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FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

LARGE GROUP
TEACHERS

DAVID RAUSCH

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A NOTE TO CHILDREN'S MINISTRY LEADERS

You're not just a mountain climber, you're a mountain guide! You're leading a group of volunteers to the summit. You're roped up with your team and encouraging them toward becoming the best larger group teachers they can be. This resource is a labor of love, meant to help you do that. Use it in whatever way serves you best, but here are some suggestions.

Give it to your volunteers. Alright—that one is kind of a no-brainer! But seriously, this is a resource meant for them, so print it out for them or give them a digital copy. Give it to your current large group teachers and ask them to read it. More than that, give it to every new teacher as a way to help them get started with a bang!

Establish a "Team Time." If your volunteers show up at the same time as the kids, it's next to impossible to connect with them. If you don't already, ask your volunteers to arrive 15 minutes before the kids are allowed into the room. Use that time to catch up with one another, pray for each other and the ministry, and for training. You'll be amazed at what this little bit of time will do for your team!

Feed them some training nuggets. Spend part of your Team Time talking through one of the two minute trainers. These training pieces are intentionally broken up into bite-sizes so that you can quickly train volunteers during times like this. Maybe choose just one topic for the month. Ask your volunteers to do a self- assessment. Ask them how they're doing with that topic. Ask them if they have anything to add to the topic. As a team, come up with a game plan for improving.



CHAPTER ONE

**PREPARATION
SKILLS**

HOW TO PREPARE LIKE A CHAMP FOR LARGE GROUP

Here's a short story for you: a man gets up in front of a room full of kids and with no forethought or preparation he delivers a spellbinding and life changing message. The kids are so grateful that they carry the man out of the room on their shoulders as confetti canons go off. Great story, right? Unfortunately, you'll find it under "fiction". Great messages don't just happen without a little work on the part of the communicator. In short, your goal as the Large Group Leader is to communicate God's truth to kids in an engaging way so that life change can happen. To do that effectively, though, you've got to do a little prep work. Here's a few ways you can prepare:

Live the message. Authenticity is one of the most important traits of a good communicator. When we tell kids that they need to be pursuing God, they need to know we're doing that ourselves. That doesn't mean you have to be perfect, it just means that you have to be working towards living the message out in your own life.

Memorize. Sounds scary, right? It doesn't have to be. We'll spend more time in the future talking about how to memorize, but for now let's just say this. Effective communicators memorize. When you're tied to a script, you lose eye contact and your body becomes less animated. And when that happens, your level of engagement goes down. If you've never memorized before, start small. Pick a section of the lesson to memorize and pay attention to the difference it makes with your audience. (See next page for more tips.)

Rehearse. In short, don't let service time be the first time you've ever delivered your message. It might seem awkward at first, but run through your message a few times in advance. If possible, do it in the actual space where you'll be teaching.

Pray. When we deliver God's message, we're not alone. Ask for the Holy Spirit to be your co-teacher!

7 STEPS TO BECOMING A MASTER OF MEMORIZATION

Alright, I'm going to be honest here. I've never heard anyone say that memorization is their favorite thing in the world, but great communicators love delivering great messages and part of delivering a great message is committing it to memory. Think for just a moment about the best speeches or sermons you've ever heard. I'll bet it wasn't being read to you from a script. One of the reasons it was such a good message is because the pastor or speaker had it committed to memory which allowed them to focus on delivering it in a powerfully impacting way. There's no way around it, memorization requires some work, but the payoff is huge and there are some things you can do to make it easier. Here's a quick guide to get you started:

Read the whole lesson first. Before you commit anything to memory, you have to know the big picture. It's kind of like using plans to build a bird house. Before you make your first cut or start hammering on things, it helps to know what it's supposed to look like when you're finished.

Mark the lesson up. Pens and highlighters are your best friends! Underline and highlight key phrases, transition sentences, difficult lines and anything else you think is worthy. This will create visual handles in the lesson that your brain can grab ahold of.

Chunk it. Your brain has trouble remembering vast amounts of unbroken information, so break the lesson down into smaller chunks. When you memorize, just focus on one chunk at a time and then put them all together at the end.

Read and recite. Starting with the first chunk, read the first sentence or two. Then put the lesson down and recite it back from memory. Continue doing this until you reach the end of the chunk. Then return to the top and recite the whole chunk in its entirety.

(Continued on next page.)

Focus on the transitions. Often times the most difficult parts to remember are the transitions from one “chunk” to the next. Be doubly familiar with your transitions.

Write out trouble spots. If there’s a line or section that keeps giving you trouble, hand write it out. This involves a separate part of your brain and can help with retention.

Recite the lines out loud. It may seem awkward at first, but speaking the lines is tremendously helpful. Practice teaching the lesson out loud in front of an imaginary audience. It’s even better if you can do it in the actual space where the lesson is being taught.

UNDERSTANDING A KID'S WORLD

One of the best ways to connect with kids is to understand the world they live in. Unfortunately, relying on our memories of being a kid won't cut it. Newsflash: kids don't know who "Captain Caveman" is and your "Speak and Spell" is a technological dinosaur to them. Even if you were a kid just a short while ago, the culture has already shifted considerably. Communicating with kids effectively, whether as a small group leader or a large group teacher, requires you to engage them at *their* level and in *their* world. Don't let the task sound daunting, though—you're surrounded by experts who would be happy to teach you!

Ask the experts: Who's the best person to ask about today's kid culture? (*Warning: obvious answer approaching*) Kids! Ask the kids in your ministry what their favorites are—movies, TV shows, music, board games, video games, apps, toys, etc. Be ready, though. Just like experts in any area, when you get them talking, they might not be able to stop!

Do some research: Who said research has to be boring? Once you know what your kids are watching, playing, and hearing, you should watch it, play it, and listen to it yourself! You'll be surprised how much you learn about kids when you visit their world.

Report your findings immediately: The next time you see the kids, tell them what you listened to, watched, or played. Their faces will most likely light up. You'll be able to reference things that are relevant and interesting to them. Best of all, you'll have an instant connection with them and they'll see you in a whole new light.

KEEPING KIDS SAFE

Repeat this with me: “There is nothing more important than the safety of the kids.” Period. End of sentence. An unsafe children’s ministry environment can have a profoundly negative impact on a kid’s physical, emotional, and spiritual life. It can also put the leaders and ministry at large in legal jeopardy. The purpose of this is not to make you fearful, but to make you diligent. The following is not intended to be a thorough safety policy, but rather a general set of guidelines to help you create a safe place for kids.

Be familiar with the child protection policies of your church. Your church most likely already has policies and guidelines in place for the protection of you and the kids. If you’re not already familiar with them, ask your ministry leader to give you a copy. Simply put: know them and follow them.

Follow the 2-person rule. As much as possible, don’t be alone with kids. Always have a second leader with you. Additionally, try to occupy spaces that are visible to public areas. This is as much for your protection as it is for the kids.

Use appropriate touch. Use only positive and appropriate forms of physical contact while avoiding anything that is or appears as inappropriate or unsafe. Examples of appropriate touch may include: side hugs, high-fives, fist bumps, and pats on the back. For younger kids, ask your ministry leader if sitting on laps and brief front hugs are permissible.

Emergency evacuation and shelter. Do you know where to go or what to do in case of a fire? How about a tornado, an earthquake, or an active shooter? If you’re not sure about any of these, ask your ministry leader about the plan. Walk the routes and familiarize yourself with the spaces.

If you see something, say something. Trust your instincts. If you notice anything that is unsafe, careless, or suspicious, say something. If you notice any signs that a child has been abused or neglected, let your ministry leader know.



CHAPTER TWO

BASICS OF DELIVERY

TELLING PERSONAL STORIES

There are few communication tools as engaging and powerful as a well told personal story. The right story at the right time can show kids how the Bible can be lived out in real life. Consider these few things when telling a personal story:

Be sure it's age appropriate. For some of us, our lives before Christ may have been rated PG-13 (or dare I say R). Be mindful that the content and details of your story are appropriate for General audiences.

Be sure it's relevant. Your recent conversation with a co-worker about the rumors of a corporate take-over may be the perfect metaphor for sin's infiltration of the world, but your kids couldn't care less. Be sure your story takes place in a world that is familiar to your audience. Consider telling a story about something that took place when you were a kid. The kids in your ministry will eat that up!

Be sure that it fits. Sometimes we have a story that is so great we can't wait to tell it, even if it doesn't fit. Don't force a story to fit the lesson or vice versa. The perfect story is one that you can just tell and the kids will understand the connection with little explanation. If you have to explain the connection too much, you might just want to save it for another time.

USING PROPS EFFECTIVELY

Telling a story is great. Showing a story is even better! Well used props can give a third dimension to a two dimensional story. They help stories come alive. They add interest and intrigue. More than that, they help cement a story or lesson into the minds of the audience. Poorly used props, on the other hand, can bring your lesson down like the flaming Hindenburg! Here are a few tips on how to achieve the former and avoid the latter:

Choose props that are relevant to the message. The lesson materials will often times suggest different props. If you think of a prop that you want to introduce on your own, be sure that it contributes to the objective of the lesson.

In most situations, keep the props out of sight until it's time to use them. Props are kind of like tigers during a magic show. Let them out at just the right time and they're sure to wow the audience. Let them wander around for the entire show and they'll devour an audience member! Interesting props, left in plain sight, can easily devour the attention of a kid.

Don't let live tigers loose in the room. I think we adequately covered that one in the previous bullet point. More than that, though, be sure that all of your props are safe around kids. If your intro into the prop goes something like this, "God is kind of like this hand grenade", please reconsider your choice of props.

Organize your props ahead of time. Make sure your props are easy to get to. If you're using multiple props, organize them so you can quickly grab the right prop at the right time. Does your prop require some set up? If so, set it up ahead of time. The transition from words to props should be quick and seamless.

BREVITY—IT'S YOUR FRIEND

The belated comedian, George Burns, once said that “the secret to a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.” Can I get an amen? Brevity is the art of saying much in few words. It isn't something talked about a lot. What a shame! Brevity is one of the most powerful tools that a communicator has in his or her tool belt! Isn't that ironic? Sometimes there's as much or more power in the words you choose *not* to say. Here are a few things to consider on your journey to brevity:

You're taking longer than you think. Repeat after me...“I'm a word-aholic”. The first step to recovery is recognizing you have a problem. Time flies when you're on the stage, but not when you're in the audience. What feels like a minute to you is probably closer to 3 minutes. If you feel like you're flying through your message too fast, don't worry—you're not.

Brevity keeps your message from getting lost in clutter. Have you ever tried to find something in a sea of clutter? It's frustratingly difficult! Brevity cleans the clutter of words up and allows your audience to find the ones that are most important.

Memorization and brevity are best friends. The more memorized and “on script” you are, the more brief you'll be. When people “wing it”, they tend to use more words than necessary...*way* more words!

Make “brain space” for brevity. The next time you teach a lesson, keep brevity in the back of your mind. Don't be afraid to expound on things or to say them in your own way, with your own words. Just keep in mind that you need to get into and out of a thought efficiently.

You're robbing your small group leaders. In short, the more time you spend talking, the less time the small group leaders get to build community and invest in their kids.

Remember the golden rule of brevity. When you've run out of things to say, stop talking!

USING KID-FRIENDLY LANGUAGE

It may be true that we've been washed in the blood of Jesus for the atonement of our sins and the redemption of our souls, but you might want to pause before telling that to a kid. The Christian faith is rich with imagery and vocabulary! To a kid, though, some of it might be confusing, overwhelming and even frightening at times. If you don't want your kids to look at you like you're speaking Klingon, consider the following advice:

Be mindful of your language. The biggest part of solving a problem is recognizing that it exists. For some of us, we don't even realize that the words we're using with kids are a little advanced.

Develop a kid-thesaurus. No—that's not a dinosaur! Begin developing kid-friendly language to replace some of the bigger words you might use. For example, instead of saying "redeemed," you might say "set free." Instead of saying, "washed in the blood," you might say, "forgiven of our sins."

Be intentional with new words. Not only is it okay to introduce new words to kids, it's instrumental. Part of developing kids into functioning members of the church is helping them understand the language, but be purposeful with your new words instead of just using them haphazardly.

Don't introduce too many new words too quickly. It can take kids a little bit of time to understand and absorb new words and concepts. If you throw too many new words at them too quickly, they may not remember any of them.

Use the word, define the word, use the word. When you introduce kids to a new word, first use it in its right context. Next, define the word using simple and clear language. Finally, use the word multiple times so kids can really digest it. You may even want to have the kids repeat the word after you so they can really familiarize themselves with it.



CHAPTER THREE

**THE BODY
AND
VOICE**

BLOCKING PART 1: MOVEMENT, PLANTING, AND STILLNESS

One of the most effective tools in a communicator's tool belt is blocking. No—I'm not talking about preventing anyone from scoring or obstructing anyone's view. "Blocking" is a drama term and it refers to the movement and positioning of people on the stage. Skilled actors and communicators know how to use their body to bolster their message and to create visual interest. Here are a few tips to get you started.

Be intentional with your movement. Communicators without a blocking plan often wander aimlessly around the teaching area. To prevent this, come up with a plan ahead of time for when and where you're going to move. If you write it into your lesson, it can even help with memorization.

Create reasons to move. Effective movement has purpose to it. If you simply move back and forth across the teaching area without purpose, you look more like a caged animal than anything. To fix this, create reasons to move. Place your Bible to the side of the teaching area or even the back of the room. This gives you a reason to move to those areas. Do the same with any other materials or props that you might use during the lesson. Create different areas to serve different purposes.

Learn to plant yourself. Pacing and other repetitive motions are distracting. When you've made a purposeful movement to a new area, plant your feet. Keep them planted until you're ready to make another purposeful movement.

Be still. Movement and stillness are the yin and yang of teaching. They both need each other and complement each other. Whereas planting is about the feet, stillness is about the whole body. After a series of purposeful movements, choose a moment to cease all movement. This is especially effective during tender moments when you want your words to sink deep into your audience's heart.

BLOCKING PART 2: LEVELS

Good blocking is like visual candy for kids—it pulls them deeper into your message. Poor blocking, on the other hand, can put your kids to sleep. One of the most effective ways to employ blocking to your advantage is to use a variety of levels (the highs and lows of your space). In fact, at the moment you change levels, you'll probably notice an increase in the kid's attention. From high to low, here are some different levels you can use along with the message they convey:

Elevated level: If you stand on a chair, a ladder, or some other tall, stable object, you'll be towering over the kids. This is the most dominant level and it's great when you want to have an overbearing presence. Are you speaking as if you were Goliath or an angry king? Place yourself high above the kids to help them feel the overwhelming power of the situation.

Standing level: This is your baseline level—the one you'll use most often. People often address kids from a standing position, so it's one they're very familiar with and it doesn't necessarily convey either dominance or intimacy.

Seated level: This level is beginning to put you closer to the kids and therefore is a more relaxed and comfortable level. It's a good level to be at when you want to share something from the heart. This might be a great level to use while sharing a personal story, depending on the nature and energy of the story.

Kneeling level: Kneeling puts you almost at eye-level with the kids and is therefore the most personal and intimate of the levels. You might employ this level near the end of a lesson when you're sharing the truth about Jesus' immense love for them. If you get on your knees, and speak softly and slowly, the kids will eat up every word you say!

GESTURES: GET YOUR HANDS IN THE GAME

For some people, using their hands while talking comes quite naturally. For others, not so much. Your hands hang like dead weights as if they were anchors keeping you from floating into space. Regardless of where you fall on the spectrum, harnessing the communication power of your hands is very important. If you use them well, they'll grab the interest of your audience and reinforce your message. On the other hand (pun intended), if you don't have command of your hands, they can betray your message. Here's a few tips to help put your hands to work:

Recognize the communication power of your hands: Wrap your brain around this: your hands are *always* communicating. It is impossible to not say something with your hands (or any of your body, for that matter). The sooner you grasp this, the sooner you can begin making them say what you want.

Avoid distracting gestures: There are certain gestures that can distract the audience and betray your message. Hands hanging low, hands in pockets, hands on hips, and arms crossed can communicate disinterest or nervousness.

Make your hands match your mouth: If you're telling kids how exciting God's Word is, but you have your hands in your pockets, your hands are betraying your message. Your mouth is saying "exciting," but your hands are saying "boring." Choose gestures that match and strengthen your message.

Be spontaneous: For a lot of people, their hands naturally reflect their inner thoughts and emotions. The more comfortable you are with your audience, the more your hands will "speak." So relax and let them go to work!

Be intentional: Spontaneity is great, but sometimes you need to be intentional about the gestures you make. Look through your next lesson. Choose one or two places to use an intentional gesture. During an intense moment of battle, you might clench your fists. When you're telling the kids about God's enormous love for them, you might spread your hands far apart. Decide what you want to do and practice ahead of time.

3 WAYS TO CAPTURE KIDS WITH YOUR VOICE

Has the continual droning of someone's voice ever made you want to take a nap? A tediously dull and monotonous voice is as sure to put someone to sleep as eating a whole turkey while watching C-SPAN. On the other hand, a skilled communicator can grab the attention of an audience and cut through boredom with her voice like a sword wielding ninja! So what do you want to be—C-SPAN or a ninja? (I'm going to assume you just karate chopped the air and yelled "ninja".) That's the spirit! Here are 3 ways you can begin to use your voice to grab kid's attention:

Pace: Simply put, pace is the speed or tempo of your delivery. Avoid using the same pace throughout the entire lesson. Variety creates interest. When you get to the climax of a story, illustrate the excitement by increasing your pace. When you're talking about the incredible height, and width, and depth of God's love for us, slow down and let each word float into the ears of the kids.

Pitch: Pitch is the highness or lowness of a voice. When you fail to vary your pitch, you become monotone, which is the perfect recipe for boredom. Questions should typically end on a high note, but when you end a statement on a high note, it can create doubt in the listener's mind. When you're speaking with authority and certainty, try using the lower end of your voice.

Volume: Volume is the degree of loudness in your voice. Be sure to always speak at a volume that can be heard by the kids. Higher volumes can communicate excitement or dominance while lower volumes can communicate intimacy and tenderness. To create excitement, let your voice crescendo as you work towards the pinnacle of a dramatic point or story. Conversely, trail off to a whisper when you really want to pull the kids close for a more tender moment.

HOW TO CREATE A “MOMENT”

Wouldn't it be great if you could keep kids laser focused on every word you said during a lesson? (*Answer: Yes! That would be a super power greater than both invisibility and flight!*) Unfortunately, that's often times not the case. No matter how dynamic a lesson is, most kids can only stay laser focused for so long. Part of being an effective communicator is choosing the most important “moment(s)” within a lesson and using your voice and body to package it in a way that draws in your audience. Here are a few tips on creating a “moment” so you can be certain your audience hears what matters most:

Choose your “moment” wisely: Any given lesson probably has one or two moments where you really want to draw their attention. Often times, the best place to look for that moment is at or near the end of the lesson when the “Big Idea” is being hammered home. The “Big Idea” is usually the moment the whole lesson has been leading up to.

Don't make the “moment” too long. For a kid, you might want to keep your moment to 2 or 3 high impact sentences.

Pause before the “moment.” A well placed pause can be very powerful. That short moment of silence can communicate to a kid that something different and interesting is about to be said or done.

Use your voice. One way to create a moment with your voice is to slow your pace down—give each word just a little extra emphasis. In addition, lower the volume of your voice to just above a whisper. A whisper can grab attention even more than shouting.

Use your body. Using movement and levels can also help to create a powerful moment. As your voice begins to slow down and become quiet, move close to the kids. You may even choose to place yourself in the middle of your audience. Sit down or kneel so that you put yourself almost eye to eye with the kids. Slow down your body movement and hand gestures to match the pace and volume of your voice.



CHAPTER FOUR

**OVERCOMING
OBSTACLES**

ESTABLISHING RULES AND CONSEQUENCES

“Houston...we have a problem!” If you’ve been teaching kids for any length of time, you’ve probably wanted to say something like this. Unfortunately, most of us are flying solo and don’t have a ground control to call into. Kids are great and well behaved most of the time, but problems still occur. Here are some things you can do to help prevent or address problems:

Establish rules. If you haven’t already, work with your leaders to come up with a short list of rules for the room. It might be something as simple as “Be Kind” (listen quietly and treat others with respect) and “Be Safe” (keep your hands to yourself and follow instructions carefully).

Communicate the rules to your kids. Kids can’t abide by your expectations if they don’t know what they are. For younger kids, you may want to go over the rules weekly. For older kids, you might visit them once a month.

Have consequences. What good are rules if there aren’t any consequences for breaking them? An example of consequences might be something like “3 strikes”. Strike 1 is a warning. Strike 2 is a time-out on the wall. Strike 3 involves calling the parents out of service to pick up their kid. Again, if you haven’t already, work with your leaders to establish the consequences that work best for your ministry.

Don’t be afraid to enforce the rules. Inevitably, there will be kids who test the boundaries. When you enforce the rules, most kids will see that you mean business and quickly comply.

Call out the best in kids. Whenever you apply consequences to a kid, it’s a good idea to have a follow-up conversation with him. Make sure he understands what behavior led to his consequences. Be sure to do it with grace, though. Always end by calling out the best in that kid. Tell him you know he can do better and that you look forward to seeing him again.

GROUP MANAGEMENT

There's a fine line between being a large group teacher and a zookeeper. If you make a few untimely missteps, it can start to feel like you're losing control of the room and slipping into the wild kingdom. Don't fret, though! We've all been there! And fortunately, there are a few things you can do to prevent your kids' wild side from breaking out.

Get some help: Hopefully you've got some dynamic small group leaders in the room who are willing and able to help you. They can be your first line of defense. Talk to them ahead of time and ask them to sit among the kids (as opposed to the back of the room). Encourage them to intervene any time they see distracting behavior.

Separate the fire and gas: Some kids just make for explosive combinations. If there are two (or more) kids seated together that historically have trouble being around one another, don't be afraid to separate them from the beginning.

Involve the kids: If you're too much of a "talking head," kids can start to zone out and get fidgety. Be sure to involve the kids in as much of the lesson as you can. Bonus points if you can get the kids moving physically.

Don't get stale: Fidgety kids can also be an indication that it's time to move on to something different. If you're overly verbose and spend too much time on the same thing, you can start to lose the room.

Put your body and voice into it: Often times, when a communicator is beginning to lose the attention of the entire room, the first response is to call for quiet and "eyes up here." There's a better way, though. By changing what you do with your body and voice, you can regain the kid's attention in a way that doesn't interrupt the flow of the lesson. For example, if you're standing, try sitting or kneeling near the kids for a moment. Resist the urge to talk over the kids. Instead, begin speaking in a quiet voice, just above a whisper. This combination body/voice combination can do wonders with regaining attention.

DEFEATING THE VILLAINS OF LARGE GROUP INTERACTION

Too much of a talking head can be terribly boring for most kids. Inviting kids to interact during the Large Group time is a great way to foster active learning and it gives them ownership of the lesson, but it's not without its perils. Even the best of kids can have villainous tendencies that jeopardize a lesson. If you want to become an "Inter-Action Hero," here are a few alter egos to be on the lookout for along with ways to counteract them:

The Joker: He's just out for a good laugh! And there's nothing wrong with that as long as it doesn't detract from the lesson. Inviting a kid to respond or participate requires trust, though. If the Joker's antics become disrespectful or distracting, talk to him privately to let him know he'll only be called on to participate if he can be trusted.

I Forgot Bot: Her hand knows the answer, but it forgot to tell her mouth. If a kid raises her hand, but then suddenly goes silent, give her a short moment to remember, but then let her off the hook by saying something like, "You keep thinking about it and let me know if you remember." Then go on to the next kid.

Captain Random: He has an answer to the question, it's just not *your* question. If a kid begins telling you a random story that has nothing to do with your question or the lesson at hand, politely interrupt him and tell him you'd love to hear his story later. Keep your word, though, and follow up with him afterwards.

The Silent Stare-Masters: They'll meet your question with a silent stare and then unleash a flurry of crickets on you. Sometimes the best way to get great responses from your kids is to ASK, GIVE, and CALL. ASK your question, GIVE your own answer or example, and then CALL on the kids for theirs. This does two things: it gives them a moment to think and it points them in the right direction.



CHAPTER FIVE

**THE SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES**

LEADING A KID TO CHRIST

There are few things as amazing as praying with a kid to become a Christian, but for some people, the thought of it is terrifying. Questions might swirl through your head. How do I do it? What should I avoid? Is it possible I could mess this thing up? It's understandable that some people might feel nervous about walking a kid through such a huge spiritual milestone, but fear not! By the grace of God, *you can do it!* Here's a few suggestions to help you along the way:

Avoid coercion. It's in most kids' natures to want to please adults. Avoid language that might pressure a kid into a disingenuous decision to follow Jesus. It's okay to present opportunities by asking questions like, "Do you ever think about asking Jesus to be your Savior?" but allow them to reach a conclusion on their own. In other words, lead them towards a decision; don't push them towards one.

Use the ABC's. If a kid has already heard the Gospel and has expressed a desire to become a Christian, explain to them the ABC's of prayer. "A"—Admit you have sinned and ask God for forgiveness. "B"—Believe that God has sent His son, Jesus, to die for your sins. "C"—Choose to follow Jesus and make Him the leader of your life.

Prompt the child in prayer. It's important that the salvation prayer comes from the heart of the child. Instead of having a kid repeat the prayer after you, provide prompts and let them do the praying. For example, begin by opening the prayer, but then prompt the kid to "admit" he's sinned and ask God for forgiveness. Pause for the kid to say his own prayer and then prompt him through "believe" and "choose".

Celebrate! This is the greatest decision anyone could ever make and it's worth celebrating! Let him know that all of heaven is rejoicing over his decision. If the kid doesn't have a Bible yet, you might consider buying one for him as a celebration gift. Be sure to share the news with the leaders in your room or any other people who are important in the life of the child.

HELPING KIDS NAVIGATE THE BIBLE

“The B-I-B-L-E, Yes that’s the book for me! *Unless you don’t know how to navigate it, in which case it just sits on your shelf collecting dust.*” I like to imagine that these were the original lyrics to the famous Bible song. (Whatever it lacks in singability, it makes up for with raw honesty.) The Bible is the greatest book ever written—it’s a book that has the power to not only change our lives, but our eternities as well. But how can God’s Word truly plant itself in a kid’s heart if they don’t know how to read it for themselves? Helping kids navigate the Bible is one of the most important things we can do. Here are a few tips to help you do that:

Show them the bones. Teaching kids about the basic “bones” of the Bible will help them get around on their own. Show them how the Bible is broken into 2 sections (Old and New Testament) and 66 books. Show them how each book is broken into chapters (the big numbers) and verses (the little numbers).

Teach them about the Table of Contents. Some kids are Bible whizzes. They can recite the 66 books in order and flip to them like lightning. For the rest of the kids, though, the Table of Contents can be a valuable tool. Point your kids to the Table of Contents and show them how to find a book quickly.

Let them see you do it. Flip through your own Bible as you explain. Let the kids see you navigate the Bible as you illustrate each step.

Don’t be a Bible hog. Instead of just reading to the kids, challenge them to look up the verses for themselves. It will take more time for the kids to find it, but it’s worth the investment.

Give space, give hints, give answers. When you give the kids a verse to look up, first give them space to find it on their own. After a moment, give them hints on where to find it. *“It’s in the Old Testament.” “It’s close to the middle of the Bible.” “Look for the big number 28.”* Finally, when enough time has passed, help the kids who are struggling. If there are kids who are new to the Bible or continually struggle, spend some extra time with them afterwards.

HOW TO LEAD KIDS IN PRAYER

If a kid's prayer life consists of shouting, "God's neat, let's eat" before dinner, they might need your help! One of your most fundamental jobs as a small group leader is to help kids connect with God. And one of the most fundamental ways of connecting with God is through prayer. With a little bit of direction from you, the kids in your group can become pros at prayer. The following suggestions are intended to help you do that:

Consider your own prayer life. Never mind the kids for a minute, if *your* prayer life consist of shouting, "God's neat, let's eat," you might need to work on yourself first. You can't model what you're not practicing.

Tell them what prayer is. Some kids might have misunderstandings as to what prayer is. They might think it's something mystical or magical. They might think it's repeating rote lines. Let them know that prayer is simply talking to God.

Model it. Instead of just telling the kids how to pray, show them. During group prayers, let the kids hear how you talk to God. Go beyond the surface—tell God about your feelings and your fears. Praise Him for His goodness. Thank Him for specific blessings in your life. On an appropriate level, tell Him how you've messed up and ask for forgiveness.

Don't be a prayer hog. Kids can say the most amazing, heart-felt prayers—if you give them a chance, that is. Get them started, then get out of the way. Tell the kids that you'll open the group in prayer, then let them own it from there. You'll be amazed by the depth and sincerity with which kids can pray!

Consider using different prayer postures. Bowing your heads, closing your eyes and folding your hands works great, but there are some other postures that can create unity within your group while praying. For example: stand in a circle and hold hands or link arms. Stand or kneel in a huddle and put your arms around each other or place your hands in the middle.

HELPING KIDS REFLECT AND RESPOND TO GOD

When ministering to kids, it's easy to spend all of your time on two endeavors: getting the Bible into a kid's head and teaching them how to apply it with their hands. That's great, but it's missing a key component. God doesn't just want our head and our hands, He wants our heart too! But teaching a kid to develop a heart-felt relationship with God can feel kind of squishy—it's not as concrete as teaching Biblical truth or application. That doesn't mean it's impossible, though. Here are some tips for helping kids develop a relationship with God through reflection and response.

Ask reflective questions. Instead of asking kids comprehension questions, in other words, what they remember from a story, ask them reflective questions like, "What do you think God is telling you through that verse or story?" or "How does that verse or story make you feel? Why?"

Tap into their inner artist. Art is a great way for kids to respond to God. Instead of having kids pray verbally, consider having them draw their prayers. Or carve out some time to allow kids to draw praise pictures to God.

Pray on the spot. If a kid shares something prayer-worthy, don't just tell them, "I'll be praying for you." Instead, tell them, "Let's pray about that right now." Pray for that kid on the spot, but encourage them to pray aloud as well.

Get them into God's Word. Often times, when kids are at church, they'll have a Bible story told to them. But you can help them take it further by encouraging the kids to read the story from the Bible at home too. If they're still learning to read, have them ask their parents for help. When you see them next, ask them, "What did you learn about God from that story?" or "What do you want to say to God after reading that story?"

Letters to God. Some kids love to write. Get them into journaling by telling them to write a letter to God. They could tell God about something they learned from the Bible story that week or they could write out their prayers to God.



CONCLUSION

THE WRONG GUY

A few years back I was beginning to feel an unsettled stirring in my heart. After many months of thought and prayer, I was starting to feel like God had a new adventure for me. I felt like it was big, but I really had no idea what it could be. So I said a prayer—one of those dangerous sorts of prayers. In retrospect, I only suggest you say this prayer if you're seriously ready to have God rock your world! I said to God, "What's next?"

Later that night I was working on a home project when God said very loudly and clearly, "Quit what you're doing and start the GO! curriculum!" How do I know it was God's voice and not my own? I knew it because the voice was big and bold and it was telling me to do scary and exciting and Kingdom rocking things. My voice doesn't do that. My voice tells me to do small and safe and comfort preserving things. In fact, my small, safe voice was quick to answer God by saying, "You've got the wrong guy!" And I wasn't just being modest. I really believed God had actually dialed the wrong number. But here is how I heard God answer me back, "I know you're the wrong guy. That's why I picked you." BAM! In my face! How do I argue with that?

Shortly thereafter, God reminded me of all the other "wrong guys" He had picked. David was the wrong guy. His dad thought the idea of David leading the nation of Israel was so laughable, he forgot to even mention him in the list of his sons. Jonah was the wrong guy. He pleaded with God to send someone else to Nineveh. And then there was Moses. When God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, He told Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses replied back in Exodus 3:11, "Who am I that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Seriously! Who was he? Who was David? Who was Jonah? Who am I? I tell you who we are—we're the wrong guys!

The truth is that God picks the wrong guys like it's His job! Why? Maybe it's because God's glory shines the brightest when He works through our weakness. How could I possibly take credit for anything good that comes out of this adventure? I can't. It would be undeserved.

Chances are that many of you might feel unworthy or unqualified to do great things for God. You may even feel unworthy to lead a small group of kids. Good! God is looking for someone like you. If you haven't already, I hope you find the courage to ask God a crazy question like, "What's next?" I hope you hear God calling you to do some hair-raising, white-knuckled, monumentally big and bold things. And when you're finished hyperventilating, I hope you find the courage to say, "Yes."



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David Rausch is the founder and President of Mooblio, a dynamic organization devoted to developing resources for children’s ministries. He’s also the creator of GO!—the chronological curriculum that gets kids out of their seats and into the storytelling action.

For many years prior to that, David was the Programming Director with Promiseland, the children’s ministry at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. David has also served as the Children’s Director at The Crossing, a multi-site church in St. Louis. His passion is for resourcing and training people to plant the Word of God in the hearts of children.

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