

3 Keys: Choosing The Best Curriculum For Your Children

by DiscipleLand Staff

Children's Ministry Curriculum, Children's Ministry Resources

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Whether you're a veteran ministry leader or a children's worker newbie, the following article by Dr. Thomas Sanders will help you consider the right curriculum for your kids. Your choice of curriculum may impact generations to come!

Recently, I have had more phone calls and conversations about curriculum than at any other time in my recent memory. I am glad children's ministry leaders are thinking about this issue, because the selection of curriculum is very important. Curriculum becomes the recommended instruction for leaders to use in guiding children to know, trust, obey, and follow Jesus. In other words, the curriculum you choose represents to the children in your church your views and the views of your church about God, Jesus, and the Bible, so it is very important that you carefully think through your choice of curriculum. **Here are some suggestions and questions you can ask yourself when choosing curriculum.**

Theology

- First, read the entire Bible story outline to get a sense of the overall direction of the curriculum. Sometimes, curriculum can start out with a bang and fizzle later on. Or it could be that it begins with less controversial topics and then brings them up later. You

as a ministry leader know what direction you want to take for your lessons, so you need to make sure that you don't have any surprises later on in the year. Reading the entire cycle helps you to avoid those surprises.

- Next, ask yourself the question: Are these stories understandable to the children? This is especially a good question for preschoolers and younger elementary-age children, and a biblical question as well. The Apostle Paul recognizes several times, in working with adult believers, that new learners/believers are not ready for the more difficult content. Is the stoning of Achan and his family from the book of Joshua really the best choice for Bible study for preschoolers or even younger elementary children? Are descriptions of animal sacrifices in the Old Testament or even the crucifixion of Christ told in a way that children can grasp?
- When you read through the biblical concept, biblical truth, life question, or teaching aim for the lessons, ask yourself these questions: Are these consistent with the Scripture passage? Are these written in a way that the target group could understand? In many cases, this information is written from an adult perspective or understanding. The framework portion is much more helpful when it models how to interact with children in the target range.
- Is the theology consistent with your church or your pastor's view? Many denominations and publishers provide curriculum. Spend some time investigating the biblical assumptions of the materials. If writers and pastors associated with the project are listed, determine if they represent where you would like to take children on the spiritual journey. Curriculum offers a huge support to the vision of the pastor or church leaders; the key is moving in the same direction.
- How is the Bible treated? Is the Bible treated as a collection of moral tales where people make good choices? Or is it treated as a story where God is the main actor and people choose to obey and honor Him with their lives? It is popular today for curriculum resources to have a set of values that are culturally relevant and focus on behavior and lifestyle. At times this may

ignore the bigger narrative of God's activity in the Bible and in the lives of His people. The purpose of curriculum should be to help boys and girls learn to follow God's plan for their lives.

Methodology

- In what ways is the Bible presented? Is the Bible passage only or always presented via video? How does the curriculum call for leaders and children to use their Bibles? When adults at church and in the home model reading and using the Bible physically in their hands and not just on a screen, they raise the value of the Scripture for daily use in the lives of boys and girls.
- Does the material foster observation or participation? Boys and girls are so accustomed to entertainment that it is easy to create resources that ignore the need for children to be involved rather than passively observing. Think about how children are involved in group time and in small groups.
- How do leaders relate to the children? Does the curriculum challenge leaders to be involved in the lives of the children or are the leaders caretakers or focused on crowd control? Think about the opportunities leaders with children have to tell their stories and validate the impact of God in their own lives. The leaders are the connection children have with the Bible.
- Are the video/media resources true to the Bible text? Does the media take liberties for the sake of entertainment? Remember for many of these children this is the first time they are hearing these passages, so some information may need to be corrected.

Child-Focused

- Does the curriculum provide for any differentiation for the variety of ages in preschool and/or elementary-age children? It is tempting for curriculum to take a one-size-fits-all approach. There is a significant difference between two-year-olds and five-year-olds and second graders and fifth graders. The reason for age-grading is the opportunity to speak in a way that is at the level of the learner.
- In the directions, do the writers model how to talk to the target age

group? Are words like descendants, sacrifice, altar, synagogue, and temple explained, or are assumptions made about what preschoolers and young children can understand? Some words and concepts are difficult because of the context of the Scripture, context of the child, and level of learning of the child. In some cases, time can be taken to explain concepts, but in other cases, especially with preschoolers, focusing on the content at a later date may make more sense. Remember, you as a ministry leader may have been trained how to talk to the different age groups, but your volunteers may not have, so it is always useful for them to have as much guidance as possible so that they feel comfortable presenting the lessons.

- In looking at the teaching methods, are they mostly or only discussion-based activities, or do they provide for interactive activities that focus on the process of Bible teaching. Talking is not necessarily teaching nor is sitting necessarily learning. Learning is a two-way process. When Jesus encountered people, He often tailored His approach to the context and situation of the individual. This is a great model for children's leaders.

There is not a perfect curriculum because curriculum must be adapted to meet the needs of local churches and individual children. In the sea of options for curriculum in children's ministry, leaders who take seriously this stewardship will be rewarded with teaching that helps boys and girls and their families learn to follow Jesus.

Thomas Sanders conducted his Ph.D. research on how children understand and describe their conversion experiences. His passion for discovering what children understand and how they construct meaning in the language of faith has led him to continue this research, along with his graduate students in childhood ministry at Dallas Baptist University, into these issues and others related to the youngest generations of the church.

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Choosing Curriculum for Children's Ministry.
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