

# What Every Child Wants to Hear

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A couple of weeks ago I taught a group of 5-8 year olds about the [Baptism of Jesus](#).

In the days leading up to the lesson I contemplated [Matthew 3:13-17](#) and asked myself how the event might be viewed from a child's perspective. What is it about this part of God's Word that "makes sense" to a child? What is it about the baptism of Jesus that helps a child relate to God?

And then it struck me. It was not just "God's Word" in a general sense that was impacting. It was, quite literally, God's words. Words spoken directly from heaven and in relation to his son. Words of approval. Words of affirmation for a good choice made. Words from a proud father claiming a son as his own and expressing love for him. These are the words every child wants to hear.

Unlike the crowds flocking to hear John's preaching, Jesus was not baptised because he had done something wrong. Jesus was baptised because he wanted to do everything that was right. God responded immediately...

*And a voice spoke from heaven. The voice said, "This is my Son and I love him. I am very pleased with him." Matthew 3:17 (ICB)*

As for the children in my class, they related perfectly to Jesus at that moment. They understood how much this declaration must have meant to Jesus.

After we talked about how proud God was of Jesus I took the lesson to the next level. The children were not aware that I had previously collected words of affirmation from their own parents. You could have heard a pin drop as, one by one, I read these messages aloud to the class. Tears came to my eyes as I watched the way the children hung on each word.

- Ezekiel, you are my son. I love you. I am proud of you. You have been very brave about leaving your pre-school and starting at a new school.
- Mylah, you are my daughter. I love you. I am proud of you. You are always so kind to people and take the time to thank people for their good deeds.
- Gurshan, you are my son. I love you. I am proud of you. You have practiced faithfully in Tae Kwon Do and have earned a place beyond what is usual for your age group.
- Caleb, you are my son. I love you. I am proud of you. You are a good big brother and set an example for your younger brother to follow.

I use the term "God's Word" quite often because I believe the Bible to be inspired by God. In sharing lessons from the Bible I am imparting truths from God. However, in the story of the [the Baptism of Jesus](#), the literal words spoken by God were the ones most profoundly impacting on each child.

Just like the children, don't we also crave these words from our father? Through Christ, I want to make God proud. I want him to say, "Mary, you are my daughter. I love you. I am very pleased with you."

This is what every child wants to hear.

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# Experiencing God's Holiness

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What does “[holiness](#)” mean to a child who is five years old? God’s holiness is an extremely important theme running throughout the entire Bible and I believe even very young children can experience how special God is.

I’ve recently had an opportunity to teach in a large room so I decided to dedicate one area of the room as a special place where, each week, we sit for a few minutes and talk about how special God really is. I’ve loved how this has brought a new depth to what we are learning and I would encourage you to give this a try sometimes.

## A Holy Space

I didn’t buy anything to set this space up and, with a little imagination, you will be able to find “special” items of your own. I drug in a coffee table from another room. I covered it with some shiny wrapping paper and placed chairs around it. Draping some old sheets and fabric over a room divider formed a small “wall” to make the space cozy. Someone had left some “gold” Christmas tree garland in our supply room so I thought that would add to the feeling of grandeur. A paper crown on a purple pillow emphasized the Kingship of God since we were studying the [Divided Kingdom](#) and the [End of the Kingdom](#).

Even though these were not expensive items I can tell you that the children were in awe of the space. On a side note it occurred to me that [the Temple that Solomon built](#) was dripping with gold and precious cloths in a way that left everyone awestruck. But, in reality, gold and expensive items are actually worthless in comparison to God’s true worth. Perhaps we adults aren’t all that sophisticated after all.

# A Holy Attitude

When we sit at the table in this space it is a “set apart” time from the rest of the class period. At other times we might play games and sing action songs and act out the story. There are many ways to glorify God. But, when we go and sit in our holy space we speak more quietly and we all reflect in awe and reverence about God.

## A Holy Conversation

This is a 5 minute devotional time that is not limited to the lesson we are studying for the day. Everything we talk about in this space relates to how special God is. He is approachable but He is different than us. In a child’s eyes this space is very special and it is a great launching place to talk about how God is even more special than our idea of precious things.

Each week I try to cover a different aspect of God’s holiness and how this has been shown in Scripture. This is not the time to tell another Bible story or try to explain complex topics. I want the children’s minds to be fully on God so I talk about concepts they can easily grasp. I try my best to use illustrations to depict these things. For instance, the illustrations below are from [www.freebibleimages.org](http://www.freebibleimages.org)

- [The Tabernacle](#)
- [The Temple](#)
- The Word of God- We open our Bibles and read a verse about God (or they follow along as I read).



## New Depths

This experience has brought a new depth to the lessons I’ve been teaching. The children have really picked up on the fact that sin is not just “bad behaviour” it is a real offence against who God is. I’ve been amazed at how often the children have referenced God’s holiness as we study other lessons.

- When we talked about idols being erected and even brought into the temple the children were disgusted. They understood why [King Josiah destroyed idols and places of false worship](#). “Don’t those people know how much more special God is than statues?”
- When we learned about the prophet [Jeremiah visiting the potter’s house](#) and hearing God warn about turning away from him the children understood why God was angry. The kings were not treating him in the way he deserved.
- We learned about how [Jeremiah dictated God’s Message onto a scroll](#). As King Jehoiakim listened to the words he cut off pieces of the scroll and threw them into a fire piece by piece. When I mentioned that King Jehoiakim was making a huge mistake one of the children corrected me, “No! the king knew God’s words were special. He did not make a mistake, he did it on purpose!”
- Before being led off into Exile the Temple of God was destroyed. The students in my class were so sad to hear this. They understood how serious this was to God.

# How About Making Your Own Temporary Tabernacle?

I was blessed with a room large enough to create a separate space but you could create a special space almost anywhere. Put your “special” items in a basket and lay out the items when it comes time to have your devotional. After all, this is exactly what was done with [The Tabernacle](#). It was set up and taken down wherever the Israelites camped.

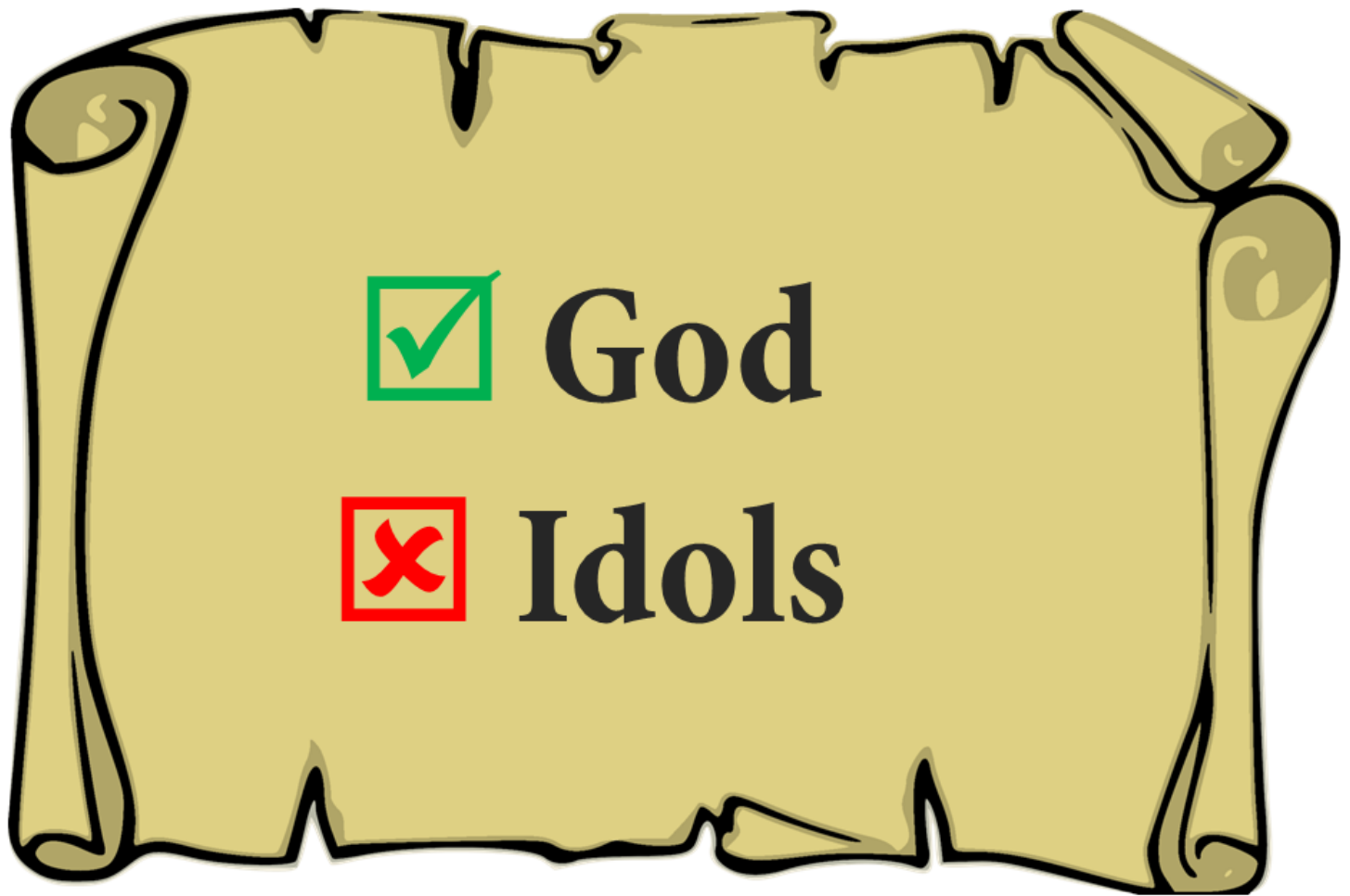
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## When Destructive Behaviour is a Good Thing

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If you asked me what my Bible Class was like this week I would have to say it was quite destructive...in a good way!

The 4 and 5 year old children have been learning about the [Divided Kingdom](#) and this particular lesson was about [King Josiah](#) and how he attempted to restore true worship of God in Judah. [2 Kings 22-23:30](#); [2 Chronicles 34-36](#)

As I read about [King Josiah](#) and his zealous destruction of idols and places of false worship I wrestled with how I would relate the severe actions of destruction and even death to the lives of these 4 and 5 year olds without giving them nightmares or encouraging destructive behaviour in general.

## How do we relate tough lessons in the Bible to children?

Here's how I prepared for the lesson about Josiah. There were many actions and themes that children this age would find confusing and disturbing. So, as I read about Josiah, I tried to focus on God and then thought about how Josiah responded to him. Here's what I came up with:

- God is Holy and Josiah believed this passionately and wanted to honour him.
- God desires and commands our sole worship. Josiah was indignant about the prevalent idol worship in the kingdom.
- God expects to be taken seriously. Josiah took his kingship seriously and was determined to change his kingdom.
- God displays emotions but he always does the right thing. Josiah's anger, indignation and outrage did not lead him to sin. These emotions propelled him into actions that honoured God.
- God's Word is true. Josiah had respect for God's Word and obeyed it.
- God is concerned about everyone. As king, Josiah displayed leadership and shared God's Word with his people.

Trying to teach all of these would have been too much for 4 and 5 year olds to comprehend so I focused on just two main points that I thought they could best relate to. I felt confident in the priority of these choices since they are also how God started when he issued the 10 Commandments.

1. God is Holy.
2. Do not worship idols or anything else besides God.



## God is Holy

We spent time in a “special” area I had created in our classroom. I wasn’t trying to re-create the temple but I made the space special with some silver wrapping paper and some strings of gold beads that I found. As we sat in this space we read from God’s special book, talked about the special tabernacle and temple and then spent some time talking about how God is different and holy.

## Do Not Worship Idols

After sharing the Bible story we spent some time destroying idols! The children took turns finding a scroll I hid underneath some carpet tiles. If they found the scroll they “read” it.

*Yes! for God.....No! for idols*

Once they found and read the scroll they then followed Josiah’s example in clearing out all of the idols. The biblical version is much more graphic. We expressed our outrage by kicking them and knocking them down.

To conclude the class we gathered in and focused on God’s holiness one more time.

For older children I would follow up by taping pictures of other “idols” on the boxes to show that anything we place as more important than God can be our idol. This might include possessions, beauty, sports...and the list goes on.

- [Click here to download instructions and pictures for the “Destroying Idols” activity.](#)
- [Click here for resources for teaching about Josiah.](#)

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# Am I a McTeacher?

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We've probably all taken children to fast food restaurants. I, for one, don't mind the occasional escapism provided by playgrounds and toys and packaged quick-fixes to hunger.

It is certainly an easy option and the kids leave the restaurant with full tummies. They think we're great when we take them. But what would happen if this were the only kind of meal that a child ate? There are plenty of nutritional studies that have shown not-so-happy results everywhere from obesity to diabetes to even a low IQ.

Although restaurants are providing some healthier choices there are still no substitutes for regular, healthy and well-balanced family meals provided by parents who are intentional in planning for the growth and well-being of their children. Granted, this is not the easier option but it has been shown that there are some possibly unexpected benefits even beyond the obvious health issues. One resource I came across, the Family Dinner Project, lists [some of those additional benefits](#) as better academic performance, higher self-esteem, greater sense of resilience and even a lower risk of substance abuse

## So what, you may be wondering, does that have to do with teaching the Bible to children?

*Sometimes, we naively expect healthy, grounded and long-lasting spiritual results in the lives of children while taking a "fast-food playground" approach to teaching God's Word to them.*

I'm not sure if you find this to be true where you are but I am constantly having to check myself and re-focus in this area. In our busy and "instant gratification" societies I think we are sometimes tempted to forget that that is not the way of our God. How much time has he spent on his purposes in my life? What has he given up for me? Has his goal been to keep me busy or entertain me or has he always been concerned with leading me to be more like Him (and who I was meant to be)?

Is this ever your struggle?

I thought it might be interesting to put together a sort of check-list for myself. In writing this list a couple of the points required more than a little soul searching. Maybe my list will be helpful to you.

# Warning Signs That I Am Becoming a McTeacher

- I'm content to passively let others do the study and thinking concerning Scripture. That is not a priority for me in planning a lesson.
- Instead of taking a careful inventory of the spiritual growth and discipleship of my students I call a class a "success" when I have kept the children busy and they like me.
- I'm satisfied teaching a "little serving of this" and a "package of that" without considering long-term goals for a child's overall faith journey.
- My individual classes begin to "stand alone". One lesson does not relate to the next or last and I don't talk to the children about how each relates to God's overall story.
- I wait until the last possible moment to prepare my lesson and do not see a need to make it a priority.
- The required amount of my own time and effort rise to the top as my most important criteria when choosing curriculum.
- For the children I often substitute non (or loosely) related activities, social events or class excursions for actually teaching the Word of God.
- I am not convinced that the Word of God is enough to maintain a child's interest. I keep it to a minimum so children can concentrate on the "fun stuff".

[Click here for help on choosing meaningful learning activities.](#)

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## What Bothers Jesus?

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What bothers Jesus? His earliest disciples thought they knew.

*"Some people brought their children to Jesus so that he could bless them by placing his hands on them. But his disciples told the people to stop bothering him.*

*When Jesus saw this, he became angry and said, "Let the children come to me! Don't try to stop them. People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God. I promise you that you cannot get*

*into God's kingdom, unless you accept it the way a child does."*

*Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them."  
Mark 10:13-16 Contemporary English Version (CEV)*

The disciples thought that these children would bother Jesus but it seems very clear that the disciples themselves, the adults in this situation, were the real bother. In fact, their judgement on children led to one of the few times in Scripture when Jesus was recorded as being angry. The New International Version uses the word "indignant".

So why is Jesus not bothered by children? After all, children are wiggly and curious and lacking in inhibition. If we are honest, we have to say they are often inconvenient to have around. They slow us down, exhaust us and generally cause havoc in what we like to call our "perfectly organised lives".

Children force us to reorganise our priorities. Schedules are worked around nap times and curfews. Holidays are planned based on how "child friendly" the activities and accommodations are. Having a couple of children enrolled in sporting activities or music lessons means a couple's once-spontaneous social life becomes a series of intricately planned and often postponed events.

And if that was not enough, they don't seem to really care when we are doing the "important stuff" at church. They are obviously not impressed by long sermons or deep discussions about spiritual matters. They don't seem to worry about the things we worry about. They choose action over contemplation almost every time.

If children are such a bother then why was Jesus indignant that the disciples would turn them away? Jesus points out that the disciples were turning away the very examples they needed to learn how to enter the kingdom of God. Ultimately, the disciples were the ones missing out.

Children in our communities, families and churches inspire us to act more like adults than we sometimes feel like acting. The inconvenience they bring produces patience. Examining priorities helps us maintain focus. And practising an active faith makes us useful. To keep children safe we plan better. To secure their future we work harder. To help them engage we adapt and change.

Most of all, like the disciples, we adults are sometimes satisfied with walking alongside and talking about Jesus. Children on the other hand want to touch him and be embraced by him.

May we learn from the example of the young ones among us. This does not bother him at all.

[Click here for for help in teaching the Bible lesson: \*Jesus Blesses the Children\*.](#)

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