

Key Teaching Resources: Quality, Biblical Curriculum

Creating or Choosing Curriculum

As we develop or purchase curriculum we ask 3 groups of questions:

The first three key questions we ask:

1. **Is it sound theologically? Is it God-centered?**
2. **Is it developmentally appropriate for the children?**
3. **Does it reinforce key truths about God in different ways?**

These questions are summarized by “Two Dead Men and a Diamond”

Dead Man #1: Martin Luther

Luther spoke of theology—the study of God—as not just dry, heady stuff, but how you live and how you die. Children want to learn real, solid truths about God because He created them to know Him. They want to know about the world, God and His great plans for the world and their lives. Teaching biblical truth is how they can know these things.

Dead Man #2: John Bunyan

Bunyan spoke of reaching people through the gates to their heart. We want to use every gate we can to reach the children. The eye gate, the ear gate, the hand gate, the feet gate, even the stomach gate. The more gates used, the better the chance for the learning time to be enjoyable, understandable and memorable.

A Diamond

The great Puritan preachers meditated upon a single truth from many different facets, seeking to expand their knowledge of God and the implications and applications of this knowledge to their lives. We strive to lead children in thinking upon God in ways that might expand their own understanding of Him, and help them see implications and applications of this knowledge to their lives. We find that curriculum which reinforces the same biblical truths in different ways and at different levels helps to achieve this goal.

The next question we ask is:

Are the response activities “conduits of truth” or are they “time fillers”?

Conduits of Truth

There are many curriculum on the market which seek to teach Biblical truths to children in a way that is understandable, enjoyable and memorable. However, we have found, especially in the response activity area, that you need to look closely to see if the activities help the children retain the key, biblical truths of the lesson we most want them to remember.

So, when we create or look at a curriculum, we are not only looking for enjoyable, age-appropriate activities, but at whether these activities are filled with truth or whether they just fill the time. Those which are filled with truth are what we call “conduits of truth.” A conduit of truth activity is one that uses

the enjoyable-ness of the activity to fill the children with the important truths of your lesson.

For example, if the lesson was on Noah's Ark and the children were asked to pair up and mimic animals entering the ark, the children may have a great time, but only go home making elephant noises. This game would not be a conduit of truth. But, if the children were asked to pair up and mimic animals entering the ark, but asked to freeze each time you blow a whistle, then you ask them a question related to the day's story for them to answer, then you have made the same game into a conduit of truth. You are using the enjoyable-ness of the activity to provide an opportunity to reinforce the biblical truths you want them to understand and remember.

Then we ask:

- 1. How well does it fit us?**
- 2. Does it include resources for parents to use with their children?**
- 3. Is it cost-effective? Re-usable?**

1. How well does it fit us?

- a. the attendance patterns of our children
- b. the staffing and abilities of our teachers

Particularly:

- It is easy to follow? How much teaching experience is needed to teach this curriculum well?
- How much preparation is involved?
- What kind of preparation is involved? (choosing and shaping activities or creating activities?)
- Does the curriculum build upon itself, requiring consistent attendance of same kids and the same teacher/s?
- Or, can the lessons stand alone, being effective with kids who have patchy attendance, with visitors, and/or a rotation of teachers?

2. Does it include resources for parents to use with their children (both those whose children attend a class at church and those whose children don't attend the church class but they want to teach these truths at home)? This is important, since class time with the children is very small compared with the teaching time and opportunities parents have with their children. If parents have a way to reinforce the truths taught in the classroom, there is a much higher chance they will be understood and remembered.

3. Is it cost effective? Re-usable? Does the curriculum rely on single-use materials or can they be reproduced and used again with another group of children without additional expense?

The final question we ask is:

1. Does it fit into the teaching emphases set out by our elders?

Our elders have given Children's Ministry four teaching emphasis:

1. Chronological study of the Bible (OT/NT overviews)
2. Prepare the children to gather together with the church body
3. God's One Big Plan of Redemption/Missions
4. Biblical Theology

It can be amazing curriculum, but if it does not fit with what they want us to teach the children, then we will have to pass on it. We trust our elders' God-given vision for our children!

**So, what do we use right now at CHBC to fulfill these four teaching emphases?
Let's take a look!**

Resources We Have Used, Are Using Or Are Considering Using at CHBC (by teaching emphasis)

#1 Chronological Study of the Bible

Who: K-6th grade
When: Sunday School hour

Resource #1 Treasuring Christ

Developed by Providence Baptist Church, Raleigh, North Carolina, this has become our favorite Sunday School resource.

Pros

- Offered online for easy download. Deep discounts for church plants and overseas churches.
- There is curriculum for preschool through high school that covers the same concept for all ages, each week. This makes review discussion at home easier for the parents.
- There is a teacher devotional for every lesson that our teachers have found to be extremely enriching to their own heart as they prepare to teach the children.
- Great, age-appropriate resources.

Cons

- Only that sometimes the crafts for the kindergarten and first grade assume more writing ability than they have.

Resource #2 CSI: Christian Schools International

A reformed publishing house out of Grand Rapids, MI. These are materials designed for use in Christian schools.

Pros

- They are well-organized, use reproducible masters instead of workbooks, and offer a wide range of teaching suggestions.
- There is curriculum for K through 8th grade that builds upon what was taught in the previous year.
- These materials include textbooks which can be purchased for use with children at home for use in devotionals or in a home school setting.
- Theologically sound, interesting details

Cons

- The activities include spelling lists and other "school-ish" activities which must be weeded through.
- Even some of the more straightforward activities need to be modified to be less school-ish.
- Pricey, if you buy all the textbooks for the kids, but at least you only purchase them once.
- Geared for teachers not for volunteers. Best for teachers who can figure out what to use and what not to use; or for a church with someone who can adapt the curriculum for them.

Resource #3: Children Desiring God

Resources developed by Bethlehem Baptist, Minneapolis, MN. These are materials designed for use in churches with a steady attendance of teachers and students. Based upon 40 week teaching schedule.

Pros

- They are well-organized, God-centered, thoroughly biblical.
- There are a large number of resources available for each age group, preschool through high school. They offer Sunday School, mid-week, and inter-generational curriculum.
- More scripted. Geared for volunteers.
- Great for churches with a steady attendance of teachers and students (because the curriculum builds upon itself each lesson).
- Can order resources and be ready to go. Now most available for download at greatly reduced prices.
- Great memory program (Fighter verses) for the whole church. Have just put their children's fighter verses to music!
- Offer curriculum in ESV and NIV.
- Customer support and annual children's ministry conference that can be very helpful.

Cons

- Curriculum costs can add up quickly, especially if you buy the (one-use) workbooks. Now, though, you can download and print out yourself quite a few resources and save yourself a lot of money.
- Not as effective if you switch teachers or have patchy student attendance since the curriculum builds upon what was previously taught.
- Only 40 weeks of lessons leaves a 12 week gap for those who have a 52 week Sunday School program. (We add a monthly review session to fill in this gap).
- While some of the curriculums provide lots of activities, some do not provide many activities besides the workbooks. Teachers—or someone—may need to supplement the content with more active, hands-on, reinforcement activities. (We have done this using the Praise Factory games which can be used with any Bible story or Bible verse. We simply print them all out and put them in a binder for our teachers to use as needed to supplement the lesson.) **However, we have found that they are updating many of the curriculums, now offering more activities.**

Other Resources We Are Looking at:

God's Story

Developed and used by many Sovereign Grace churches.

from Covenant Fellowship Church

http://www.covfel.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=47115

#2 Preparation to Gather with the Church Body

Who: K-6th grade

When: Sunday School hour

Resources used:

Elementary: Church service, Praise Factory Investigators story, and watch for signs

- K-4th grade are in the service up to the sermon (prayers, singing and Scripture readings). Praise Factory only takes place during the sermon time.
- Help expand attention span in Praise Factory Investigators by longer stories. Don't want to exasperate them or bore them, but do want to slightly challenge their ability to focus.
- In Praise Factory Investigators, we watch for signs of developmental readiness for staying in church and listening to the sermon with their parents. We talk with parents when we see these signs and encourage them to consider keeping their children in the service for the sermon time—even though their child may still be of eligible age for Praise Factory Investigators. Often parents begin this process by alternating keeping their children with them to listen to the sermon and sending them to Praise Factory Investigators.
- Incorporate K-4th in singing time in Sunday evening service. At times, keep the 3rd and 4th graders in for rest of the Sunday evening service.
- Incorporate K-4th in the Adult Wednesday Night Bible Study.

5th-6th grade: Church bulletin and Church service, sermon review

- During Sunday school, they discuss the church bulletin and note key content before attending the service with their parents.
- From 5th grade on, the children are in all of the services. Many of these children take notes during the sermon, with parents' help.
- Parents are encouraged to take time for sermon review at home with their children, after the service, helping them to understand and apply what they've heard at church.

#3 God's One Big Plan of Redemption/Missions

Who: K-2nd (sometimes through 4th, depending upon volunteer numbers)

When: Sunday evening Service after the singing time.

Resources used: Great Commission Club (in-house curriculum)

In-house, quarter-based resources, each with a different focus on a part of God's One Big Plan of Redemption and Missions (The role of God's people in God's One Big Plan)

Quarter 1: Too Small a Thing: (Isaiah 49:6)

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." NIV, 1984

The children learn about different people groups, using Windows on the World and other resources. They learn T,H,U,M,B and people groups around the world and what is being done to reach them with the gospel (T = Tribal, H=Hindu, U=Unreligious, M=Muslim, B=Buddhist. This is an acronym developed by The Caleb Project. We like the acronym, but have hesitations about elements of the curriculum they offer. So, we have been developing our own instead.)

Quarter 2: Heroes of the Faith:

Centers around different themes, learning about men and women who have gone out to tell others about Jesus through the ages.

- Blessed are the Persecuted: God's people who have suffered for the gospel
- Salt and Light (Everyday people)
- Preachers and Spreaders of the Word (preachers and evangelists)
- From Every Tribe and Nation

Quarter 3: Those Who Have Gone Out from Us

Focus on one missionary we support for a whole quarter, culminating in a reproduction of that particular place for the children and others in the church to come and experience. This is a very time intensive but incredibly memorable experience for the children. Perhaps the most memorable program we do with the children...and hugely encouraging to the missionary chosen. We've done one couple in Central Asia and one couple in Munich, Germany.

OR,

Have thirteen of our supported workers who are preparing to go, are on the mission field or have come back share with the children.

Quarter 4: Gospel/Mission related Stories, using puppets

Dangerous Journey/Pilgrim's Progress (John Bunyan), The Chronicles of Narnia (C.S. Lewis), Star of Light (Patricia St. John), Gumtree Gully and Who Will Be King? (Matthias Media) and other stories. Perform for the preschoolers.

Unfortunately, these curriculums are not yet available for download.

#4 Biblical Theology

Who: 2 year olds through 4th grade

When: 2 year olds: a portion of the Sunday School hour

3- pre K 5 year olds: All of Sunday School and church service

***K-3rd grade: Sermon portion of the church service**

Resources used: The Praise Factory family of curriculum:

2's and 3's: Hide 'n' Seek Kids

4's-pre K 5's: Deep Down Detectives

K-3rd grade: Praise Factory Investigators

The Praise Factory family of curriculum is our own, in-house curriculum and a very important part of what we teach our children here at CHBC. It is available for download at. Since it is both so important to children's ministry here at CHBC and you may find it a useful resource, we will look at them in-depth.

Since these three curriculums are connected together, it is helpful to consider them together as a whole before looking at each one in more depth. A list of Pros and Cons of Praise Factory curriculum follows these sections.

*Praise Factory Investigators is actually appropriate for K-5th grade. We use it with our K-3rd grade, but our 4th and 5th graders are in the church service. This is partly because we do not have enough volunteers or space to offer it to our 4th and 5th graders. We also feel that by 4th and 5th grade, most children are able to sit and glean from the sermon.

Great resources for understanding the Praise Factory family of curriculum:

The Praise Factory Curriculum Tour (Basic and Extended Versions)

A helpful and colorful overview of Praise Factory family of curriculum, philosophy, FAQ's and Scope & Sequences. available through [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).