

Wading Lambs and Swimming Elephants



As a Scripture was being publicly read in the church of my childhood I would sometimes watch my grandmother's finger slide across the page of her Bible. As a small child I would light up when I could occasionally read a word or two.

There is no other book like the Bible in its importance for people of all ages. It has always amazed me how God's Word can seem so simple and yet so complex. Even when I am reading Scripture as I prepare lessons for infants and toddlers I am often astounded at a new concept that I had never noticed before.

I think Gregory the Great said it best many many years ago when he wrote the following (emphasis is mine),

*"Divine speech sometimes stirs up the clever with mysteries, but more often provides consolation for the simple with the obvious. It has out in the open food for children but keeps hidden away the things that fill the minds of the eminent with awe. Scripture is like a river again, broad and deep, **shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim**".*

SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT: *MORALIA ON THE BOOK OF BLESSED JOB*,
SECTION 4. [CLICK HERE FOR FULL TEXT](#).

What a blessing to help lambs wade in God's Word! As I teach children I want to be attentive to their stage of development and help them experience God fully. I usually have my own Bible open on the table when I am teaching so that children can see that I refer to it and respect what God says.

In addition to my own Bible I want children to be very familiar with handling a Bible on their own. If at all possible I try to have bibles available for the children. Over the years I've developed a few measures for what children of various ages are able to do so I'm sharing them with you here in case you might find them useful in your teaching and at home.

Infants and Toddlers



**Ages
0-2 Years
Infants-Toddlers**

- Allow the infants and toddlers to hold small Bibles. These should be inexpensive because they will inevitably, at one time or another, be chewed and pulled apart and the pages torn.
- Show them how to hold the Bible carefully and how to turn pages.
- Place a sticker of Jesus inside the front cover so the children can “find Jesus” when they hold their bibles.
- Hold the Bible in front of each child, in turn, and slide your finger along as you “read” from it. I usually read, “God Loves Suzy.” (inserting the child’s name) Or “God loves Mummy.” “God loves Daddy.”

Pre-School (ages 3-5 years)



**Ages
3-5 Years
Pre-School**

- Pre-Schoolers can look at pictures in a children’s Bible. If you do not have picture Bibles then tuck pictures between the pages of a Bible before class.
- Guide the children in pretending to read along with you as you tell a story or read a verse.
- Children of this age can learn to spell and write a few basic Bible words. I use magnetic letters or puzzles to do this. And of course they are learning to write letters at this age so they really enjoy just writing the letters. We practice one word over a few weeks until the children have it down. They are so proud of themselves!
 - G-O-D
 - J-E-S-U-S
 - B-I-B-L-E ([song](#))

Younger Primary School Age (ages 6-7 years)



**Ages
6-7 Years
Primary**

- Children of this age can learn to recite the names of the 66 books of the Bible. I think it really helps to

learn them by singing the songs.

- ([New Testament Song](#))
- ([Old Testament Song](#))
- With help, children can find a book, chapter and verse in the Bible when given a Scripture reference. This is much easier to accomplish with a few children than a big group.
- Depending on their reading ability they can usually read a Bible verse that you have chosen (short and simple).
- They can use their finger to follow along in their own Bible as the teacher reads

Older Primary School Age (ages 8-10 years)



**Ages
8-10 Years
Primary**

- Depending on reading level children of this age might be able to read a few verses in a row or even a very short Bible story. You will have to plan this carefully if children are reading out loud in class. This can be embarrassing for some children and it does take time.
- Children in this age group can copy verses onto paper. These can be used in the classroom or taken home as reminders.
- Children aged 8-10 years are often able to confidently find a verse from a book, chapter, verse reference. A fun game is for the teacher to call out a reference (like Ephesians 6:1). The children then “race” to find the verse in their Bible and begin reading.

Pre-Teen (ages 11-12)



**Ages
11-12 Years
Pre-Teen**

- By the pre-teen years children can usually read a set of verses or a Bible story of reasonable length from the Bible.
- A teacher can challenge them to read a verse or set of verses and then:
 - Outline what they have read
 - Point out the most important words and/or
 - Name the characters and describe them based on what they have read.
- Also guide them to read a verse, group of verses or a Bible story and then describe:
 - What this reading reveals about God
 - How the pre-teen's thoughts and feelings are affected by what they have read, and/or
 - What actions they might take based on what they have just read.



Experiencing God's Holiness



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

- [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.

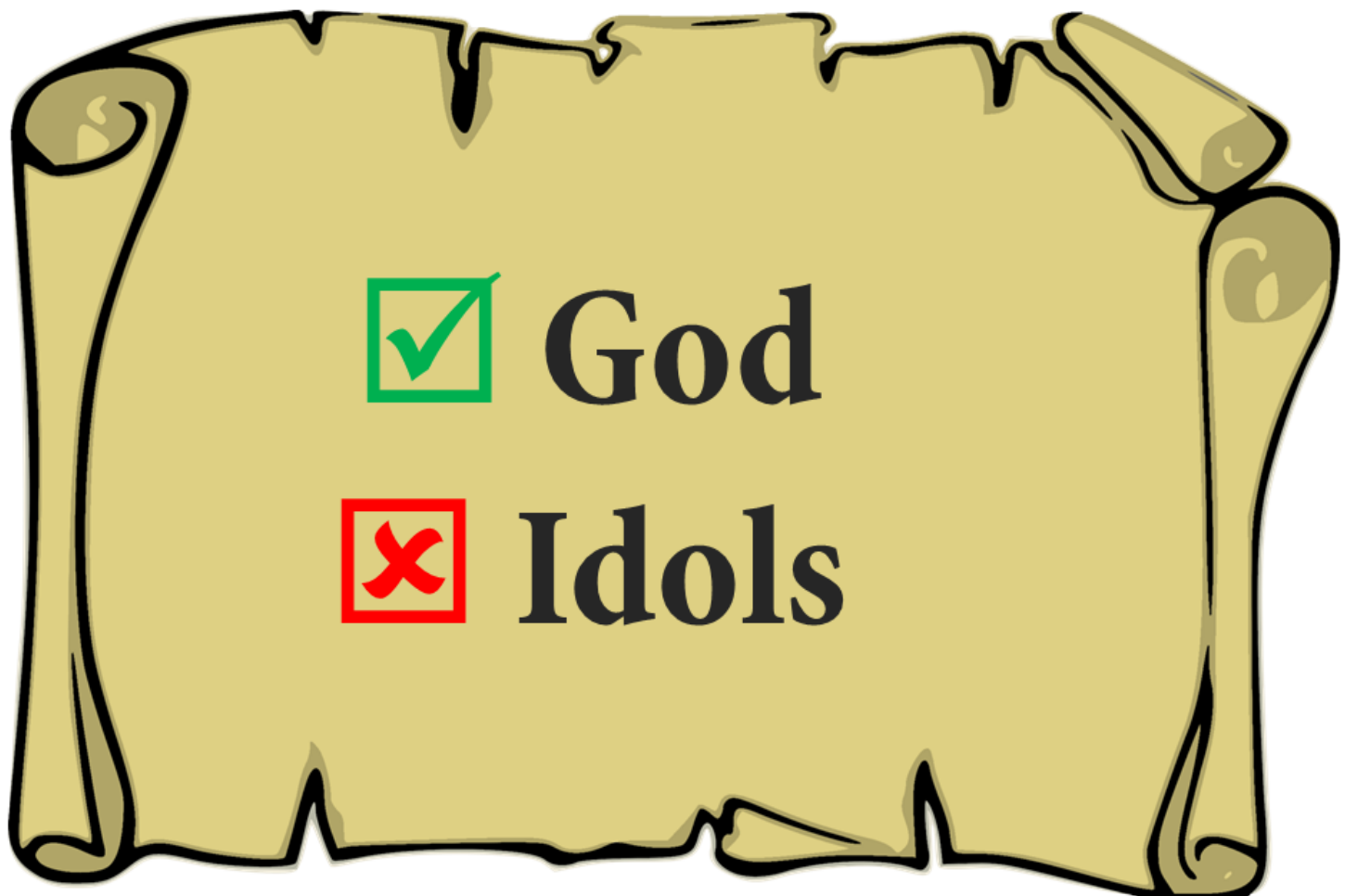
How About Making Your Own Temporary Tabernacle?

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



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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Bon Voyage



Those last few words can remain long in our memory. They draw everything together and mark the people and event as unique and special to this particular place and time. Imagine spending an evening with our friends in their home only to realise that they had gone to bed and left us on our own without saying goodbye. This would probably make us feel awkward and abandoned.

One of Paul's Goodbyes

As Paul traveled and shared the Gospel he had to say goodbye many times. These were often emotional occasions with tears, encouragement and even words of warning or advice. Here is one example:

We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. Acts 21:2-6 NIV

How do children feel when they leave our Bible Classes?

When a child leaves Bible Class is he or she a ship full of fresh provisions being warmly fare-welled from a safe and friendly port? Or are the children drifting off toward open sea while the busy people back on shore seem to barely notice they have gone?

Take the time to draw everything together at the end of your teaching time. Solidify what you have taught, let the children know you are glad they came and give them courage to go out and put into practice the things God has moved them to do.

Concluding Activities

- Pray for and/or with the children. [Click here for prayer activities.](#)
- Join hands and sing a song together. [Click here for a song list.](#)
- Learn a memory verse and recite it together as a group. [Click here for memory verse ideas.](#)
- Talk (and listen!) about the week ahead and how you and the children plan to apply God's Word and what you have learnt today. Conversational activities such as "Situation Cards" or "Things Matter" are helpful for this. [Click here for situation cards instructions.](#) [Click here for things matter instructions.](#)

Encouraging Last Words:

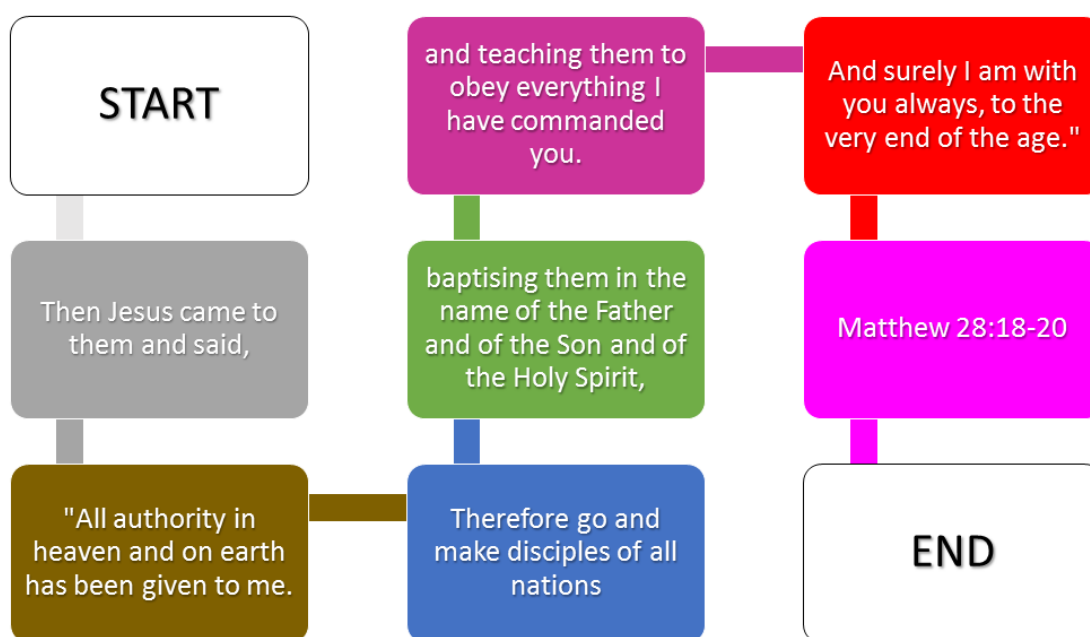
- I'm glad you were here today.
- You have blessed me today.
- Today is a good day because we were together.
- I'm going to remember today's class for a long time.
- I am so excited to see how you are going to be like Jesus this week.
- I'm looking forward to seeing you next time.
- I thank God for each of you. He is good to me to allow me to teach you.
- I have written your name down because I will be praying for you this week.

Individually, as They Walk Out the Door:

- Shake each child's hand
- Give a hug to each child
- Say "May God bless you" to each child by name.
- Say each child's name and a Spirit challenge. For example: "Suzy, may you be loving this week" or "Jacob, may you show Christian joy to people you meet."
- Give a card or note to each child. (This will require you to plan ahead, of course.) or
- Give a paper with a Scripture written on it.



Walking Down Memory Lane



I so wanted to use the title "Loci Dokee" for this post but I didn't know if anyone would read it. I've also since learned that I was probably pronouncing it incorrectly.

The ancient Romans and Greeks used a [mnemonic device called "loci"](#) for memorising information. Basically, they would mentally "walk through" buildings or streets and associate the various locations or items with something to remember.

It is sort of like tying a string around your finger to help you remember to put the rubbish by the curb. As you leave for work and put your hands on the steering wheel you notice the string and say to yourself "oh yes, I need to put the rubbish out."

Or remembering how many days in each month by using the the knuckles of your hand as a [mnemonic device](#).

I've often used an adaptation of this same method called "Memory Lane" when helping children learn verses from the Bible. Kids love it and it works particularly well when memorising a number of verses together.

How It Works

Children follow a “path” and stop along the way to say parts of the memory verse. The words might be written out at each stop but once the children repeat the journey a number of times they learn to say the verse from memory without reading the words.

Supplies:

- A Bible and chosen verse(s)
- (outdoors) Sidewalk chalk and a surface such as sidewalk/footpath, asphalt, driveway or paved parking lot
or
- (indoors) Marker, pen or pencil and paper. Rope, string, masking tape to visually connect the papers and form a path
or
- (outdoors) A stick to “write” with and a surface such as sand or beach
- or any combination of the above.

Instructions:

1. Read over the verse(s) and divide it into phrases.
2. Create a path using the method you have selected.
3. Write the phrases on separate pieces of paper (or on the surface you have selected).
4. Place them on the path in the order they will be said.
5. Show the children how to follow the path. They will stop at each paper and read the phrase aloud before walking to the next phrase. (You might do it first to show them how it is done.)

Adaptations:

- Older children can write out the phrases and set up the game for everyone else.
- This activity can be done at a quiet and slow pace appropriate for smaller indoor spaces or fast and loud if you have a large outdoor area.
- If you have plenty of help and space appoint helpers to stand at each stop and read the assigned phrase with the children. This personal touch aids in memorisation. You will be amazed how quickly children learn long passages of Scripture with this method.

Memory Lane Example:

I’ve used the verses known as [the Great Commission](#) in the example at the top of the page.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20 NIV)

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