

## **PREPARING AN IMPACTFUL CHILDREN'S MESSAGE IN 5 STEPS**

I'm writing this based on the challenge from my leader to document the process how I prepare a message in the children's ministry so that it can be shared with others who may find it useful.

Before I share the steps or process, I want to share 3 basic ideas I believe works when preparing a message. These are not rules or the only way to do it but just guidelines I hold to personally from my experience and exploration in these many years of ministering with children.

### **1) Be Bible Driven Not Topic Driven.**

When teaching the bible, we have the tendency to haste through the passage of the bible to established quickly the point or topic of the passage and then spend bulk of the time talking about the topic rather than the passage. For example when we are sharing on God's Calling for Abraham, we haste through the story of God's calling and spend majority of the time explaining what 'Faith' (which is the topic of the passage) is. We may come up with clever ways of explaining faith but it may still not be as effective as if we focus on the passage and point out truths/facts describe in the passage. Stick to the passage and creatively expand the story with "what ifs", "how he/she the character may feel", "possible fears, hopes and dreams of the characters"

The reasons to be bible driven (rather than lesson driven) are:

- 1) We will retain the context of the passage and tend to be more focus and not divert from the point of the passage.
- 2) Kids are more likely to be attentive because they like stories/narratives more than ideas or concepts. (Their abstract thinking is just starting to develop)
- 3) Kids remember the lesson more because everyone enjoys a good story/parable.
- 4) Kids will make association of your teaching to the bible which is important that they know you are actually teaching from the bible rather than off your head.

We need to go high on the bible passage and do not overdo topics or concepts. Be bible driven because God's word speaks for itself most of the time. We just need to help them understand difficult words and point them to truth revealed in the bible passage.

### **2) Have as few points to make as possible.**

Preferably just make one point, if not two. We tend to want to explain too many things. It's 'value for money' or value for the time given' you may think. So from sin, to salvation, God's plan to the devil's work we want to cover it all

in one message. At the end of the day children lose you completely and get nothing in return. It is better for them to learn one thing well than many things vaguely or often not at all.

### **3) Scripting your message word for word**

Unless you are a very natural communicator, script your lesson word for word. The reason is it may take longer but actually it takes shorter time? Let me explain, I use to prepare in my head and just jot down points I want to make. Obviously every time I practice my message, I do it a little bit different. It happens so often that it's no longer a practice, its still in construction phrase. The amount of practice required for this style of preparation to succeed far exceed scripting from day one. And when the time comes for me to preach, I'm still doubtful how I should say it or present it and that affects the flow of words that comes out of my mouth and hence lessen the effectiveness of the communication.

When I script from my first draft, I always practice exactly what is on paper. If I'm not comfortable with the words during practice, I amend them for good and practice on the improved version from then on. Usually by the time I preach the message, I know I'm giving my best word structure to communicate my point. I may deviate but the bulk of it is firmly in my head that I can confidently present it. If you are a good communicator and can think well on the spot, you need to script how you start and how you'll end while leaving the middle part of your lesson in point form.

Having established these 3 important points, here are the 5 steps of how I prepare a lesson for children.

#### **Step 1 - START WITH THE BODY**

Start with the most important thing. The body of the message that is straight out of the bible. Type out the passage (or if you are online, go to [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) find the passage and cut and copy it into your Word document). This is perhaps the most important Step! Because you can't preach without God's Word.

#### **Step 2 - RECONSTRUCT THE BODY**

Read through the passage and decide which part is important so that it can be retained as foundation of the story / lesson. Cut these parts out to form the body of the message. As much as possible retain the order of the verses so that the message is "bible" driven and not lesson driven. It is better to use God's word directly than to use your own.

Replace those parts that you can explain better in your own words. Yes bible jargons may be confusing for kids. For example think of better words or phrases for 'sanctification' (eg. to 'clearing up the junk') or 'redemption' (eg. to buy us from Satan). Use simple and easy to understand words. Explain difficult words or references in the bible with one easy sentence (eg, 'Skin of water' means water bottles made of camel skin) Try to retain the verses number so that you can mention them during your message to allow kids to know that you are 'still' preaching from the bible. Add things like "What do you think God said? In verse 2 God says .... ", " And God replied...that's in verse 5".

So there, you already have your message which when you read out has the complete story in easy to understand language. However it is most likely to be un-interesting as it is. So let's develop it further.

### **Step 3: ADD AN INTRODUCTION & A CONCLUSION**

Add an introduction where you can share about the book, its history, who wrote it or even a personal story relating to the book in your perspective. One that I like to do is to share with them that the book is part of the Gospels, or the book is the second last book in the Old Testament and take the opportunity to reaffirm that the bible is God's own word. Share who I think the writer is and I usually share very quickly something interesting about the book/passage. (eg. Paul wrote this book while he was in prison) This part just prepares them to appreciate the passage as God's word. You can be as light hearted as you can during this part by sharing some personal stories. (eg. I remember when I read this book, God told me that I should be like Paul)

After that add the conclusion of your message where you focus on

- 1) A singular point of the lesson (don't focus on more than 2 points each lesson)
- 2) Some applications of the lesson. If you have care group in your service programming, let bulk to the discussion about application happen there. Please note that kids application is beyond "let's behave ourselves" or "let's be a good boy/girl". It is also about prayer, about witnessing, about helping the weak kids do real ministry.

Be a serious in the conclusion and expect God to convict hearts.

### **Step 4: ATTENTION GETTING TOOLS**

After Step 3 you should have the meat and first layer of packaging of the lesson. Now we just need to ensure that it's delivered in the most interesting and creative manner.

Here's what I do. At each paragraph of my script I assume that I would have lost their attention then so I think about what tools is needed to attract the kids' attention back to me. If we do it this way, it'll also help make it fun for us to preach. You can use the following

- Interesting facts
- Observations. Use phrases like "Think about ...", "What if ", "I wonder", "I remember..", "I believe ...", "I don't know about you but for me its ... "
- Jokes and funny anecdotes
- Multichoice answered quiz (eg. What do you think a prophet is? )
- Real objects (As big as possible)
- Trivia
- Any other creative elements, throwing your voice, puppets or drama
- Phrase that can be repeated. (Kids love this)

If you have the equipment during time of preaching such as PowerPoint slides or cd player use 1) pictures to flash out or 2) sounds to be played. This will suit well kids who are auditory and visual learners.

## **Step 5: FIND PARTS THE KIDS CAN PARTICIPATE**

To move one step deeper to further engage the kids, include them in the story/passage or dramatization of the passage. Kids generally love it. You will have to carefully planned it out and anticipate their reactions. Do not be forceful of kids who don't like it, there will be a few who will gladly volunteer (with or without rewards). Besides actions, you can also ask them to make sounds during your lesson. It will be ideal to give them parts they can do on the spot with very little rehearsal. If there are harder parts, make sure we prepare them or rehearse with them before hand. With getting kids to participate that we would have complete our reach to all 3 visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners.

Well that's the 5 Steps! Once that is done, go get some good sleep the night before and go out and have a great time teaching the word of God. Remember kids respond to a message better when they respond to you as a teacher, pastor or a caregiver. Invest time to get to know them when you are not sharing on the pulpit.

## **CONCLUSION**

The traditional approach of sharing a message follows the classroom style where topical ideas & concepts are taught (and sometimes imposed). A better approach I believe is through a storytelling/narrative style where its bible driven and you point out truths from the bible often personalizing it by adding in your own stories/testimonies. When we preach topical sermons, we tend to just reach the mind but when we teach expository according to the bible while adding our own

experiences and personal learning of it, it may be possible to reach the heart as well. To impact kids, it is so essential that we preach faithfully and truthfully from the bible. Get kids to remember bible passages and stories, not your lesson. Remember that God's Word can impact more by itself than any clever ideas or concepts we can work out on our own. We just need to help them know what is in the bible and relate it to their own lives.

Happy preparing and I'm so certain that the effort is going to be worth it. Remember also that quality is in the long run easier and cheaper to maintain than mediocrity.

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