

Big God, Little Kids

God's extraordinary work through ordinary kids of
the Bible

A 13-lesson curriculum for ministry to elementary-aged children;
designed for use in the family, the church, or camp.

Theme Verse:

“Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

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Faith Development in Kids

One of the most crucial tasks of the Christian community is to teach and develop the Trinitarian faith in children. The weight of this demand is so strong for a couple of reasons. First of all, Jesus himself held the children and gladly welcomed them as models of faith. He said about children, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these¹....whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me².”

Secondly, the famous Jewish *Shema* prayer is followed by an important command. Here is the prayer:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.”³

And here is the command that immediately follows this exhortation:

“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”⁴

Therefore, the need to value children and teach them about Jesus is not only modeled in the life of Jesus but also commanded in the inspired Word.

Jesus also told adults to look to children for lessons in faith:

“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”⁵

Since Jesus upheld children as faith-models, then adults have some learning to do *from* this age group as well.

In the secular psychology world, Erik Erikson delineates various stages of “psychosocial” development.⁶ These stages go from all the way from “trust versus mistrust” in infancy to “integrity versus despair” in one’s elder years. When speaking of elementary school children, Erikson’s stage is that of “industry versus inferiority.” The primary ambition for these children is to reach a certain level of “competence.” The contexts for this pursuit of competence is usually the child’s school and neighborhood.⁷

¹ Matthew 19:14, NIV.

² Matthew 18:5, NIV.

³ Deuteronomy 6:4-6, NIV.

⁴ Deuteronomy 6:7-9, NIV.

⁵ Matthew 18:2-4, NIV.

⁶ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 46.

⁷ Chris Kiesling, Class Lecture, *CD615: Discipleship Development in the Family* (Wilmore: Asbury Theological Seminary), Spring 2007.

In a similar vein, James Fowler has developed a list of developmental stages that follow a faith-development trajectory instead of a merely psycho-social one. Here is a list of his stages with approximate age ranges for each stage:

Fowler's Stages of Faith Development:⁸

1. Primal Faith (0-1)
2. Intuitive-Projective Faith (2-5)
3. Mythic-Literal (6-12)
4. Synthetic-Conventional (13+)

According to Catherine Stonehouse, Fowler's perspective is this: "Children are born with readiness for faith but need an environment of mutual love, care, and interaction for the faith potential to become a reality."⁹ Thus, there is a combination of both nature and nurture in the development of a child's faith.

When children reach the level of elementary school, they are in a stage to develop faith through the "mythic-literal" lens. This means that this age group is intrigued by the story (myth) and at the same time are in pursuit of reality (literal). They are at an age of learning logic and cause-effect relationships. They can also rightly separate the fake from the real, yet still be mesmerized and intrigued by the world of the imagination.¹⁰ In fact, storytelling is one of the more powerful tools in communicating to these children, especially when talking about God.¹¹

The interesting thing about teaching the Bible to this age group is that the Bible is both sensational and real at the same time. Kids may be tempted to start questioning the reality of some Biblical stories. That is, they may start to believe that Moses parting the Red Sea is about as real as Santa Claus squeezing down their chimney. But this is where parents and teachers must come in and help them categorize the Bible on the "reality" side (even the sensational parts) and keep Santa Claus and the Easter bunny on the "fake" side of their imaginations. The good thing is that their imaginations are still strong and vibrant so that they can learn a great deal about God through hearing the stories of God. In effect, they can more easily enter the narrative of God's history than can adults. And that narrative is very real to them, especially when their *context* (community of parents and teachers) affirms the reality of it.¹²

A Practical Answer: "Big God, Little Kids"

In an effort to create a practical resource in raising up elementary-age kids in their faith, I have developed a curriculum that is some four years in the making. It is called "Big God, Little Kids" with the subtitle, "God's extraordinary work through ordinary

⁸ Stonehouse, pp. 150-166.

⁹ Stonehouse, p. 150.

¹⁰ Stonehouse, p. 159.

¹¹ Stonehouse, p. 161.

¹² Stonehouse, pp. 161-162.

kids of the Bible.” The intention is that elementary school children will feel a connection with these kids of the Bible and be inspired to know that God can do great things through them even while they are young.

This curriculum was birthed when I took my first church staff position as a part-time children’s pastor at Vineyard Community Church of Lexington, KY. At the time I took the job, the church was actually known as Life Church (it soon became a part of the Vineyard Association of churches). The year was 2003 and I was a first-year seminary student. I had just learned curriculum development in a Christian Education class at my college. So when I took my job as the children’s pastor at this small church with a small budget, I decided to write my own curriculum. I chose the theme of studying kids in the Bible because I wanted to show my kids in church the examples of kids in the Bible who were used by God in big ways.

Since that time, this curriculum has been used in many summer camps and VBS’s with great reception. You are free to re-order the lessons for your application as well as take some out if you have less than 13 sessions.

Here are some suggested uses of this curriculum.

1. **Home:** A 13-session family devotional series that covers the stories of normal kids who were used by God in big ways.
2. **Church:** A 13-week preparation program for the initiation of older elementary schoolers into leadership, young adulthood, and greater maturity in their faith.
3. **Camp:** A week-long camp or VBS that teaches kids that they do not have to wait until they grow up to be used by God in powerful ways.

Use of Curriculum

Introduction

Welcome to “Big God, Little Kids.” This is a 13-lesson series that teaches kids about God in a way that helps them connect to characters in the Bible so that they can live out their faith in big ways in today’s world. This curriculum is designed for use in one of three types of settings: the home, the church, and the camp. There may be variance in how the lessons are presented in each setting, but the content and format should remain basically the same throughout any setting. Any version of the Bible can be used as the curriculum will reference the Scripture passages for each lesson. Basically, the teacher/parent can adapt this curriculum to each particular setting.

Each lesson explores the life a kid in the Bible. Most lessons are about a particular character, such as Josiah (#4) or Mary (#8). But there are a few lessons that teach a lesson through a generalized “type” of kid, such as the lessons on “Wise Kids” (#5) and “Children of God” (#13).

There is also a “Big Idea” attached to each lesson. This is the main message the teacher/parent wants to drive home to the kid. It should be repeated and emphasized

throughout the lesson. The *overarching* big idea for the whole curriculum is this: *You don't have to wait until you grow up to be used by God.* This overarching big idea should be emphasized throughout each lesson, along with the unique big idea of each particular lesson.

Finally, there is an “assignment” given for each lesson. These are not academic assignments. And these should not be treated like homework for a class. Rather, they are designed to be fun and creative activities that help reinforce the big idea and the Bible story. When the activity is completed, the teacher/parent can sign and date the lesson indicating that the lesson/activity was executed.

The Memory Verse (1 Tim 4:12):

There is only one memory verse for this entire 13-lesson series. That may not sound like much, but the idea is to put the spotlight on one verse so that it will really sink into the kids over the duration of the entire series. The memory verse is 1 Timothy 4:12. The teacher/parent may use whatever Bible translation they wish. But here it is in the New International Version: “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

The reason this is the memory verse is because this idea serves as the main theme throughout the entire curriculum. Basically, we want kids to know that they can do big things for God too. They can set an example for others (even adults) with their faith. And they should not let anyone spiritually look down on them just because they are kids.

There are a variety of memory verse games and activities. Use different methods on different weeks. I like making up hand motions for each of the different words in the verse and then having the kids say it and motion it at the same time.

A method that I have used that has been particularly helpful is something I call the MVOTW. It stands for “Memory Verse of the Week.” You pronounce it, “muh-vah-twuh.” Kids love saying it and we put motions to the words to help us remember whatever verse we are working on. One year, some girls recited a MVOTW to me that they had learned two or three years prior. They still remembered the words and the motions.

So if you lead your kids in a MVOTW, put some motions to each word or phrase (try to put in some or all American Sign Language if you can). Then quote the scripture reference, and finish it off with a hearty, “muh-vah-twuh!” It works. Trust me.

Target Age Group (Ages 5-12):

While this series of lessons can be used for any age group, the main target is for kids in the elementary-school age group. This means that this curriculum is best used for kids between the ages of five and twelve. This age group loves stories.¹³ They also

¹³ Stonehouse, p. 161.

love anything hands-on and participatory. So this curriculum strives to utilize both storytelling as well as participatory activities. The teacher/parent does not have to be a professional storyteller or gym teacher to successfully pull off this curriculum. Instead, the most successful parent/teacher will be one who loves the kids, loves God, and passionately desires to see these kids grow in faith and love for the Trinitarian God of the Bible.

The Outline of the Lessons:

#	Kid Champion	Focus Verse	Big Idea	Assignment
1	Isaac	Genesis 22:7,8	Trust	Blind Catch
2	Samuel	1 Samuel 3:10	Listening	Telephone Game
3	David	1 Sam 17:45	Faith	Target Practice
4	Josiah	2 Kings 22:2	Leadership	Kingdom Interview
5	Wise Kids	Proverbs 4:1	Wisdom	Outing w/Parent
6	Jeremiah	Jeremiah 1:6-8	Witnessing	"Jesus Loves You"
7	Zack's Kids	Zechariah 8:5	Playing	Play a Game
8	Mary	Luke 1:46-47	Praising	Poem to God
9	Kid Jesus	Luke 2:46,52	Learning	God Questions
10	Jairus' Daughter	Luke 8:50	Miracles	Pray for a Miracle
11	Fish/Bread Kid	John 6:9	Giving	Give Away a Meal
12	Timothy	1 Timothy 4:12	Boldness	Service Project
13	Children of God	1 John 4:4	Indwelling	The Big Outreach!

Basic Format of Each Lesson:

1. **Opening Prayer/Songs**
2. **Learn and Recite the Memory Verse (1 Timothy 4:12)**
3. **Introductory Game** – participatory, hands-on, and connected to the main idea
4. **Bible Story**
 - a. Teach: The leader reads or paraphrases the story to the kids.
 - b. Act: Let the kids act out the story (dress them up if you have the outfits).
 - c. Review: The leader asks review questions about the story.
5. **Putting Faith into Action**
 - a. Main Idea: Emphasize the Main Idea
 - b. Connect: Brainstorm ways to model this Kid Champion in today's culture
 - c. Assignment: Do the Assignment

Here is a note about the Bible story time and the review questions: First of all, stick to the text when telling the story. It can confuse children if you make up facts about the story that are not in the Bible. On the other hand, you can also ask the kids questions that help them imagine certain details that may not be explicitly stated in the

Scripture (like how Isaac may have felt as he was ascending the mountain with his father, holding the wood for the sacrifice, and then seeing his father raise a knife over his head). The important thing is to be clear about the difference between what is in the text and what you are guessing about how the characters may have felt or other similar conjectures. Feel free to bring in other Scripture references that are relevant to the story at hand. This particular curriculum does not go into depth as to how you teach the Bible story, so it will take some homework on your part as the leader to be prepared with the story ahead of time and any other relevant Scripture references to go along with it.

Secondly, make sure you ask review questions that are not merely “yes” or “no” questions. When you are done with the Bible story, ask questions about how the characters may have felt or thought about the situation they were in. Ask questions like, “Tell me how David may have felt when he approached Goliath?”, “Have you ever had to stand face to face with someone or something that was a lot bigger than you and maybe scary looking?....Tell me about that time and what it was like for you.”

Build a Bridge and Turn on the Light:

Children’s Ministry expert Roger Fields teaches that children’s ministry is about “building a bridge and turning on the light.” What he means by “turning on the light” is that kids need the light of Jesus and His Word. That is the end goal in instructing children here – that they might come to know and grow in Jesus and learn about His Word.¹⁴

What he means by “building a bridge” is that we need to speak the language of children – which is often the language of play, hands-on participation, and other similar kid-languages. He claims that some churches simply build a bridge with no light while others have the light but no bridge. There are plenty of ways to both build a bridge *and* turn on a light in reaching out to children. This combination of both “method” and “content” is what Roger Fields refers to as the “maximum focus.”¹⁵

Outreach Celebration:

The culminating project of this series is for the kids to go out into the world and do something big for God. That’s what they have been learning about, so it seems right to go out and let them get their hands dirty serving for the Kingdom of God. The parents/teachers should plan ahead and set a day (or multiple days) for this outreach. This curriculum does not dictate what kind of outreach the group should choose. Instead, here is a list of suggestions, and keep in mind that the kids might want to be a part of picking what project to do:

- Community block party
- Handing out bags of groceries
- Clothes drive
- Food drive

¹⁴ Roger Fields, *Big City Studio: Director’s Guide* (Lexington, KY: Kidz Blitz Ministries, 2004), p. 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

- Bible-based puppet shows in a neighborhood
- Free food/drink giveaways at a community event
- Raising money for international needs (eliminating poverty, sexual exploitation, child labor, modern-day slavery, malnutrition)
- Kid-led worship service at church
- A kid-led prayer vigil in the community
- Write a book together
- Produce a performance together
- Create a large work of Christ-centered art together
- Many, many more ideas (come with some of your own)

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Big God, Little Kids:

#1 - Isaac

God displayed His great power through kids in the Bible. You do not have to wait until you grow up for God to do big things through you too!

#	Kid Champion	Focus Verse	Big Idea	Assignment
1	Isaac	Genesis 22:7,8	Trust	Blind Catch
Bible Story: Isaac trusts his dad and God provides (Genesis 22:1-19)				

Main Idea:

Trust that God will always provide.

1. **Opening Prayer/Songs**
2. **Learn and Recite the Memory Verse** – Use different hand motions for each of the words in the verse, then have the kids say it and motion it at the same time.

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

3. **Introductory Game – The Human Chair**

Split the group up into boys and girls. Have each group get in a circle and then tell the kids to turn and look at the back of the head of the person to their right (this gets them facing the same direction yet still in a circle). Tell the kids to make their circles tighter. Then tell them to sit right down on the knees of the person behind them. This creates a continuous circle of sitting children (one on another). See which group can stay seated the longest. If a family does this, then only one circle is necessary. This teaches the kids to trust one another.

4. **Bible Story (Genesis 22:1-19)**

- a. Teach: The leader reads or paraphrases the story to the kids.
- b. Act: Let the kids act out the story (dress them up if you have the outfits).
- c. Review: The leader asks review questions about the story.

5. **Putting Faith into Action**

- a. Main Idea: Emphasize the fact that Isaac quietly obeyed his father and that God provided a way for Isaac not to die.
- b. Connect: Brainstorm ways to model Isaac in today’s culture.
- c. Assignment: The assignment for this week for each kid to practice a “blind catch” (*with adults only as the catchers*). This means they must either stand on the ground or on a chair, then close their eyes (or be blindfolded) and allow the adult to catch them. This will reinforce trust and the idea that Isaac had to trust his Dad and God to provide.

TO OBTAIN THE REST OF THE CURRICULUM, SIMPLY DO THE FOLLOWING TWO STEPS:

1. Sign up for my monthly newsletter by going to this link: <http://jessejoyner.com/free-newsletter/>
2. Send me an email telling me that you signed up and would like the rest of the “Big God, Little Kids” curriculum. Send the email to jesse@jessejoyner.com