

Preparing a Bible Study for Children

There is a big difference between telling children a Bible story and teaching a Bible lesson. A Bible story is certainly interesting, but a Bible lesson can have a real and lasting impact on a child's life. Making your Bible lesson life changing takes careful preparation. So, you must start your lesson planning early in the week. The following are some tips for preparing a Bible lesson for children.

These examples use the passage from Mark 6:45-52, the narrative of Jesus walking on the water.

Study the Word

1. **Read the Word.** If you are using a curriculum, study your lesson from the Bible, not from the teacher's manual! Read the passage several times using several different versions of the Bible, if possible. Use the curriculum only to get background facts about the culture and the historical setting, etc. as you would any Bible commentary. The teacher's manual can also give you good ideas for games, crafts, and songs, etc.

The first thing you must do is spend time studying the passage for yourself. Look up the cross-references, meditate on the Word. Give the Holy Spirit time to work your lesson for the children right into your own life, too. The children will be more impressed by the relevance of the Word to their own lives if they see that you are learning from the Word right along with them. Ask yourself, "What does God want to teach me?" You cannot teach others something that God has not taught you first.

2. **Outline the passage.** After you have read the passage several times, list the logical development of the events. What happened first? What happened next, and so forth? Break the text into the main ideas that are presented. Make sure you have the order of events correct.
3. **Find the central point of the passage.** After finding the main ideas, look for the main theme or general idea of the whole passage. Ask yourself, what is the most important truth that the passage teaches.
4. **Chart the passage using your outline.** Once you have outlined the text you are ready to break the text apart further by charting it. You use charting to look very carefully at the text through OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION, and APPLICATION. Take each section of your outline and go through it verse by verse, noting important words, phrases, and ideas.

Follow these steps to chart a passage:

Step 1 - Observation: What does the text say?

While you are reading the text be sure to carefully observe it. What does God's word say, *exactly*? Look up the meaning of the words, if necessary. Think about why God chose certain words rather than some other words!

In the *Observation* column make a verse-by-verse list of the outstanding words or phrases that catch your attention. You don't have to re-write every word from the text. As you are doing that, ask yourself "Who is speaking?" "What is the subject?" "Where is it taking place?" "When did it happen?" and so on. As you make your list, do not paraphrase; use the actual words from the passage itself.

Step 2 – Interpretation: What does the passage mean?

In the *Interpretation* column write the meaning of the words you observed. Look for the general principles and lessons which can be learned from the words or phrases you wrote in the *Observation* column. This is not your own private interpretation, but the meaning that God intended when He inspired the author to write it down in the first place. Just put it in your own words. As you are doing that, ask yourself, “What is the main idea?” “What is the reason the author wrote this?” “Why did the author choose this word and not another?”

There are several rules for proper interpretation of scripture:

- **Interpret literally**, unless it is obviously figurative language.
- **Study in context**; know what was happening before the passage you are studying.
- **Let scripture interpret scripture**; don’t get your interpretation from some other source.
- **New Testament takes precedence**; remember the NT is the fulfilment of the OT.

Step 3 – Application: What does the passage mean to me?

In the *Application* column, write down what you will do today to respond to the lesson God wants *you* to learn? Ask yourself, “What are the people doing that I should be doing?” “Is there a command that I should obey?” “...a promise that I should claim?” “...a warning that I should heed?” “...an example that I should follow?” Make yourself accountable to God’s word. Make at least one measurable performance objective that focuses on the specific end result. For example, “Today I will...”

Listen for God to communicate to you through His Word. He *will* speak to you personally; He wants to reveal Himself to you! Remember, don’t rush. It may take you several days of prayerful meditation on a given passage in order to discover meaningful lessons and hear God speaking to you. The objective is to develop your personal relationship with God as you learn to communicate with Him.

5. **Develop questions.** Once you get the passage outlined and charted you need to develop questions that you can use during your teaching to engage the children, plus you can use them as lesson review questions for a game to reinforce the lesson objectives. It is important to ask questions that will bring about a good working flow through the text.

Make questions from each column in your chart.

Observation Questions: Who? What? When? Where?

Help the children get into the scene themselves and relive the event or conversation. For example:

- Who are the people in this story?
- Where were they going?
- What did they see?

Interpretation Questions: Why? How?

Help the children think through the main truths of the passage. For example:

- Why would He do that?
- What did Jesus mean?
- Why were they afraid?
- Why were their hearts hardened?

Application Questions:

Help the children think about how they need to respond to God’s word in attitude and behavior. For example:

- How should you respond in times of trouble?
- Do you ever feel like the winds of life are against you?
- What should you do if you believe that prayer is important?

Here is an example chart for the Mark 6 passage:

Mark 6:45-46

God's Word	OBSERVATION (What does the text say?)	INTERPRETATION (What does the passage mean?)	APPLICATION (What does the passage mean to me?)
v 45a. Immediately	Immediately	Right after the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 had just happened.	
QUESTIONS:	What do you think the disciples were doing right after the feeding of the 5,000? (They were probably caught up in the excitement after experiencing the amazing miracle!)	Why didn't Jesus let the people or the disciples revel in the excitement for long?	
v 45b. He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida,	He made His disciples go to Bethsaida.	Jesus knew they needed to rest and He knows what's best for us, too.	I need to listen to God and do what he tells me to do.
QUESTIONS:	What did Jesus make the disciples to do? (Go to Bethsaida.)	Why did Jesus make the disciples go to the other side of the lake? (To rest. Remember in verse 31, before the feeding of the 5,000, they were heading to a secluded place to rest. Look at the context of the passage!)	Why is it important obey God? (He knows what's best for us.)
v 45c. while He sent the multitude away.	He sent the multitude away.	Jesus has authority over the crowd.	Jesus has authority over my life.
QUESTIONS:	What did Jesus do to the crowd? (He sent them away even though they probably wanted to stay after experiencing the amazing miracle.)	Do you think the people wanted to leave? Why did the people leave?	How much authority does Jesus have over your life?
v 46. And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.	He departed to the mountain to pray.	Spending time alone with the Father was very important to Jesus. We need to get away with Jesus; He wants to be alone with us. When we are alone	Starting tomorrow morning at 5:00 a.m. I will spend time alone with Jesus every day.

God's Word	OBSERVATION (What does the text say?)	INTERPRETATION (What does the passage mean?)	APPLICATION (What does the passage mean to me?)
		with Him, He reveals Himself to us.	
QUESTIONS:	What did Jesus do after the crowd left? Where did Jesus go to pray? (The mountain)	Why did Jesus go to the mountain to pray? (He wanted to be alone with the Father.) Why was prayer important to Jesus? (He got instructions about what He was to say and do from God the Father.)	Why is prayer important for you and I? (Spending time with God in prayer equips us to meet life's challenges and struggles.)

6. **Plan to reach the unsaved child:**

- a. **Need for a Savior:** Look for places in the story where the problem of sin is evident in the lives of the characters in the story. That is, find places in the story that would apply to a child's need for a Savior where you can teach about God's solution to man's problem of sin: the gospel.

For example, in verse 52 it says the disciples "...had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened." You could ask the class "Why were their hearts hard?" and lead them to understand that our hearts are hard when we don't believe that Jesus is God and that He is all powerful and more than able to help us in our times of trouble.

No matter what the story is about there should be a place to get in the Good News. Always use the Bible as your authority. Make sure the children know the Word of God is your source. Make Jesus the hero of every story. He is the answer to every problem we have. You want the unsaved child to learn to trust Jesus as his personal Savior.

- b. **Knowledge of God:** Look for places in the story where you can teach the children about God's character. He is holy, just, longsuffering, omnipresent, loving. For example, in verse 48 it says that Jesus, who was up on the mountain, could see the disciples straining at the oars, even though it was night. You could say, "*God is omnipresent. That means God is everywhere and He knows everything that is happening. He knows when you are in trouble.*" You want the children to grow in their understanding of who God is.

7. **Plan to reach the saved child:** You want the child who has already asked Jesus into his or her life to learn to apply God's Word in everyday circumstances. Find the main thrust of the lesson — the lesson objective or the conclusion to the story which should be summed up in the memory verse for the lesson. It should be something that will challenge the believing child to live more earnestly for God. For example, in verse 51 it tells us that as soon as Jesus got into the boat with the disciples the wind stopped. You could say, "*When you let Jesus into your boat; that is, when you trust Jesus in the middle of the storms and trials in your life, He will give you peace.*"

8. **Choose a good Memory Verse for this lesson:** The verse should sum up the lesson objective. For example, using the Mark 6 passage, your verse might be:

God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1-2a)

This should emphasize the moral of the story; that is, the lesson you want the children to learn.

9. **Prepare an attention-grabbing introduction to the lesson.** You can start with a question. For example, using the Mark 6 passage: *“Do you ever get afraid? God knows how frightening your troubles can be and He has the power to solve every one of your problems. Today we’re going to learn how important it is to look to Jesus when we are in troubled times and to remember that He is with us and can help us.”*
10. **Plan to capture the emotions of your students:** You want the children to live this story. Make the Bible story come alive. For example, using the Mark 6 passage, you could ask the students: *What do you think the disciples were doing in the boat? The wind was blowing and the waves were crashing over them. I bet they were bailing the water out of the boat and rowing as hard as they could. What do you think the wind sounded like? Let’s all pretend we are rowing the boat as hard as we can.* Let the children talk and share or even act out the lesson.

You not only want the children to know the facts, but to feel the emotions. If these stories are real to them, the outcome is that they will learn to make right choices in their own lives.

11. **Prepare your Visual Aids and Activities.**

Having colorful visual aids is very helpful in capturing the attention of children. Be sure they are in the right order and that using them doesn’t become a distraction to you. Pull them out of your Bible to reinforce the fact that the lesson is coming out of Scripture. Then, think of songs, crafts, games, and object lessons that will help reinforce your lesson objectives.

12. **Don’t Forget the Invitation.**

Once you have told your story and your students have clearly heard the message of salvation, don’t stop there! Be sure to give them an invitation to accept Jesus as their personal Savior. You’ve made their need known, the problem is clear; now offer them the solution, Jesus Christ. Use a condition/promise verse to give the invitation. For example, you could end your lesson by saying, Acts 16:31 says, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”* God punishes sin, but you can be saved if you will just believe on the Lord Jesus. If anyone wants to receive Jesus, just have them raise their hand to identify themselves and you can pray with them after class.

Your Bible lesson should be life changing, so don’t leave out the sweetness of Jesus.

Lesson Presentation Tips

Once you have studied the passage for yourself and you believe that the lesson is valuable for the children, the Holy Spirit will anoint you to teach it to the children.

When you teach the lesson, teach it accurately and with creativity. Be enthusiastic. Tell the story with as much fervor, excitement, and belief as you can, and let the Holy Spirit do His job. Make sure the children know the Word of God is your source.

Don’t get too caught up in trying to cover everything you’ve got planned. Remember that your goal is not to cover your agenda, but to get the living Word of God into the children’s hearts so that the Holy Spirit can create change in their lives. So, leave your teacher’s manual at home and while you are teaching, hold your Bible with reverence.

Be Accurate

We are responsible to teach truth – interestingly – but accurately. You can project feelings, but don't fabricate or add inaccuracies to make it more interesting. Kids love fantasy, but the Bible is not fantasy; the Word of God is the truth.

Do's and Don'ts

The following are some *Do's* and *Don'ts* for presenting your lesson:

Presentation:

- Make eye contact with the children. Don't look at your notes.
- Organize your visual aids. Pull them out of your Bible; it reinforces the fact that the lesson is coming out of Scripture. But be sure they're in the correct order!
- Make sure the children can easily see the visual aids.
- Be sure your appearance (jewelry, glasses, etc.) isn't a distraction.
- Be confident.
- Use your voice, facial expressions, and physical gestures to be expressive. Pauses are very powerful, too. Use your personality. Have a variety of pitches to use for people in the story. Shout, talk slow or fast, make your voice march.
- Create visual or mental images. Word pictures are very effective.
- Make your words clear. For example say, "Balm" of Gilead, not "bomb."
- Don't talk "Christianese;" look up definitions of terms. Use the appropriate vocabulary for your students so they can understand what you are teaching them.
- Don't tell the story too quickly. Slowing down can make a great emphasis.

Introduction:

- Set the mood, or atmosphere, for the lesson.
- Start with an attention grabber or object lesson to make the story relevant to the kids. Make the story live from the first line. Get into action.
- Bring the author to life – tell something about who he was.
- Get the kids excited about your teaching the lesson; make them look forward to it.

The Body:

- Get the facts straight, but don't worry if you leave something out. Just don't put anything in that is not in the story.
- Be expressive. Try to put yourself in the place of the Bible characters. Make them real (hungry, tired, etc.) to the children.
- Be descriptive. Try to get a real sense of what actually happened. Be enthusiastic – if you are not, the children won't be either!
- Act out the different characters. Do a dialog using different voices for each person in the story.
- Involve some of the other senses. For example, if you are teaching about Palm Sunday, bring in some palm branches to wave around.
- Be sensitive to the children's emotional level. If there is a morally sensitive issue in the text, ask yourself if the children will come to know the Lord Jesus better by including it. For example, if you are teaching very young children, you do not need to mention that someone was killed for being disobedient. You can tell them he was punished. Ask them what sorts of punishments they receive when they are naughty. Remember young children are very literal and are not able to think in abstract concepts. Make the lesson applicable to their lives.
- It is said that the attention span of a child is one minute per year of age. Keep your lessons short and to the point; the tighter the better.
- Don't start a story if you don't have time to do it justice.
- Don't be unnerved by irrelevant questions during the story – particularly from very young children.

Application:

- Weave personal application right into your lesson; don't wait until the end. You can suspend the story to ask a personal application question, then go on to find out how the Bible character handled the situation.