children and youth it will be much easier to give the example of God as a lover, and even use the same imagery as given at that Bible camp. This imagery works well with youth and adults, but is harder for young children.

Another way of experiencing God's love is through family relationships, particularly those of parents and children. For many children the unconditional love that God gives can be experienced in their relationships with their parents. Parents for the most part can't stop loving their children; they love their children for who they are. Similarly, it's not what people do that makes God love, God just loves, and one mistake or even many are not going to change that love. This metaphor is commonly used, but needs to be used carefully because there are many families that do not experience this kind of love.

In the book Friends God and Prophets by Elizabeth Johnson, the metaphor of friendship or companionship is used to describe all of these relationships that have been previously described in terms of a family. She talks about the Communion of Saints. This communion goes beyond the living or the dead; it's a community of both living and dead. There is a mutuality, reciprocity, and egalitarian momentum that are involved in these relationships. The advantage to this metaphor is that people so often can be mistreated by family members, but are typically not mistreated by friends in the same way. This language of friendship rarely is used in a way that would exclude people from

the community. This is what children's ministry in a congregational setting can be modeled after. Like all metaphors, there are still drawbacks.

In human relationships it has to be taken into account that sin, death and the devil are still very present in the world. Human beings are not as dependable as God for all of these reasons. In close relationships people can be abused and manipulated physically and psychologically. People ignore or neglect other people and people die. This means that people will let other people down at one point or another, their mortality means their relationship can and will end. God has conquered death, and so even death cannot stop God from having a relationship with us. This is an amazing thing that every child needs to hear.

Development:

“Psychology's practiced ability to comprehend children's thought processes and behaviors makes it profoundly important to anyone who cares about child.” (Miller-McLemore, 39) Children, although spiritual and capable of discipleship are not adults. This does not make them less human, but does mean that they need to be treated differently than adults. They are developmentally at a different stage and therefore see and understand the world differently.

Erik Erikson was a developmental psychologist, he is known for his theory of psychosocial development. (Everist, 172) This theory states that people pass through stages of development consecutively. The first stage is Trust vs. Mistrust, this happens from birth to two years old. As this stage children are wondering about the trustworthiness of their environment. They also struggle through times when parents are

leaving, when and if they will come back. It can be observed that most children at some point in this age group go through separation anxiety and have a hard time separating from their parents. The next stage is from ages two to three and a half, and this is the Autonomy/Shame and Doubt stage. In this stage children are struggling with being independent. Not in the sense that one may think of a teenagers struggle for independence, but they are working through what they can do on their own and what they need help with. Working through their independence is important when potty training, and with allowing children to try things for themselves and explore the world they are growing up in. Children are developing their sense of self. From the ages of three and a half to six-years-old children are in the Initiative vs. Guilt stage. During this stage children participate in activities to maintain their identity, and are setting goals and accomplishing them, giving them a purpose. From six to twelve years old children are in the Industry vs. Inferiority stage, which means that children are figuring out what they do well. Children start working through what their gifts are and how to use them. The stages continue through adulthood, but these are the ages that are focused on when talking about children's ministry. (Everist, 172-173) (Krych, 35-60)

Another important developmental psychologist is Jean Piaget, who studied cognitive development of children. He also broke development down in to stages or levels. The first level is the Sensorimotor, which spans from birth to one and a half. For the most part a child's world consists of what is immediately present, what the child is currently looking at, hearing, touching, and smelling. Then a child moves into the Preoperational thought period. During this stage children have great imaginations, they can use words and images to think and communicate. Children do not use logic during

this stage; they can see inanimate objects as alive. (Everist, 172) “Piaget observed a three-year-old who had scratched herself on a wall point to her hand and say: ‘Who made that mark? ... It hurts where the wall hit me.’” (Armstrong, 71) The next level is Concrete Operational Thought Period, and stretches from approximately age seven to twelve. During this time, children begin to think more concretely and are able to use logic. They cannot yet think abstractly, which comes in the final stage, Formal Operations that starts in teenage years and continues through adulthood. (Everist 172)

When it comes to Faith Development, James W. Fowler has used the research of developmental psychologists and come up with a theory of his own. He starts with describing Primal Faith. This is the stage that children are in from before they are born through the time they begin to use verbal communication skills. This stage reflects Erikson’s trust/mistrust stage. The next stage faith development is intuitive-projective faith, which spans children the ages two to six are in this stage. “Imagination, not yet disciplined by consistent logical operations, responds to story, symbol, dream, and experience. It attempts to form images that can hold and order the mixture of feelings and impressions evoked by the child’s encounters with the newness of both everyday reality and the penumbra of mystery that surrounds and pervades it.” (Fowler, 59). This is the stage where children who see a cross, may call it “church,” because that is where they know the symbol from and associate it with. Children between the ages of six to eight develop a sense of cause and affect and fairness that leads them into the stage of Mythic-Literal Faith. If something bad happens they may think that it’s because of something they did wrong. The next stage of Faith development is Synthetic-Conventional faith. Children between the ages of eleven and thirteen typically transition

into this stage, when they begin to think abstractly. Their relationships with others change in a way that allows them to take the perspective of others more easily than they previously could. They develop much more deep personal relationships. This allows for an understanding that God knows them better than they know themselves. Also, because of a greater awareness of one's inner self, they also begin to question and establish their belief system.

There has been many people studying childhood development and working towards applying it to education. Today there is much more brain research being done that can help in working with children and designing curriculum to fit the developmental stages of children. All of the developmental research done by Erikson, Piaget, Fowler and others should be studied and taken advantage of for designing children's ministry today. Keeping in mind that children do not always pass through the stages of development at the same rate, the theories put forth can be used to help create a general curriculum and then adapt as necessary. It's essential that children are valued and appreciated for who they are and how they experience the world.

Children's Ministry today

Children need to be included in all aspects of congregational life from the typical Children's Ministry areas of Sunday school to Worship even committees. If children cannot be a part of the committees, there should be advocates for them at every meeting. The following will talk briefly about intergenerational ministry and worship, but then focus on the area of congregational life that children are primarily involved in: Sunday school.

Congregations have something going for them that other institutions do not, the opportunity for many generations to interact and share interests and beliefs. This opportunity is easy to overlook, but is such a gift that should be taken advantage of. When I was younger, my grandma would take me along to all of her church activities; her women's circle, when the sons of Norway made lefse, even to stuffing newsletters with the "happy stuffers" once a month. I remember the smiles and people saying, "I see you brought your helper along today." As a child, I loved the opportunity to help out with all of these aspects of congregational life; I didn't realize how lucky I was to be involved in such a way. These are activities that children are usually left out of in a congregation and just a few examples of ways that children can be involved and generations can come together. These things did not just influence my life in the church, but also my grandma's and the people we worked with. There are many opportunities within a faith community for people of all generations to come together; one primary place is when they worship together.

“When Congregations worship God, their liturgy or “service of the people” has the potential to include the participation of all God’s people in ways that few other actions can.” (Mercer, 227) Worship doesn’t need to be changed to welcome children at the expense of welcoming adults. The tradition that surrounds worship is great for children’s involvement and even leadership. Simple additions to the worship bulletin or to the projection can be symbols indicating when to sit, stand, sing for people who cannot read to follow along. Another addition can be to encourage children to lead various aspects of worship like the prayers, or a song. Leading does not mean putting on a show, but rather to lead and participate with the congregation. Music that is repetitive can be used, so that children can sing along by the end, or songs that involve motions get everyone involved kinesthetically. There are many ways to welcome children in worship without leaving the adults out.

“So the question before us is, how do children change intellectually and emotionally as they grow, and what do those changes mean for their growth in faith, and for educational ministry with children? To help us find the answer we will consider the ideas of some major developmental theorists, along with others who provide insight into children and their development.” (Krych, 31) Using Erikson’s stage model along with Jean Piaget’s developmental theories and James Fowlers Faith development research provides insight. The ability to understand children can help one to come up with ways to talk about God with a 3 year old. Developmental psychology is valuable in developing a Sunday school curriculum and in other work with children in ministry.

Demands for children to achieve academically are getting more strenuous and extending to a very young age. Children are capable of learning so much especially in

the first years of life, that their ability is becoming exploited. Preschools are designed to help children get ahead in the world, and parents are too afraid that their children will be left behind if they do not start them early. “Our current obsession with raising academic standards (focused on veridical knowledge) has led to a diminished focus on school time devoted to the basics of personal and social development and conflict resolution, as well as to a potential for destructive and other forms of antisocial behavior.” (Sylwester, 106) Since children are pushed so much in school and the world outside the walls of the church building, it is even more important children’s ministry should be made developmentally appropriate.

Developmentally, children between the ages of three and six are at a point that Piaget called Pre-operation. This means that they do not have the capability to understand the world through the logic that older children can. Piaget found an example of this as he observed a four-year-old, “ Piaget noted that a four-year-old boy said, ‘There’s the moon, it’s round.’ Then, when a cloud covered the moon, the child commented, ‘look now, it’s been killed.’”(Armstrong, 70) These things that children say are such a great example of the linguistic genius that they are capable of. It is so important in children’s ministry to give children of all ages the chance to speak and learn from each other, as found in a model described by Parker Palmer. They have such a great imagination and are able to tell stories so well; they can be given the opportunity to hear the story of Noah’s ark, for instance, and then to retell it to each other.

When it comes to children’s ministry with these very young children, it’s important that they are allowed time to play and to feel safe within the congregation. Sunday school should allow more free time than structured time. Important elements still

include a Bible story or other story through which the gospel can be heard, and prayer is important. In addition, a loving environment and time to explore that environment is key for children in the pre-operational stage.

The environment itself is important; children in the birth to age six are going through separation anxiety and working through what's trustworthy. The environment needs to be safe and welcoming for children in these young ages. Even where the classroom is located can affect what the child is learning. If children are dropped off someplace in the basement or the other side of the church building from where the adults are going, it is possible that they will feel unwelcome in the other parts of the building. The design of the building cannot often be helped, so having plenty of opportunities for children to explore the church building and come to know it can be a positive step. A classroom can be decorated in a way that's welcoming to children, and toys and games can be provided to engage children in what they are learning and help them to feel welcome in the stage where trust is being developed.

For children between the ages of seven and twelve children's ministry can contain more structured time than free time. Children in this range understand cause and effect, but almost to a fault as described in Fowler's theory previously. When a tragic event happens in a child's life at this age, they are prone to think that they did something to cause it. For instance, a young boy named Jack's parents were getting a divorce. Jack an eight-years-old, was well-mannered and well-behaved. When he filled out an evaluation about his own behavior for school, he rated his behavior as bad. When his teacher asked him about this, he said that his mom and dad are getting a divorce. Jack thought that he must have done something wrong, he must be a bad person because his parents were

getting a divorce. This is something to be aware of when working with children. Children need to be allowed time and space to talk about the issues they are dealing with. A safe environment should be provided for children and they can be comforted to know that things like this happen and it is not their fault and they can even be reminded about God's love and the hope Christians have in the resurrection.

An environment where children can talk about what is going on in their life should start at the beginning. If when they are younger they come to know the congregation, the church building as a place that can be trusted, with people they can trust, they are more likely to be able to share when events are affecting them. This is a great opportunity to put God language to experiences and talk about how God is with people at all times especially in their suffering. Time should be made to check-in with each child to see what the ups and downs of the week were and where they saw God throughout the week. Also during this stage of development, children should be encouraged to study the Bible, learn the stories and then tell the stories to others. They can be given opportunities to tell stories in various ways, if they do a skit or write a song or even paint a picture. "Religious language should invite and equip children and adults to participate in an interesting conversation about issues and concerns that matter in their lives." (Yust, 83) As children learn to take on the perspectives of others, discussion of Biblical characters becomes even more important, and being able to identify with Biblical characters becomes possible. When children can identify with a character from the Bible, they can bring that with them into their week outside of Sunday school.

For all ages, any time there's ministry with children, the four keys can be followed, as described by David Anderson and Paul Hill in Frogs Without Legs Can't

Hear. These are four basic ways of interacting with God and others. The first is “Caring Conversation.” (Anderson and Hill) An easy way to create space for caring conversation is to ask questions each week, and talk about what’s going on in the lives of each child. These questions can include “highs” and “lows” for the week, or the best and worst things that happened in the time they’ve been apart. Another good question is, “where did you see God this week?” These questions prompt caring conversation, and as children continue to go through their lives the time provided with each gathering will give them an opportunity to talk and make space for conversations that children may not be able to have any place else. They can build relationships with these conversations and walk through life’s challenges together. Also, asking where they saw God, gets them looking for God throughout the time that they are not in their congregational setting.

The next of the Four Keys is “Devotions.” This is time devoted to God. (Anderson and Hill) There are different ways of doing devotions with children. One way is reading the Bible together and talking about the stories. Part of the devotional time can and always should be prayer. Prayer needs to be in the weekly if not daily lives of children. Karen Marie Yust says in Real kids, Real Faith, “In silence and in speaking, prayer is a conversation with God that nurtures and supports our spiritual lives. “ Prayer can take many different forms, and can include whatever the children want it to include. Children should be encouraged to pray aloud and silently. The things they talk about during the opening highs and lows time can be used during the prayers at the end of the time together.

“Service” is the third of the Four Keys. (Anderson and Hill) Genesis 12:2 says, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that

you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of earth shall be blessed.” (NRSV) This is a fun one to integrate into Children’s Ministry because even very young children can serve others. Children can make cards for people who are in the hospital or nursing home. They can serve their families by helping with dishes or laundry. They can even make simple tie blankets for families that cannot afford them. Children can do service in a variety of ways, and part of service can be figuring out what ways children can use their gifts to help others. This identifying and use of gifts is important throughout development and beyond. It gives reassurance for what children are good at and capable of, and validates them as disciples of Jesus.

The last of the Four Keys is “Rituals and Traditions.” (Anderson and Hill) Worship offers lots of opportunities for rituals and traditions, but these can also happen in the Sunday school classroom and at other children’s ministry events. Just the ability to talk about their week each time children come to class can be considered a ritual as well as the regular prayer. Being able to come in and know what to expect can be a great comfort for children. Not only is it important for children to talk about their lives and their faith, but also children need be able to be mobile when learning. “Misguided teachers who constantly tell their students to sit down and be quiet imply a preference for working with a grove of trees rather than a classroom of mobile articulate students.” (Sylwester, 124) Children can and need to move, this may mean learning the Lord’s Prayer as a dance. Putting movement to important parts of the faith or acting out the stories can keep children interested in what they are learning and help them to learn

better. People learn in different ways, being able to do physical activities will help some children to learn better, whereas other children will learn better through art or discussion.

There are several important aspects to ministry with children. The first is the ability to understand where they are developmentally on life's journey and accompany them on that journey. Another is to be able to describe what is happening in children's lives in terms of their faith, and helping them to do the same. An outcome of children's ministry should be not only to have a relationship with God, but also the ability to understand and communicate their faith.

Leaders in Children's Ministry

Triple "A" adults are authentic, available and affirming. (Anderson & Hill, 171) This means that they live what they believe; they are accessible to children and affirm people of all ages. A way for them to be affirming is to know where children are developmentally, and to listen to them when they talk and help them explore the world and their faith. "Psychology insists that adults take the child's point of view. In fact the most important trait of good parenting, according to most psychologies, is to learn from children." (Miller-McLemore, 39) This is true of not just parents, but all adults that work with children; they are good if they are willing and able to learn from children. Children have so much to teach us, and adults that understand that are often the best for working with children.

Adults that will be working with children should go through an application process and background check. This is to not only making sure that they are Triple "A" adults, but also to make sure that the children are safe. Children should not be scared to

come to the church building and parents shouldn't be worried about leaving their children. The most important thing is to make sure that children are safe, and this is one step that can be taken towards that. Another step is proper training.

Adult and youth leaders need to be equipped. An equipping event for adult and youth leaders is important to help people to know how to build healthy relationships with children. Although many adults know how to interact with children in healthy ways, it is important to make sure everyone is on the same page. One point is that adults should not be left alone with children or a child. When it happens that they are alone with a child they should be visible in a public area. These types of details are to both protect the child from harm and the adult from false accusations and are important boundaries to be set. Situations can arise in working with children that leaders need to be equipped regarding. For instance, if a child is being abused, leaders need to know how to report these incidences. Adults working with children should be mandatory reporters. Mandatory reporters discreetly let the authorities know if there is evidence or reports of abuse or neglect from a child. They also can be equipped to watch for signs of emotional disturbances. These are all very serious issues that adult leaders need to be aware of and trained to handle.

As leaders are equipped this also an opportunity for them to learn about the developmental stages that children go through. As they learn these stages they can better understand what to expect when working with children of various ages. In addition learning about how children form friendships at different stages can help in building relationships with children. It's also easier to know how to comfort children as they go through the tough parts of life when one knows the stage they are in developmentally.

During an equipping leaders event, techniques like brainstorming can be used during the training session. Brainstorming during a training session is beneficial in at least two ways. The first way is that people are sharing information with each other and coming up with new ideas that might not otherwise be considered. Through the sharing of ideas, leaders can build relationships with each other, learn from one another, and know where to find support later on. Another way brainstorming is helpful is that it sets the example for using it as a tool in the classroom or small group to get children engaged in what they are learning. Children can brainstorm about service activities or about a Bible story. Other important parts of a training event are similar in that they can set examples of what to do when working with children. Things such as prayer at the beginning and the end of the session can be modeled, and putting words to faith and brainstorming can be modeled. Also leaders can be equipped around what to expect when working with children.

One challenge for children's ministry leaders is discipline. Discipline and discipleship have the same root words. Being a disciple means having discipline. Discipline can be a scary word because when people think of discipline they often confuse it with punishment. So, a better word or phrase to use is classroom management. There can be some tension for people working with children in the area of classroom management. "Since children tend to imitate the actions of others it's important to teach them to be discriminating—to imitate appropriate behavior and to suppress any tendency to imitate inappropriate behavior." (Sylwester) This means complimenting and drawing attention to appropriate behavior, and avoid this with inappropriate behavior. When a child chooses an inappropriate behavior, a leader should

respond by telling them privately to stop, not by directing the entire class's attention to it. This is for several reasons, first, if the child is seeking attention they learn that they won't get it by performing inappropriate behavior, but also it prevents embarrassment for the child in front of their peers. When it's not possible to pull a child aside to talk to them, then a leader should ask the child politely to stop and say that they will talk about it at a time when they can give the child more attention. Part of being a disciple of Christ is showing others and yourself respect and honor as a child of God, and all people have something to learn about what this means. It's important to remember the child is still loved even when his or her behavior is not. Classroom management in children's ministry is part of helping to nurture children as disciples of Christ.

Several things are important when working with children and adults in children's ministry. The adults that work with children need to respect them as people and as disciples of Jesus. Protecting children and advocating for them is a part of children's ministry. Leaders within children's ministry need to be triple "A" adults, which means they are real with the kids, they are available for the kids when needed, and they affirm children in their personhood and their selfhood. It's important to keep adults and children safe from emotional or physical abuse and false accusations. Adults can affirm children in listening to them and engaging them in discussion and other activities. Another part of affirming them is not letting them get away with inappropriate behavior.

Home and Family

After everything has been done to ensure that the Sunday school or Wednesday school is nurturing faith, its time for the home and family to step in. "What I have come

to realize as a parent and a religious educator is that my children are living in two cultures. One culture is that of our local community, our neighborhood, schools, network of friends, and life in a midwestern city. The other culture is that of our religious community: our family spiritual practices, local congregation, and wider church events.... I have to help my children negotiate the overlaps and tensions between these two worlds so they can become genuinely bicultural” (Yust, 28) A connection should be made between Sunday morning or the time spent with the congregation and the rest of the week. Children are spiritual beings who, like adults, need their spirituality nurtured. A primary place for this to happen is in the home with the most influential people in a child’s life, the child’s primary caregivers; this could be parents, grandparents, or any other number of people. One hour on Sundays is not enough to nurture anybody’s faith.

Parents or other caregivers should be engaged in what their child is learning in the congregation. There are many ways to help promote this. One way is making connections between children’s ministry leaders and parents. The leaders can inform the parents about the things their child learned about and some questions to ask or talk about. This can also be done via a handout. Making sure that families attend intergenerational events and worship together, and parents demonstrate a life of faith for their children. Faith developing activities and ideas can be put in the weekly or monthly newsletter and bulletin for parents to do at home. Inviting parents to attend Sunday school with their children is another way to connect home and congregation. A parent/caregiver is more likely to do something at home if they tried it first in the congregation since they are sometimes afraid of not having the right words to say or the right activities to do to share faith in the home. Empowering parents and caregivers is an essential part of children’s

ministry and in nurturing the faith of children. Children can also be encouraged within their classrooms or small groups to talk about and ask their parents questions. Just getting the discussion started is important. Even parents and caregivers living life as disciples of Jesus without saying anything can be more powerful than any words.

Something to keep in mind is that not all homes are loving ones; which makes it even more important to have a loving environment in the congregation. “What is more, the failure to develop trust and to attach strongly to a caring adult has implications for the child’s life of faith. A child who has not learned to trust other people may find it difficult to trust God and God’s care for her.” (Krytch, 36) It is so imperative for Triple “A” adults to be examples to children of what it means to live a life of faith in and outside of the congregation. Children can experience God’s love through the people they meet at the congregation, even when they do not experience that love at home.

Conclusions

God is loose in the world. God created the world in the beginning. God saved the world through Jesus. God is active in the world and in the lives of humans through the Holy Spirit. Children can learn about God and see God working in the world. Jesus even says in Mark, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” (NRSV) This just shows how important ministry with children is, and how much adults can learn from children about faith.

Children can be disciples of Christ, under a working definition of discipleship as someone who is called to follow Jesus, follows Jesus with others, and takes care of and honors God's creation. Children are called by Jesus as it says in the book of Mark, and

also called through their baptism. They are capable and do serve others in ways that are often overlooked, yet still very important. As with all disciples of Christ, as humans, the need for forgiveness and grace is evident. God is loving and gave humans a great gift, and in response we are called to be disciples.

The love of God can be experienced and understood through relationships with fellow humans. An easy metaphor to use is that of the family, but because not all families are loving sometimes a friendship metaphor works better. However, as with all human relationships sin, death and the devil are still prevalent, and so drawing a distinction between the relationship with humans and a relationship with God has to be made. God does not let us down like people can and do.

Children grow and develop in many ways. At different stages in life they understand the world differently. Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget have done wonderful research in the area of child development. James W. Fowler has taken theirs and other's research to develop a theory of faith development. This understanding of childhood development, and views of the world is essential in developing a children's ministry program that fits and values the children who are involved.

Children's ministry happens in many ways within a congregational setting, including intergenerational events and worship, but in the mainline traditions of today, primarily Sunday school. In these age-segregated classrooms and small groups it's important to help children to feel welcome and to experience God's love. This can be done by allowing them to act their age, and talking with them using imagery that they understand and relate to. Also the four keys, Caring Conversation, Devotion, Service and Ritual and Tradition can be used to design a program and make sure that all aspects of

being a disciple are included. The four keys can and should also be used in the home.

(Anderson & Hill)

It's important to find adults gifted with the ability to work with children, the term triple "A" adults can be used to describe them; they are authentic, available and affirming. (Anderson and Hill) In addition equipping leaders and empowering them is important for them to hone their skills and gifts. It also is important to open the conversation up about unhealthy relationships, how to keep relationships healthy, and what to do if you find out about an unhealthy relationship. Classroom management is hard, but another topic that should be discussed and integrated into ministry with children. Incorporating faith outside of the classroom and into the rest of the week is crucial.

Parents or other caregivers spend more time with their children, than any one else. For children's faith to be nurtured there needs to be a partnership between home and congregation. Parents need to be equipped much like the children's ministry leaders.

Overall, children are important members of the body of Christ. They have much to teach and much to learn. Children can be disciples and are spiritual. It's important to appreciate them for who they are and to stand up with Jesus when he says, "Let the children come to me, do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (NRSV, Mark 10)

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Relational Children's Ministry

Marie Woog

MA, Educational Leadership

Readers: Victoria Goplin and Andrew Root

3/23/07

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Curriculum Introduction

There are two little girls, sisters; they are approaching 2 and 4 years old. These two little girls have a rivalry. If one has a toy the other one wants it and takes it. However if one of them falls down the other is right there to help pick them up. This display of love is one way of seeing God in the world. A 2 and 4 year old do not need to be taught how to show love, but they can be taught the language to talk about it. The main goal for the following curriculum is to nurture children's understanding of God's love through the love of others. This goal is strived for in several ways.

The first way the goal of nurturing children's understanding of God's love through the love of others is by having a physical space that is welcoming to the children. The ideal classrooms are shown in diagrams on page 9. For the youngest children there is a space to make messy crafts and have snacks, but more importantly a comfy space with pillows and toys. So, when these children enter the classroom they are met with activities to engage them and help them to feel welcome not just in Sunday School, but hopefully to feel that the church building is a safe place to come.

The second way of meeting this goal is by training leaders to provide an open and welcome environment. This is done by not only giving them tips on how to be welcoming, but allows them time to brainstorm and share ideas with other leaders from the beginning before they start working with kids. In addition, all leaders should be required to follow safety guidelines and submit to a background check. It is so important to keep the children safe.

The third way of meeting this goal is during small group time each week. Each lesson has built into it a time of relationship building. The welcome time is a time to check in with the

kids, and listen to all that is going on in their lives. Perhaps if they start talking about soccer practice someday they will feel comfortable talking about deeper things that are affecting them. This space is started from the beginning of the year, and is used with all age group. And making certain that God language is used and present, the children are challenged each week to explore how they see God working in the world. This becomes a ritual and hopefully a time the children can look forward to.

For the preschool and kindergarten children, knowing the space they are going to be in is important. Each week they will be given an opportunity to explore the space. In addition the first weeks lesson allows them to explore the church building.

For the elementary children there is more than a safe space that needs to be provided, they are given more opportunities to discuss God's word and workings. At the start of the year, they will decide their own rules and the consequences for obeying and disobeying those rules; they will even sign it like a covenant. There are also extra discussion questions to help put into words what they are learning and be able to apply it to the time they are not in the church building. In addition, each week a different group will be presenting the Bible story during the large group time.

Each lesson is concluded with a time of prayer. First children are asked for prayer requests, or possibly something from the check-in time can be used as part of the prayer. They are prayed for by name each week and their requests are prayed for as well. Being prayed for is a powerful thing.

Many efforts have been made in this curriculum to provide a safe and loving environment to help nurture children's faith. It has been designed to help build relationships within the Sunday School classroom or small group, and through the relationships that can be built the

children will come to understand not only the church building as a safe place, but also God's love as something that's real and present to them.

Teacher/Leader Training:
Can be put into a PowerPoint presentation
Italics are notes for the leader of the event.

1 Welcome to Equipping Leaders for Children's Ministry

God's love can be experienced through human relationships, but it's important that God is at the center of the learning not just friendship.

Leader Notes:

Title: Use of language is important. The word "equipped" sounds better to people than "trained."

Subtitle: This is the Enduring Understanding. At the end of the night, the leaders should walk away knowing at least this.

Provide Treats: People like refreshments, and if they have sugar they will help to wake people up a bit before starting.

2 Introductions

- **Pray**
- **Play "Find Someone Else who" Bingo**
 - **Stand up**
 - **Find people who can answer the questions in the Bingo box with a "yes" and have them sign that box**
 - **In 5 minutes we will reconvene and talk about findings**

Leader notes:

For the Bingo Cards, have squares say things like "Find someone who has a birthday in the same month" or "grew up in the same town as you" To get people talking about similarities so they will open up. Later on this will help for the brainstorming time. Be sure that you talk about as a group what people had in common Also suggest that leaders use ice breakers with their own kids to get them warmed up to the class and talking

3 Building Relationships

- **Check-in time**
- **Prayer time and taking Prayer requests**
- **Going above and beyond:**
 - **Find out what's going on in their lives, attend athletic events, concerts and show support to children outside of Sunday School (if you can't do this, make sure that you are asking about specific events, make sure that you are asking about specific events during check-in time)**

Leader notes:

Check-in time: this is the time to ask questions about what's going on in the lives of the kids. Make sure that they know they are listened to. If they talk about upcoming events be sure to follow up on it the following week. Saying one high and one low is an idea. Be sure to demonstrate this for the group. Tell leaders to do the same. Make sure that leaders do not feel stressed about going above and beyond and let them know that the point is that they are

interested and care about the lives of the kids they are working with.

4 Building Relationships

- **Pray for kids by name inside and outside of Sunday School**
- **Be genuine!**
- **Listen**
 - **A big part of building trust is feeling like you have a voice and are heard**
- **Talk to each other! Get ideas, and support!**
- **Staff members are here to support you, you are not alone, if you need help, support or just someone to talk to, please contact them**

Leader notes:

Be genuine: people, kids especially can tell if you are not genuine, if you are having a rough week/day, try to put it behind you before entering the classroom.

Kids can say some amazing things, they should be listened to. It's part of being a teacher and helping them to feel important.

Build a network with the other leaders you need support just as much as the kids you're leading do.

Relationships are important, if people feel emotionally connected to something they remember it better.

5 Brainstorm!

- **What is going to make Sunday School something that kids look forward to each week?**
- **What are some ways you can help a child to feel welcome here and experience God's love?**

Leader notes:

Have people think on their own for a minute, then talk it over in pairs, then report to the whole group ideas they came up with. Just one question at a time.

Brainstorming is a great way for people to participate. When people feel like they are making a difference and have input they will learn it better.

It's a nice break instead of just listening. Also this will help leaders to build relationships together.

6 Keeping relationships holy

- **Background checks**
- **3+ person rule**
 - **Never be alone with a child**
 - **If end up in a situation where you are alone: Stay Visible, leave doors open, move to a hallway or other area with people present**
- **Bathroom Breaks**
 - **Minimalize assistance**
 - **Don't send a child alone**
 - **Keep everything public (prop a door if necessary)**

- **Never leave a child alone**

Leader notes:

Keeping children and leaders safe are high priorities. These rules are just as much for the safety of the children as they are for the adults.

People need to feel safe in their learning environments.

The focus is still God, and how God would want us to treat others.

7 When relationships get tough

Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting

- **You must report abuse!**
 - **To a staff member of the congregation.**
 - **Staff will help you with procedures from there.**
- **Incidents of Abuse may happen in the building or be told to you by a child or other adult.**
- **If a child asks if you can keep a secret, say something along the lines of, “I can be discreet but I cannot promise that I will keep anything a secret.”**

Leader notes:

Every congregation has different policies, be sure to read and adapt them to these slides.

After the “relationships get tough” slides you may want to include one about other safety issues such inclement weather or fires.

8 When relationships get tough: Classroom Management

- **The more they’re interested or invested, the more they will pay attention**
- **Criticize Behavior, not the person**
 - **You are a good person, but that was inappropriate behavior**
 - **All people are created and loved by God.**
- **Practice**
 - **Divide into groups, try out scenarios**
 - **Talk about what was hard, and how you solved it**

Leadership notes:

One way to get people invested is to get them physically or emotionally active. The leaders are trying this out as they practice these tough scenarios, have them actually act out the scenarios: (You can and should make these more specific. Particularly add names.)

- *A child walks in and says they don’t want to be there, their parents made them come. What do you say?*
- *You notice that a child has been showing up with bruises each week. What do you do?*
- *A child sits to the side and doesn’t say anything. How do you get them involved?*
- *Two children are talking while another child is trying to read aloud. What do you do?*
- *One child trips another child while walking down the hall.*
- *How would you handle the situation?*
- *One child is teasing another child about their ability to read.*
- *What do you do?*

9 **Where's God?**

- **Use God Language!**
 - **Ex: S: That's a cool tree! L: God made that tree!**
 - **Ex: L: Welcome! God loves you.**
- **Prayer!**
 - **Be sure to be talking to God to open and close the class, ask for requests from students**
- **Read the Bible!**
 - **When reading the story tell kids this is the book we go to learn about God. Show children how to look up stories on their own and encourage them to read at home with parents or on their own**
- **REMEMBER: We can experience God's love through the love of others! We are sharing God's love! God remains the focus!**

Leader notes:

This isn't a big section of the presentation, but it is important. Look for God in others. Tell kids how to find God even in the kids they don't like or are mean to them. Relationships are important, but human beings can let us down, God is always faithful. Be sure that the human relationships do not get in the way of the God ones.

This is part of the enduring understanding. Make certain that people walk away having heard and understood this well. (People tend to remember the very first things they hear and the very last things they hear the best, so having this at the end hopefully they will walk away remembering it!)

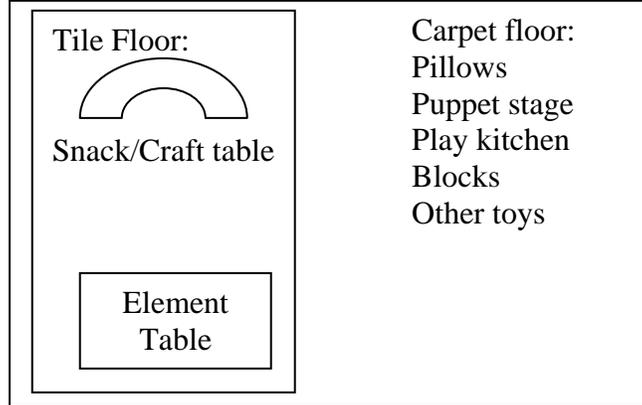
10 **Questions?**

11 **Thank you for coming!!!**

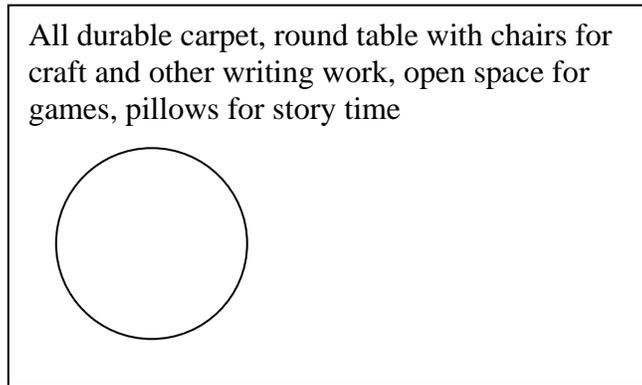
We are looking forward to a great year ahead!!

Class room Set-ups

Preschool/Kindergarten Room(s)



1-5th grade room(s)



Preschool/Kindergarten Lesson

We are the church

Objective: Children will get to know each other as blessed and welcomed by Jesus, as well as be able to explore the classroom space and the congregation building.

Welcome/Opening:

As children arrive allow for some free time to explore the classroom and get used to the space, provide activities to get them engaged such as coloring sheets, play dough, toy cars, or other manipulatives.

Activity: Moving Hearts

Supplies: Heart-shape with picture of Jesus

Use a large heart shape with a picture of Jesus glued in the center as your game piece. Have children sit in a circle. Say, "Jesus loves _____!" The child whose name is called gets to run around the circle, grab the heart and hug it, then return to his or seat to continue the game.¹

Bible Story: Jesus Blesses the Children

Supplies: Beginner's Bible²

Read "The Children," pg. 432-437 from The Beginner's Bible.

Ask: **What happened when moms and dads first brought their children to see Jesus?** (Jesus' friends turned them away.)

What did Jesus do? (Said that the children could see him, welcomed them, blessed them.)

Were the children in the story important to Jesus? (Yes.) **Are you important to Jesus?** (Yes.) **How have you been blessed by Jesus?** (My mom, dad, house, pets, etc.)

Say: **You are right, each one of you is important to Jesus. Jesus loves each and every one of you. Because Jesus loves each one of us, we can show Jesus' love to other people. There are many ways to show Jesus' love. Today we are going to explore the church building and learn about what happens in each room and how Jesus' love is shown in each room.**

Bible Story Application:

Activity: Explore the room and the church building

Play follow the leader around the hallways of the building, stopping briefly at certain parts to talk with the children about what goes on their.

Places to stop:

Worship Center/Sanctuary

¹ "Moving Hearts" Age Level Insights. Children's Ministry Magazine January/February 2007 vol. 16, no. 6. pg. 22. Group Publishing, Inc. Loveland, CO.

² The Beginner's Bible: Timeless Children's stories, as told by Karyn Henley, illustrated by Dennas Davis. James R. Leininger, 1989.

Church Office
Fellowship Hall
Nursery
Choir Room
Other Rooms important to Congregation

Ask questions like: **What do you think happens in this room? What can you do in this room? How is Jesus' love shown in this room?**

Extra Time: Give the children more free time to explore the classroom. Ask them to find specific things like the craft table or certain types of toys.

Closing/Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing all these wonderful children here today. Please let them all have a wonderful week filled with your love. Lord, I thank you for... (List children's names), and all those children that could not make it today. Thank you for all of our new friendships. In your name we pray, Amen.

Preschool/Kindergarten Creation

Objective: Children will learn that God created the world, and continue to build relationships within their small groups.

Welcome/Opening:

As children arrive allow for some free time to explore the classroom and get used to the space, provide activities to get them engaged such as coloring sheets, play dough, toy cars, or other manipulatives.

Activity:

Supplies: ball or other object children can pass around

After the majority of the children have arrived, gather the children in a circle and introduce as a ritual that will be continued throughout the Sunday School year.

Say: **I have this ball.** (or other object, a stuffed animal may be better for the younger children) **Each week we are going to be using it at the beginning of our time together. The game is that it's your turn to talk when you are holding onto the ball. If you are not holding onto the ball, it's your turn to listen. Do you think you can do that?** (pause for response) **Why don't we start by passing the ball around and each say our names when we are holding onto it?**

Pass the ball around giving each child the chance to introduce themselves. Once it has made it to every child, say: **Good job, now let's each tell about one good thing that happened this week.** Pass the ball around again, giving each child the chance to tell about a good thing that happened this week. The leader should start to give the children an example of what they can tell about. Be sure to listen and comment on each child's story.

After each child has had a chance to talk about a good thing, say: **Those are all great things that happened this week. Next week we will do the same thing, but we will also answer about one bad thing that happened in the week and about where we saw Jesus working. So be detectives this week, and be on the look out for where you see Jesus. Do you think you can all be detectives?** (pause for response. Give examples of how Jesus might be working like when people are being kind to one another, when they see a plant growing, etc.)

Bible Story: Creation

Supplies: Beginner's Bible³

Read "The Beginning" pages 9-15 from the Beginner's Bible.

Ask: **What are some things that God created?** (the sun, sky, animals, me)

Say: **God filled our world with many beautiful things. God wants us to enjoy the wonderful world He's made. God also wants us to help take care of our world. What's one thing you can do to take care of God's beautiful world?** (pick up garbage I see around, etc.)

³ The Beginner's Bible: Timeless Children's stories, as told by Karyn Henley, illustrated by Dennas Davis. James R. Leininger, 1989.

Bible Application:

Craft: The Creation of Me⁴

Supplies: Colored Construction Paper, Brown and Yellow Yarn for Hair, Buttons, Lace, Fabric, Ribbons, Scissors, Crayons, Glue

Children choose a color of construction paper for the shirt/body and 4"x16" paper for the arms and legs. The children will need to fold the paper for the arms and legs back and forth (accordion-style folds). Have the children glue the hands and feet (circular pieces of construction paper) to the arms and legs. Color the face on the construction paper. Buttons may be used for eyes. Have the children glue yarn on for hair. Children may use left over accessories to decorate their image if wanted. As children work, point out how each created person is different and special. Remind children that God made the world and you and me.

Extra Time:

Option 1: If it's a nice day outside, go outside for a walk and talk about God's creation.

Option 2: Let children explore the classroom some more, play with toys, etc.

Closing/Prayer:

Ask for special prayer requests, grandma's sick, soccer game coming up, homework, tests, etc. make note, then pray:

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing all these wonderful children here today. Please let them all have a wonderful week filled with your love. Help them to be good detectives and to discover all the ways you continue to work and create in the world. Lord, I thank you for... (list children's names), and all those children that could not make it today. Lord, today we lift up... (pray for all the prayer requests.) Thank you for all of our new friendships and for creating each one of us. In your name we pray, Amen

⁴ www.handsonbible.com/tips Fall 2005, week3 link

Preschool/Kindergarten You are Special

Objective: Children will learn that each one of them is special because God made them.

Welcome/Check-in Time

Supplies: ball

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name when they have the ball in their hand. Pass the ball around again, have each child tell about one good thing and one bad thing that happened this week. Also one way they saw God this week.

Bible Story:

Supplies: You are Special by Max Lucado⁵

Read the story, You are Special by Max Lucado

Ask: **What did the Wemmicks do when somebody did something good?** (Put a star on them)

- **What did the Wemmicks do when somebody made a mistake?** (put a gray dot on them)
- **Who made a lot of mistakes?** (Punchinello)
- **Was it nice that the Wemmicks gave so many dots and stars?** (No)
- **Who made things better?** (Eli)

Say: **Just like Eli made all of the Wemmicks special in the story. God made each one of us special. And like Eli wanted Punchinello to visit him each day, God wants us to visit with him each day too. How can we visit with God?** (Pray, read the bible, come to church)

Bible Story Application/Active Learning:⁶

Craft: “God Made Me Special” mini book

Supplies: Book pages, crayons, stapler, glue sticks

Give each child one piece of paper with pages cover, 1, 6 and 7 and another piece of paper with pages 2, 3, 4, 5. Have them draw a picture of themselves on the cover and on page 5 “God made me special.” They can draw themselves playing or doing some of their favorite things. Then children can color the other pages of the book.

Help children to assemble the book. If you imagine a 'real' book for a second, you know that each page has printing on the front and the back. We're going to fold the pages to make it like a real book. Fold each page in half and in half again so the images are on the OUTSIDE and the blank sides of the paper are on the inside (imagine you're making a greeting card). You can use a glue stick, if you like, to glue the pages together (this makes it easier for page turning later on). Put pages 2, 3, 4, 5 inside and staple the edge. Trim with a scissors if needed.

⁵ You are Special by Max Lucado

⁶ Based on Craft at www.dltk.com/crafts/miscellaneous/all_about_me.htm

Read the book to the children or have them read it using the pictures.

Activity: People Parts⁷

Remind children that God made them special, and then lead them in the following action rhyme.

God made fingers, noses, toes (*touch fingers, nose, and toes*)
Eyes, ears and hair that grows. (*Touch eyes, ears, hair.*)
God made you and God made me. (*Point to others, then self*)
God said, "It's good." Don't you agree? (*Nod head.*)

Repeat the rhyme several times. If children are interested, let them take turns leading it. After you've said the rhyme the last time, have children shout, "It's good!" and clap for God.

Game: You are Special (Simon Says)⁸

Each one of your clothespin people is special just like each one of you is special. Let's play a game to help us remember how special we all are. I'm going to give you some directions. If you hear me say, "If you're special" before the directions, do what I say. For example, I might say, "If you're special stand up."

Have children stand up.

Say: **You'll have to listen carefully. Don't follow my directions unless you hear me say, "If you're special."**

Read the following instructions, one at a time. Each time you say, "If you're special," pause for children to complete their actions. As you speak, put extra emphasis on "if you're special" to make sure children hear and follow the directions.

- **If you're special, hug yourself.**
- **If you're special, shake a friend's hand.**
- **If you're a mouse, crawl on the floor.**
- **If you're strong, make a fist.**
- **If you're special, pat somebody on the back.**
- **If you're special, hug someone.**
- **If you're in our class, sit down.**
- **If you're special, jump and shout, "I'm special!" then sit down.**

Say: **Good job! We have a lot of special people in our class. Jesus was a very special person, too. When he walked on earth, Jesus was kind to people and to animals. Jesus is glad when we are kind to people and animals because he wants us to be like him. Let's do something right now that would please Jesus. Turn to the person sitting next to you; shake his or her hand, and say, "You're special!"**

Closing/Prayer:

⁷ "Lively Learning: People Parts." Lesson 3: God Creates people Hands On Bible Curriculum: Preschool, ages 3-4, Teacher Guide, Fall, 2005. Pg. 48. Group Publishing, Inc. Loveland, CO. 1995, 2005.

⁸ Lesson 3: God Creates people Hands On Bible Curriculum: Preschool, ages 3-4, Teacher Guide, Fall, 2005. Pg. 43. Group Publishing, Inc. Loveland, CO. 1995, 2005.

Ask children if there is anything special they would like to pray for. (Ex: grandma who is sick, thank God for mom and dad, special activities etc.)

Pray: Dear God, Thank you for making us all so special! You have given us each things we do well and things we don't do as well, just like your whole creation, you made us good. Lord today we lift up to you (name all of the children and their prayer requests.) Thanks for hearing our prayers and for making us special. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Preschool/Kindergarten Being Kind to others

Objective: Children will learn the importance of serving others/being kind to others as disciples of Christ.

Bible Story: The Good Samaritan

Welcome/Check-in:

Supplies: ball/other object

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name, one high (really good thing that happened) for the week and one low (a not so good thing that happened during the week). Also ask where children have seen God in the world this week.

Bible Story: The Good Samaritan 9:30-9:35

Say: Today we will be learning about service. Does anybody know what service is? (*lending a hand to help someone else*) **What are some ways that you can help other people out?** (*pick up my toys, help mom/dad cook and clean, help my little brother/sister stand up when they fall down, help my brother/sister clean their room, sit nice, pay attention, listen in class*) **That's right! This week we will be hearing a story from the Bible, God's special book, that Jesus told, about when a man helped another man that was supposed to be his enemy.**

Read pg 395-399 "A Good Neighbor" in Beginner's Bible.

Ask: **How did the Samaritan man show kindness to the hurt man?**

- **Why does God want us to be kind to our neighbors?**

Say: Turn to a friend, tell about a time when you were loving and kind and helped someone else.

Bible Application:

Craft: Create a card⁹

Supplies: crayons, create a card handout

Say: Today we are going to be God's helpers. We're going to serve other people and help them to feel better. We're going to make get-well cards for people who are sick or need some cheering up.

Give each child a handout and crayons. Read the words: **God loves you so much. He's watching over you.** Help the children to cut out and fold the cards with the words on the inside. Have kids decorate the blank outsides of the cards and color the picture on the inside.

Game: Be Kind to Others¹⁰

⁹ Adapted from: "Create a Card." Lively Bible Lessons for Preschoolers (revised and updated). Pg. 44. Group Publishing, Inc. Loveland, CO 1991, 2004.

Supplies: small towels/wash cloth,

Have your children stand up and form a circle. Choose a child to lie on the floor in the middle of the circle and pretend to be the hurt man along the road. Give one child in the circle a small towel. Lead the children in singing the following song to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell.” (or saying the following rhyme if you are uncomfortable singing). While they sing, have the children pass the towel around the circle. At the end of the song, whoever is holding the towel will run into the center, place it over the hurt man and shout, “I’ll be kind!”

Extra Time: Show His Love Finger play¹¹

Lead your children in the following finger play to help reinforce the Bible story.

When asked who we should be kind to. (*place finger on side of head*)
Jesus had one reply (*hold up one finger*):
“Love your neighbor as yourself (*hold hands out, palms up*)
And the Lord you will glorify.” (*Smile and raise hands in praise*)
It doesn’t matter where you live (*Hold hands out, palms up*)
Or who you seem to know (*shake a friend’s hand*),
God wants us all to help each other. (*Sweep hand out in front of you.*)
That’s how his love we show. (*Hug yourself.*)

Closing/Prayer:

Ask for any prayer requests the kids have for this week. Make note, then pray.

Pray: **Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us that You want us to care for others who are hurting. They may be different from us, but that shouldn’t stop us. We should do everything we do for others like we’re doing it for You. Give us the power to serve others like You do. Lord, today we lift up...** (state the prayer requests the children talked about for this week) **In Jesus’ name, amen.**

¹⁰ “Be Kind to Others.” Pg. 137. Play and Pray Bible 2 For Young Children. Group Publishing, Inc. Loveland, CO 2003.

¹¹ “Show His Love.” Jesus Tells About a Good Samaritan. Playful Songs and Bible Stories for Preschoolers. Pg. 138. Group Publishing, Inc. Loveland, CO. 2003.

Large Group Time (Preschool/Kindergarten)

This can be after the Welcome time, so that children can travel to the large group as a class and it is not so intimidating a space to come in to. A typical structure may be:

Prayer
Song
Song
Song
Puppets/other telling of Bible story
Song
Song
Return to classroom

Large Group Time (1st-5th Grade)

This will be at the beginning of the meeting time each week. The typical structure can go as follows:

Gathering Time
Prayer
Song
Song
Song
Bible Story Presentation*
Song (offering)
Song
Dismissal to small groups/classrooms

*Bible story presentation:

Each Small group/classroom will have a chance throughout the year to present a Bible Story. The teachers/leaders can be given a schedule of Bible stories and either asked to sign up for a week or be assigned weeks. The week prior to their turn to present, the class will study the Bible passage/story and use their time to prepare a skit, painting, song or other presentation to do for the large group. This will hopefully help the children to begin to be able to articulate their faith, help them to feel comfortable taking leadership roles in the congregation. In addition it will help them to dive more deeply into a text.

“Religious educators and other leaders shortchange people when they assume only those trained theologically should engage in ministry and speak the faith on behalf of the church. They worry that if all laity, young and old, are encouraged to try to articulate the faith, they will not do it correctly, or the “truth” will be tarnished by heresy. Rather heresy is more apt to creep in where people are silenced. We will not preserve the truth by allowing only a small percentage of Christians to speak it.”¹²

¹² Everist, Norma Cook. The Church as a Learning Community. Pg 272..

1st-3rd Grade Lesson Week 1

We are the Church

Objective: Children will establish rules for their small group/classroom establishing that they have a say in what happens.

Welcome/Opening:

Supplies: ball or other object children can pass around

Introduce the following activity as a ritual that will be continued throughout the Sunday School year. Say: **I have this ball.** (or other object, a stuffed animal may be better for the younger children) **Each week we are going to be using it at the beginning of our time together. The game is that it's your turn to talk when you are holding onto the ball. If you are not holding onto the ball, it's your turn to listen. Do you think you can do that?** (pause for response) **Why don't we start by passing the ball around and each say our names when we are holding onto it?**

Pass the ball around giving each child the chance to introduce themselves. Once it has made it to every child, say: **Good job, now let's each tell about one good thing that happened this week.** Pass the ball around again, giving each child the chance to tell about a good thing that happened this week. The leader should start to give the children an example of what they can tell about. Be sure to listen and comment on each child's story.

After each child has had a chance to talk about a good thing, say: **Those are all great things that happened this week. Next week we will do the same thing, but we will also answer about one bad thing that happened in the week and about where we saw Jesus working. So be detectives this week, and be on the look out for where you see Jesus. Do you think you can all be detectives?** (pause for response. Give examples of how Jesus might be working like when people are being kind to one another, when they see a plant growing, etc.)

Activity:

Supplies: poster board/flipchart, and thick marker

Say: **Now it's time to go over the rules for this time we have together each week. I want you all to decide on them. Now I will give you one minute to think about them. Then I will give you another minute to turn to the person next to you and talk about it. And after you have talked about it, we can write them up on this poster board. After deciding the rules we will also talk about rewards and consequences for following or breaking the rules. Then when we are agreed we can all sign it saying that we will abide by the rules we chose and the consequences. Next week when you come to class I will have a copy typed up for each one of you.**

Allow time for each person to think on their own, then talk to people next to them. Finally write suggestions on the poster board. These may include things such as respect, listening when others talk, do any homework, don't insult anyone, don't injure anyone, don't swear, etc. Consequences may include things such as a warning, taking away a privilege, notifying parents, etc. Consequences may also be that if you are mean to someone, you then need to say 3 nice things about them. Rewards can include things like a game day, movie day, treats, point system, etc.

Extra Time:

If there's extra time, take a walk around the building, explore the activities that are happening through out. Ask questions such as: What do you think happens in this part of the building? How can people be served? How is God being served?

Closing/Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing us all together today. Please let us all have a wonderful week filled with your love. Lord, I thank you for... (list children's names), and all those people that could not make it today. Thank you for all of our new friendships. In your name we pray, Amen.

1st-3rd Grade Lesson Creation

Objective: Children will continue to build relationships with one another as they learn about God creating the world.

Welcome/Check-in time:

Supplies: ball

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name, one high (really good thing that happened) for the week and one low (a not so good thing that happened during the week).

Ask: **Where did you see God in the world this week?**

Ice Breaker Activity: I have never¹³

Supplies: none

Have children stand/sit in a circle. Have each person take one shoe off, this shoe will be used to mark their place. Choose one person to stand in the middle (the leader or a helper may want to start the game). The person in the middle says something they have never done. Any one in the circle, who has done what this person has not, moves to a new spot in the circle. The last person to find a spot is the new person in the middle.

Ex: "I never ate Chinese food." In this case anyone who has eaten Chinese food must find different spot in the circle.

Bible Application:

Review the Bible Story (children will have already heard it during the large group time):

Ask: **Who remembers what happened in today's story?**

Show Children how to find Genesis 1 in the Bible. Have them find the name of the book, the big chapter number and the small verse numbers. Read or ask a child to read Gen. 1:1-31. (If your students use the Beginner's Bible, the story is on pages 9-15.)

Ask: **What are some things that God created?**

- **Did God create you?**
- **What did God say about everything that He made?**
- **What are some things we can do to help take care of God's wonderful creation that includes not only everything outside but all the people we see everyday, even ourselves?**

Activity: Tissue paper earth suncatcher¹⁴

Supplies: green tissue paper, blue tissue paper, margarine or ice cream container lids, glue (can be watered down 1/2 and 1/2), popsicle sticks for spreading the glue.

¹³ Source: unknown

¹⁴ http://www.dltk-bible.com/guides/god_made_our_world.htm CraftTime activity for 1-3rd grade: Tissue paper earth suncatcher

Provide each child with white glue, green and blue tissue paper and a margarine or ice cream container lid (depending on how large you want your earth to be). Squeeze white glue onto the container lid to cover it completely with a thin layer (it takes a fair amount of glue, so if you have a large class, you'll want to keep the lids small). Rip the tissue paper free hand into continent and ocean shaped pieces. You may want a picture or globe of the earth available for them to refer to. Gently lay the pieces onto the glue. Squeeze another thin layer of glue over top.

Extra Time:

If it's a nice day outside, go outside for a walk and talk about God's creation.

Closing/Prayer:

Ask for special prayer requests, grandma's sick, soccer game coming up, homework, tests, etc. make note, then pray:

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing all here again today. Please let us all have a wonderful week filled with your love. Surprise us as we discover all the ways you continue to work and create in the world. Lord, I thank you for... (list children's names), and all those people that could not make it today. Lord, today we lift up... (pray for all the prayer requests.) Thank you for all of our new friendships, for creating the world and for creating each one of us. In your name we pray, Amen

1st-3rd Grade Lesson

You are Special

Objective: Children will learn that they are special because God made them special and that all of God's creation is special.

Welcome/Check-in time:

Supplies: ball

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name, one high (really good thing that happened) for the week and one low (a not so good thing that happened during the week).

Ask: **Where did you see God in the world this week?**

Bible Application:

Instead of hearing a Bible story, in large group time children will hear the story You are Special by Max Lucado.

Review the Bible Story (children will have already heard it during the large group time):

Say: **Today to review our story, I want you each to turn to a neighbor and retell them the story. I will tell you when it's time to switch and let the other person tell the story.**

Ask: **Who do you feel like in the story we heard today?** Say: **You don't have to answer out loud if you don't want to, but think about it for a minute.**

- **Who was Eli in the story we heard today?**
- **Who do we know that is like Eli?**
- **What did Eli want Punchinello to do?**
- **How can we visit with God?**

Say: **We don't always get treated the best by others, much like how the Wemmicks treated each other. How can we do a better job to treat each other well?**

Activity: Giant People¹⁵

Supplies: Large Paper, crayons, markers

Give children a piece of paper large enough for an outline of themselves. Have children work in pairs outlining each other on the paper. After the outlines are drawn have children draw and decorate their person with things that make them special. For instance: if they like to play soccer they may draw a soccer ball. Towards the end of class ask children to share about their drawing and how they can use the things that make them special to help other people. Going back to the soccer example: they can help their team win a game or teach someone else to play.

Closing/Prayer:

Ask children if there is anything special they would like to pray for. (Ex: grandma who is sick, thank God for mom and dad, special activities etc.)

¹⁵ Based on activity found at: http://www.dltk-bible.com/guides/god_made_me.htm Craft Time: Giant People

Pray: Dear God, Thank you for making us all so special! You have given us each things we do well and things we don't do as well, just like your whole creation, you made us good. Lord today we lift up to you (name all of the children and their prayer requests.) Thanks for hearing our prayers and for making us special. Please help us to treat each other as the wonderful creation that you have made. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1st-3rd Grade Lesson The Good Samaritan

Objective: Children will learn about The Good Samaritan and then do a service project together to teach that they can serve others even though they are young, and also to build relationships with group members.

Welcome/Check-in time:

Supplies: ball

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name, one high (really good thing that happened) for the week and one low (a not so good thing that happened during the week).

Ask: **Where did you see God in the world this week?**

Ask: **How did you show God's love to others this week?**

Ask: **Who remembers what we learned last week?**

Bible Application:

Review the Bible Story:

- Ask: **Who remembers what happened in today's story?**

Show Children how to find Luke 10:30-37 in the Bible. Have them find the name of the book, the big chapter number and the small verse numbers.

Read or ask a child to read Luke 10:30-37. (If your students use the Beginner's Bible, the story is on page pg 395-399)

- Ask: **Who lives in your neighborhood?**
- **How well do they know them? Has a new kid moved in recently?**
- **How about people who live across town, in another state, or on the other side of the world? Are they our neighbors?**
- **How can we be good neighbors to those who live far away?**

Activity: Fleece Blankets for Sharing and Caring Hands¹⁶

Supplies: scissors, rulers, two coordinating pieces of fleece (2 yards in each of two fabrics, pencils)

Special notes:

- Fabric is usually 54 inches wide or greater.
- You need two separate pieces of fabric for the blanket; one will be the front, one will be the back.
- Double-check the widths of the two fleeces to make sure they are the same.

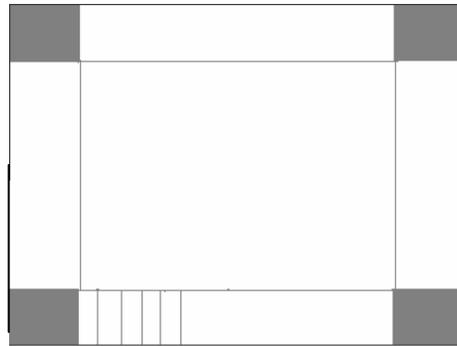
Say: Today we will be serving others by making fleece blankets for people at Mary's Place and Sharing and Caring Hands. These are places that help people and provide for people who do not have homes and cannot afford nice things. Just like the Good Samaritan took care of the man who was hurt, we will be working together to make this blanket for a family that needs it.

¹⁶ Directions adapted from: <http://www.exploringwomanhood.com/homelife/ideas/pom-jan03.htm>

Directions:

Assign Jobs: have some students measuring and some students cutting. Everybody can work together to tie.

- Cut off rough selvage edge on both sides. (This is the side that is machine finished, not cut.) Trim only as much as necessary, usually not more than 2 inches on each side. At this point, make sure that your cut sides are relatively straight. (They don't have to be perfect!) Do this on each piece of fabric.
- Lay your fleece wrong sides together, with edges matching up. (Often times with fleece, it's hard to tell which side is the wrong side and it often doesn't matter which side you use as the front or back.)
- Help students measure and cut a 4x4" square out of each corner (through both layers of fleece) and discard.
- Help students measure and cut all 4" into fleece at 1" intervals around all four sides. Tie overhand knot close to blanket edge by using one strip from the front and one strip from the back to create finished fringe edge - then tie again. Repeat around all four sides. Make sure you make two tight, overhand knots for your fringe. This should hold it together through washer and dryer cycles.



4" X 4" Square 1 inch strips

Closing/Prayer:

Ask for any prayer requests the kids have for this week. Make note, then pray.

Pray: **Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us that You want us to care for others who are hurting. They may be different from us, but that shouldn't stop us. We should do everything we do for others like we're doing it for You. Give us the power to serve others like You do. Lord, today we lift up...** (state the prayer requests the children talked about for this week) **In Jesus' name, amen.**

4th-5th Grade Lesson

We are the church

Objective: Children will establish rules for their small group/classroom establishing that they have a say in what happens.

Welcome/Opening:

Supplies: ball or other object children can pass around

Introduce the following activity as a ritual that will be continued throughout the Sunday School year. Say: **I have this ball.** (or other object) **Each week we are going to be using it at the beginning of our time together. The game is that it's your turn to talk when you are holding onto the ball. If you are not holding onto the ball, it's your turn to listen. Why is having this ball a good idea?** (pause for response) **Can we start by passing it around and say your name and your favorite kind of ice cream?**

Pass the ball around giving each child the chance to introduce themselves. Once it has made it to every child, say: **Good job, now let's pass the ball around again and each tell about one good thing that happened this week and one bad thing.** Pass the ball around again, giving each child the chance to tell about a good thing that happened this week. The leader should start to give the children an example of what they can tell about. Be sure to listen and comment on each child's story.

After each child has had a chance to talk about a good thing, say: **Thank you all for sharing what is happening in your week. Each time we come together we will do a similar activity to check-in. During this week I would like if you all could be on the lookout for where you see God and how you see God working. And during this opening time we will talk about that too.** Give examples of how Jesus might be working like when people are being kind to one another, when they see a plant growing, etc.

Activity:

Supplies: poster board/flipchart, and thick marker

Say: **Now it's time to go over the rules for this time we have together each week. I want you all to decide on them. Now I will give you one minute to think about them. Then I will give you another minute to turn to the person next to you and talk about it. And after you have talked about it, we can write them up on this poster board. After deciding the rules we will also talk about rewards and consequences for following or breaking the rules. Then when we are agreed we can all sign it saying that we will abide by the rules we chose and the consequences. Next week when you come to class I will have a copy typed up for each one of you.**

Allow time for each person to think on their own, then talk to people next to them. Finally write suggestions on the poster board. These may include things such as respect, listening when others talk, do any homework, don't insult anyone, don't injure anyone, don't swear, etc. Consequences may include things such as a warning, taking away a privilege, notifying parents, etc. Consequences may also be that if you are mean to someone, you then need to say 3 nice things about them. Rewards can include things like a game day, movie day, treats, point system, etc.

Extra Time:

If there's extra time, take a walk around the building, explore the activities that are happening through out. Ask questions such as: What do you think happens in this part of the building? How can people be served? How is God being served?

Closing/Prayer:

Ask children if there is anything special they would like to pray for. (Ex: grandma who is sick, thank God for mom and dad, special activities etc.)

Pray: Dear Lord, thank you for bringing us all together today. Please let us all have a wonderful week filled with your love. Lord, I thank you for... (list children's names), and all those people that could not make it today. Thank you for all of our new friendships. In your name we pray, Amen.

4th-5th Grade Lesson Creation

Objective: Children will continue to build relationships with one another as they learn about God creating the world.

Welcome/Check-in time:

Supplies: ball

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name, one high (really good thing that happened) for the week and one low (a not so good thing that happened during the week).

Ask: **Where did you see God in the world this week?**

Ice Breaker Activity: I have never¹⁷

Supplies: none

Have children stand/sit in a circle. Have each person take one shoe off, this shoe will be used to mark their place. Choose one person to stand in the middle (the leader or a helper may want to start the game). The person in the middle says something they have never done. Any one in the circle, who has done what this person has not, moves to a new spot in the circle. The last person to find a spot is the new person in the middle.

Ex: "I never ate Chinese food." In this case anyone who has eaten Chinese food must find a different spot in the circle.

Bible Application:

Review the Bible Story (children will have already heard it during the large group time):

Ask: **Who remembers what happened in today's story?**

Show Children how to find Genesis 1 in the Bible. Have them find the name of the book, the big chapter number and the small verse numbers.

Read or ask a child to read Gen. 1:1-31. (If your students use the Beginner's Bible, the story is on pages 9-15.)

Ask: **What are some things that God created?**

- **Did God create you?**
- **What did God say about everything created? (it was good) Is good the same thing as perfect? (no)**
- **How long did it take for God to create the world? Why do you think it took that long?**
- **Do you think God was done creating after that?**
- **What are some things we can do to help take care of God's wonderful creation that includes not only everything outside but all the people we see everyday, even ourselves?**

Activity: Creation Wheel¹⁸

¹⁷ Source: unknown

Supplies: Scissors, Pencil Ruler, poster board-cut in 12 inch circles (2 per child), Markers, White glue, Cotton ball, Paper fastener

Give children each two poster board circles. Have them use the ruler to divide one circle into eight equal wedge-shaped segments. Cut a segment from the other poster board that is slightly smaller than one segment of the one drawn on previously. Make sure it does not go all the way to the center of the circle.

Have them use the markers to decorate each segment on the corrugated cardboard to tell about the seven days of creation.

- In the first segment write "The Story of Creation" and decorate the segment.
- The next segment will be the first day of creation, when God separated the light from the dark.
- On the second day He made the sky. You can glue a bit of cotton in the sky to look like clouds.
- On the third day He separated the lands from the seas, and on the fourth day God put the sun, the moon, and the stars in the sky.
- On the fifth day He filled the seas with fish and the sky with birds.
- On the sixth day He created all the animals and He created man.
- On the seventh day God rested from his work.

Attach the poster board with the wedge cut out to the top of the decorated circle by putting the paper fastener through the center of both circles. Arrange the top circle so that the title segment, "The Story of Creation," shows through.

Tell the children they can use the creation wheel to tell the story of creation to their parents/friends/siblings/neighbors, by turning the top wheel to expose the picture of each of the seven days.

Extra Time:

If it's a nice day outside, go outside for a walk and talk about God's creation.

Closing/Prayer:

Ask for special prayer requests, grandma's sick, soccer game coming up, homework, tests, etc. make note, then pray:

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing all here again today. Please let us all have a wonderful week filled with your love. Surprise us as we discover all the ways you continue to work and create in the world. Lord, I thank you for... (list children's names), **and all those people that could not make it today. Lord, today we lift up...** (pray for all the prayer requests.)

Thank you for all of our new friendships, for creating the world and for creating each one of us. In your name we pray, Amen

¹⁸ <http://www.families-first.com/kids/ross6.htm> Creation Wheel Excerpted from Kathy Ross, author of many craft books including: Crafts from Your Favorite Bible Stories ©1999 Kathy Ross (text) Vicky Enright (illustrations)

4th-5th Grade Lessons

You are Special

Objective: Children will learn that they are special because God made them special and that all of God's creation is special.

Welcome/Check-in time:

Supplies: ball

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name, one high (really good thing that happened) for the week and one low (a not so good thing that happened during the week).

Ask: **Where did you see God in the world this week?**

Bible Application:

Instead of hearing a Bible story, in large group time children will hear the story You are Special by Max Lucado.¹⁹

Review the Bible Story (children will have already heard it during the large group time):

Say: **Today to review our story, I want you each to turn to a neighbor and retell them the story. I will tell you when it's time to switch and let the other person tell the story.**

Ask: **Who do you feel like in the story we heard today?** Say: **You don't have to answer out loud if you don't want to, but think about it for a minute.**

- **Who was Eli in the story we heard today?**
- **Who do we know that is like Eli?**
- **What did Eli want Punchinello to do?**
- **How can we visit with God?**

Show Children how to find 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 in the Bible. Have them find the name of the book, the big chapter number and the small verse numbers.

Read or ask a child to read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

Ask: **What do these two stories have in common?**

- **What do they say about each one of us?**
- **How should we treat one another?**

Activity: Hug Machine Skit²⁰

Supplies: none

The parts can be changed based on the number of students you have in class.

Characters:

Inventor (played by leader/helper)

Switch

Yeller

Spinner

¹⁹ You are Special by Max Lucado

²⁰ Source: unknown

Kicker
Hugger
Jumper

Inventor: I really need hug, I think I will invent a machine that gives hugs. Let's what do I need first? First I need a switch turn on the machine. Will one of you please be a switch for me?

Choose a student to be a switch. Ask them to join you up front.

Inventor: Yep I think you will make a great switch now I need you to stand like this: Put right arm straight out and the other arm bent in the opposite direction with one finger out.
Do the actions as you say them. The switch copies the inventor.

Inventor: All right now when I push this arm down Push down right arm your other hand should start poking. Let's try this. The inventor pushes down on the switches right arm and their other hand starts moving back and forth to the left. The inventor lifts up the right arm and then the Switch stops poking.

Inventor: Very good, but now I need another part... will one of you be the next part in the hug machine?

Choose a volunteer to be a yeller, ask them to stand right next to the switch so when the switch starts poking they get poked.

Inventor: You will work great, now stand next to the switch, and when I push down on the switch, and they start poking you, you yell "Yabba Dabba doo!" All right? Let's try this:

Inventor pushes on right arm of Switch, Switch starts poking, yeller starts yelling, "Yabba dabba doo!" This continues until Inventor brings the switch's arm back up.

Inventor: All right, well now I need a spinner, All great inventions have something that spins.

Choose a volunteer to be the spinner.

Inventor: You will work great! Why don't you stand next to the yeller. And when I push this switch and the switch starts poking the yeller, and the yeller start yelling, "Yabba Dabba Doo!" You should start spinning and don't stop until the yeller stops yelling. Let's practice.

Inventor pushes on right arm of Switch, Switch starts poking, yeller starts yelling, "Yabba dabba doo!" Spinner starts spinning. This continues until Inventor brings the switch's arm back up.

Inventor: This is working sooo great! But I am still not getting a hug, I think I need some more pieces. I need a kicker and a jumper.

Get two students to be the kicker and the jumper.

Inventor: Oh good, I am glad to have you here, I need the jumper to stand next to the person spinning and when they start spinning, you start jumping and don't stop jumping until they stop spinning. And I need the kicker to stand next to the jumper, and when they start jumping I need you to gently kick your left leg to the side only once. Let's try it!

Inventor pushes on right arm of Switch, Switch starts poking, yeller starts yelling, "Yabba dabba doo!" Spinner starts spinning. Jumper starts jumping and kicker gently kicks. This continues until Inventor brings the switch's arm back up.

Inventor: Wow this works great! Now I just need a hugger.

Have the last student come up as the hugger.

Inventor: You are perfect for a hugger. Now I need you to stand next to the kicker. And when the kicker gently kicks you, give me a hug. Got it? Let's try the whole machine!

Inventor pushes on right arm of Switch, Switch starts poking, yeller starts yelling, "Yabba dabba doo!" Spinner starts spinning. Jumper starts jumping and kicker gently kicks. Then the hugger hugs the inventor. Once the inventor has been hugged the whole machine can stop and the switch can go back up. The inventor can start the machine a second time just to make sure it works.

Inventor: That was so wonderful, I really like getting hugs! My hug machine works great! What happens if we take one part out?

Remove one person, possibly the spinner from the middle of the machine.

Inventor: Let's try the machine now. Remember your roles and what you have to wait for before you can move.

Inventor pushes switch, switch starts poking, , yeller starts yelling, "Yabba dabba doo!" nobody else does anything. The inventor runs to the other end and waits in anticipation, but never gets a hug. So the inventor tries again, he pushes the switch it starts poking and nothing else happens.

Inventor: All the parts of my machine have special gifts and do special jobs, I need all of you for my machine to work. Let's try this hug machine again, with all the parts.

Inventor pushes on right arm of Switch, Switch starts poking, yeller starts yelling, "Yabba dabba doo!" Spinner starts spinning. Jumper starts jumping and kicker gently kicks. Then the hugger hugs the inventor. Once the inventor has been hugged the whole machine can stop and the switch can go back up.

Say: Each part of this machine needed the other parts for the whole machine to work right. Just like each of us has a special job to do in this machine, we each have a special job to do in every day life. For some people they may be good readers, others may be good at soccer,

others may be good at other things, we are each made special and we each make up the body of Christ.

Activity: Things that make me special

Supplies: note cards, writing utensils

Give each child a note card and a writing utensil. Tell the children to think of the things that make them special. Have them write down what they can think of on one side of the note card. Once children have completed this, ask them to choose one thing on that list, mark it with a star and on the back side of their note card have them write how they can use that gift to help others.

Closing/Prayer:

Ask children if there is anything special they would like to pray for. (Ex: grandma who is sick, thank God for mom and dad, special activities etc.)

Pray: Dear God, Thank you for making us all so special! You have given us each things we do well and things we don't do as well, just like your whole creation, you made us good. Lord today we lift up to you (name all of the children and their prayer requests.) Thanks for hearing our prayers and for making us special. Please help us to treat each other as the wonderful creation that you have made. In Jesus' name. Amen.

4th-5th Grade Lessons

The Good Samaritan

Objective: Children will learn about The Good Samaritan and then do a service project together to teach that they can serve others even though they are young, and also to build relationships with group members.

Welcome/Check-in time:

Supplies: ball

Pass the ball around the table/circle. Have each child say their name, one high (really good thing that happened) for the week and one low (a not so good thing that happened during the week).

Ask: **Where did you see God in the world this week?**

Ask: **How did you show God's love to others this week?**

Ask: **Who remembers what we learned last week?**

Bible Application:

Review the Bible Story:

- Ask: **Who remembers what happened in today's story?**

Show Children how to find Luke 10:30-37 in the Bible. Have them find the name of the book, the big chapter number and the small verse numbers.

Read or ask a child to read Luke 10:30-37.

Ask: **Who lives in your neighborhood?**

- **How well do they know them? Has a new kid moved in recently?**
- **How about people who live across town, in another state, or on the other side of the world? Are they our neighbors?**
- **How can we be good neighbors to those who live far away?**
- **Why do we have such a hard time helping someone who is different from us? How do you feel when you know that a friend is risking or sacrificing something to serve you?**

Activity: Fleece Blankets for Sharing and Caring Hands (or other local organization)²¹

Supplies: scissors, rulers, two coordinating pieces of fleece (2 yards in each of two fabrics, pencils)

Special notes:

- Fabric is usually 54 inches wide or greater.
- You need two separate pieces of fabric for the blanket; one will be the front, one will be the back.
- Double-check the widths of the two fleeces to make sure they are the same.

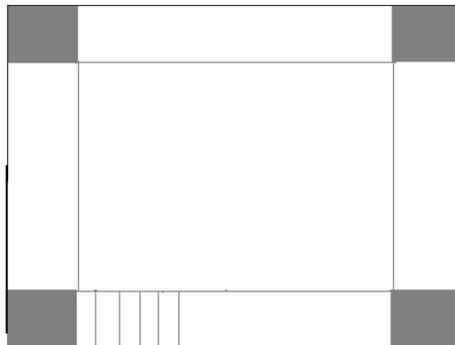
²¹ Directions adapted from: <http://www.exploringwomanhood.com/homelife/ideas/pom-jan03.htm>

Say: **Today we will be serving others by making fleece blankets for people at Mary's Place and Sharing and Caring Hands. These are places that help people and provide for people who do not have homes and cannot afford nice things. Just like the Good Samaritan took care of the man who was hurt, we will be working together to make this blanket for a family that needs it.**

Directions:

Assign Jobs: have some students measuring and some students cutting. Everybody can work together to tie.

- Cut off rough selvage edge on both sides. (This is the side that is machine finished, not cut.) Trim only as much as necessary, usually not more than 2 inches on each side. At this point, make sure that your cut sides are relatively straight. (They don't have to be perfect!) Do this on each piece of fabric.
- Lay your fleece wrong sides together, with edges matching up. (Often times with fleece, it's hard to tell which side is the wrong side and it often doesn't matter which side you use as the front or back.)
- Help students measure and cut a 4x4" square out of each corner (through both layers of fleece) and discard.
- Help students measure and cut all 4" into fleece at 1" intervals around all four sides. Tie overhand knot close to blanket edge by using one strip from the front and one strip from the back to create finished fringe edge - then tie again. Repeat around all four sides. Make sure you make two tight, overhand knots for your fringe. This should hold it together through washer and dryer cycles.



- 4" X 4" Square 1 inch strips

Closing/Prayer:

Ask for any prayer requests the kids have for this week. Make note, then pray or ask a child to pray:

Pray: **Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us that You want us to care for others who are hurting. They may be different from us, but that shouldn't stop us. We should do everything we do for others like we're doing it for You. Give us the power to serve others like You do. Lord, today we lift up...** (state the prayer requests the children talked about for this week) **In Jesus' name, amen.**