Session 5: God’s Word

***Objectives:***

* See how the ways we view and teach Scripture impacts our understanding of God, His purposes, and our own identity and role
* Understand the connection between God blessing His people and His desire for them to be a blessing to the nations
* Learn practical ways to incorporate elements of God’s Word into their own children’s church classes or home.

***Teaching Time:***45 minutes, 1 hour 15 minutes with translation

***Materials*:**

* Bible
* Session 5 handout for each participant
* small glasses
* large clown glasses
* 4 to 5 oranges (or another kind of fruit, all the same kind)
* 11 Blessing and Purpose Signs from the Teaching Aids folder
* scissors
* tape

***Getting Ready:***

1. Print out the 11 signs needed for the Blessing and Purpose activity. Use scissors to cut along the dotted lines on the three blessing and three purpose signs. *Optional:* After you have printed and cut out the signs, glue them to colored paper to make them easier to see. Glue all “purpose” signs to the same color paper. Make sure all “blessing” signs are each glued to a different color of paper.
2. Pass out the Session 5 handout to participants before the session begins.

Introduction
Learning about how children are developing at each age sets the stage to now explore the main components we need to include in our mobilization efforts with children.

Now we are going to dive a bit deeper into the components that most affect how children view themselves and God in light of that vision.

We are going to look at God’s Word, God’s world, and God’s work.

These components will lay the foundation on which you can then build with whatever activities and resources you choose to use.

In this session, let us look at how to engage children with God’s heart for the world through His Word.

Teaching God’s Word
Earlier we learned that the Bible is not a random collection of stories, statements, and rules.

It is one story … God’s story of what He has begun and what He will finish.

It is a story that is still unfolding in our day.

How do we communicate His story to our children?

Let us look at two methods of teaching the Bible and what impact each one has on children.

Two Types of Lenses

Think about how you have viewed and taught God’s Word up to this point in your life.

Perhaps, you teach it as I once did. You want kids to know what it says about them – their life, their circumstances, their decisions.

You teach it with a me-centered lens (put on small glasses).

When you teach God’s Word, you are looking for yourself and how it applies to you.

Or, do you teach it as one book about one main character - God?

You teach it through God-centered lenses. (Put on the big glasses).

You want to discover first and foremost who God is and more about His global purpose.

There are many wonderful promises and directions for us in Scripture.

However, our first question when we read God’s Word should not be “What does this say about me?”

Instead, we should be asking, “What does this say about God, the main character?”

The Importance of Balanced Teaching

As we come to know and understand God’s Word this way, then we begin to understand what God’s Word does say to us, through the right lens.

Here is an orange. (Hold up one orange.) Is this orange good for you? (Allow for answers.)

Would it be good for your body if all you ever ate were oranges and nothing else? (Hold up all the oranges and allow for answers.)

Even though the orange is good for you and full of essential vitamins, your body would not be able to function fully on just a diet of oranges.

You would need protein and healthy grains as well.

In the same way, only focusing on one part of God’s Word for us leads to inconsistent growth.

We need the whole of God’s Word to become the full people He intended us to be.

Often, when we teach children stories from the Bible, we focus on the individual blessings – what this story tells us about the things God does for us.

We teach with me-centered lenses. (Put on small glasses.)

When we teach about Daniel and the lion’s den, we talk about how God protects us.

When we teach about Elijah and the widow, we talk about how God provides for us.

When we talk about the life of Jesus, we talk about how God loves us.

All of these things are right and true and good. God does love us and protect us and provide for us.

Children need to know these essential truths.

However, when we do not balance out God’s blessings with God’s purpose, we can mislead our children.

Yes, God did protect Daniel in the lion’s den and honored him for his faithfulness.

But God also used this event in Daniel’s life to prompt King Darius to write a decree to every nation, tribe, and tongue in the land, stating that Daniel’s God was the one true God.

Yes, God did provide for Elijah, but He also provided for a Gentile widow despite the many Jewish widows who lived in the land.

God used Elijah to show His power and love to someone far removed from God’s people.

Yes, Jesus’ time here on earth reflects God’s deep love for us individually.

But Jesus also came to push against the ego-centric view the Jews had of their Messiah.

He performed miracles among more Gentiles than Jews and taught countless lessons that ultimately helped the Jewish disciples see that Jesus was the Savior of the world, for Jews and Gentiles alike.

How Teaching God’s Word Affects Development

As we saw in the development chart, at the beginning, our children are totally dependent on the adults in their lives. The whole focus of children is on getting their own needs met.

This leads to their being naturally more self-centered when they are young.

Life is about their learning to walk and talk and do things on their own.

It is our job to help them grow out of their self-centered nature.

When we teach only about the things God does for children personally, we build upon that self-centered nature.

We are creating the same ego-centric faith the Jews had centuries ago.

These me-centered concepts can give children the perception of a God who works for them alone and who has power limited to their circumstances.

In America, one out of every two teenagers (ages 13-18 years old) abandons the church once they become young adults. Why is this?

They believe it is because the church has communicated to them, though unintentionally, that God exists for them.

As they get older, teenagers begin to lose their sense of need for God.

Sure, God is their friend, but so are all these other friends around them who are more tangible and real.

Yes, God helps them, but they do not need His help. They are becoming independent and can do things on their own.

We are doing such a disservice to children if we only give them this small personal piece about God because God is so much more.

Bible Activity on Blessing and Purpose

How do we begin to capture who God is and His purposes for our children?

How do we help them see the purpose behind each blessing?

I am going to give you a Bible story that you might teach to children. First, read through the passage.

Then choose specific parts of the story that you could teach to answer these two questions:

1. Who did God bless and how? Many times this is the easy one to find. It usually involves the most prominent characters in the story.
2. What is God’s greater purpose for the blessing? This takes more practice to find. It is the part of the blessing that spills over to other people who may not be as noticeable.

(Divide the room into three sections.)

Look on your handout. Find the section that says, “Group Activity: Blessing and Purpose.”

I am going to assign each section one of the Bible stories you see there.

Following each Bible story are the verses you will read. The two questions you will discuss are also in that section of the handout.

(Assign each section one of the following Bible stories.)

Moses and the 10 plagues – Exodus 7:1-5; 9:13-16; 12:37-38

Crossing the Jordan River – Joshua 3:14-17; 4:19-24

David and Goliath – 1 Samuel 17:20-47

(Have each section break into smaller groups, read their assigned passage, and discuss: What was the blessing? What was God’s greater purpose in blessing?)

(As participants discuss, hang up the story, blessing, and purpose signs. The blessing and purpose signs should be in a column on the left hand side, one above the other.

The three story signs go along the top to form chart headings as shown below:

David

Jordan

Moses

**Blessing**

Purpose

Group Share and Summary

(After about 8-10 minutes, come back together. Allow one or two people from each section to share their answers with the large group. ***Option:*** Let the people reporting wear the big glasses. Focus on identifying what the blessing and purpose was. As you go along, tape the blessing and purpose cards you cut out under the matching story headings to fill in your chart. The three blessing cards will be different sizes and shapes. The three purpose cards will all be the same.)

Answers:

*Moses:* Blessings – God rescued His people, brought them out of slavery, heard their cries for help; Purpose – Used the plagues to make known to the world that He alone was God.

*Jordan:* Blessings – God made a way, brought them into the land He promised, protected them;
Purpose – Used the crossing to make known to the world that He alone was God.

*David:* Blessings – Gave David the victory, protected the Israelites, helped him overcome;
Purpose –Through the defeat of Goliath, the whole world would know that He alone was God.

What do you notice about the blessing and the purpose identified in each of these stories?

See the blessings. (Point to blessing statements in the blessing row.) Each one of them is unique and different.

But notice the purpose lived out through each of those blessings. (Point to purpose statements in the purpose row.) Each one of them is the same.

Through God’s blessing, God was making Himself known to nations and people who did not know Him. He was drawing others to Himself.

What if we consistently taught God’s Word in this way, teaching not only the blessing, but also the greater purpose?

What if \_\_\_ [insert country group here] children believed that God wanted to use the blessings in their life to make His name great and draw others like the \_\_\_ [insert nearby unreached groups here] to Himself?

This global kind of vision is rooted in our children’s understanding of who the God of the Bible is and who they are in light of His purposes. We can shape this understanding by how we present Scripture.

Teaching a Bible Story
For most of us, sharing God’s Word with our children is not something totally new.

Teachers, if you read and discuss Bible stories or passages in your classroom, raise your hand. This area – God’s Word – is already a part of your existing lessons.

Parents, if you read Bible stories to your children at home or discuss passages of Scripture, raise your hand. This area – God’s Word – is already part of your family time.

No matter what Bible story or passage you are sharing, you can help your kids to be God-focused rather than self-focused.

As you present Bible stories, help your children understand that:

* God is the main character in every story.
* God is always at work to make Himself known.
* God blesses His people for a greater purpose that includes others.

You can weave these concepts into the Bible story introduction, the story itself, discussion questions, and the story application.

The Bible stories themselves are not changing. What is changing is how you frame those stories for your children.

Let us look at the parts of a Bible lesson and see how small changes can give your kids the big picture.

Introducing the Bible Story

Listen to these two introductions for the same Bible story. Which one guides children to be God-focused? Why?

(Read both of the following introductions, pausing between each one.)

Introduction 1: Today we are going to hear a Bible story about a man named Daniel.

Introduction 2: Today we are going to hear part of God’s story. I wonder how God will use Daniel.

(Allow the participants to share their thoughts.Answer: #2 is God-focused because it conveys that Daniel is part of God’s larger story and that God will work through him.)

With younger children, consider using a long string that represents God’s continuing story. Hang it up in your class or home, just as we have done during our time together.

Attach pictures of Bible characters to this string as you introduce them. These can be pictures provided in a curriculum or pictures that your children draw.

Use the pictures on the string to review characters from past lessons and how God used them. Then say, “I wonder who God will use in His story this time?”

Telling the Bible Story

As you tell the Bible story, help children to think about who the unbelievers might be – the people to whom God may reveal Himself.

For older children, you can do this by giving context about the story’s setting. Here is an
example from Daniel in the lions’ den:

Daniel lived in Babylon, a society that did not know or worship the true God. The Babylonians worshipped and bowed down to idols. They were subject to the king and his commands.

For younger children, insert phrases during the story like “Who else is watching?” or
“Who needs to know about God?” Repeat these phrases each week so children begin to think about Bible stories in a broader way.

When you are telling the Bible story, do not end it too soon. If you end with Daniel’s rescue from the lions, you are leaving out the part of the passage that gives God’s greater purpose.

Teachers, if your curriculum does not include this part of the story, add it yourself. Parents, if you read a storybook about Daniel and it leaves out this part of the story, use your Bible to tell your children the rest of the story.

Discussing the Bible Story

After the Bible story, include at least one discussion question that guides your children to think about how God is working through His people to make Himself known.

Here are two examples for older children:

* How did God use Daniel’s experience to change the king’s heart?
* What changes in the empire resulted from Daniel’s willingness to stand strong in his faith?

With younger children, you will need short, concrete questions that bring out both the blessing and the purpose for the blessing.

* How did God protect Daniel in the lion’s den?
* What other people learned about the true God?

Applying the Bible Story

It is important to apply God’s Word to children’s lives outside of our home or classroom. Kids need to see how it connects with their everyday lives. Make sure that applications focus not only on the child, but also on how God wants to work through the child to reflect His glory to other people.

Here is an application that focuses on the child:

* Have your children think of situations during their week when they might need to stand strong for their faith. Tell them that God will be with them in these situations. They can pray to Him to help them and give them courage.

Here is a broader application that focuses on what God might do through the child:

* Have your children think of situations during their week when they might need to stand strong for their faith. Ask who the unbelievers may be in these situations. Ask what these people might learn about God if the children stand strong for their faith.

Bible Memory Verses

Learning Bible verses is often a part of the Bible story time in our church classes. Teachers, raise your hand if you do this in your class.

Look through the Bible passage you will teach. If you can find a verse that talks about God’s heart or purposes, have your children learn it.

Parents, you can also make Bible memory a part of what you do with your children.

Here is an idea that would work at church or home. Introduce a verse about God’s heart for the nations at the beginning of each month.

On your lesson handout, you will find 15 verses to get you started.

Memorize the verse in a fun way. Add hand motions, act it out, add rhythm, or sing the verse.

Repeat the verse each week for a month and then choose a new verse.

For very young children, choose short verses or work on a small section of a verse each week.

Songs

What about worship songs? Teachers, raise your hand if you have a singing time in your classroom?

Parents, raise your hand if you sing praise and worship songs with your children at home. If not, consider adding this to your daily routine – at bedtime, before dinner, as you drive in the car, or when you walk your children to school.

Include songs that help your children worship and praise God for who He is or tell about God’s love for the whole world.

Small Group Activity

Now it is your turn. We are going to practice forming the different components that make up a Bible lesson that will give children a big view of God and how He works through His people to make Himself known.

We will divide back into the same groups we were just in. Each group will be assigned one of the five components we discussed. You will apply your task to the story you reviewed during the last activity.

(Allow the participants to divide back up into their original groups. **Option 1:** Assign each group one part of the Bible lesson to prepare as shown below. ***Option 2:*** If you have a very large class, give the same assignment to multiple groups.)

Look at your handout and find the Small Group Activity section. (Give participants time to do this.) Here are your assignments.

Introduction- you will introduce your Bible story. Focus on God and what He may do through His people. Give any context that shows who the unbelievers are.

Discussion Questions - you will prepare a few questions to discuss after your Bible story. Make sure that your questions draw out both the blessing and greater purpose for the blessing.

Application- you will give two ways to apply your story, one for young children and one for older children. Remember to focus not only on the child himself, but also on what God may desire to do through him.

Memory Verse- you will choose a memory verse on God’s heart and purposes and decide how the children will learn it. Tell how you would modify this activity for younger children. It can be from the list of verses in your hand out or directly from your story.

Worship- you will choose a worship song that reflects who God is or His love for the whole world and decide how you would present it to the children. It can be general or related to your story.

Everyone has his assignment. Now imagine that next Sunday’s Bible lesson is from the Scripture passage your group read in the last activity.

Look back at the Bible passage with your group. Remember to put on your imaginary glasses with the God-sized lenses.

Then discuss what you would do for your part of the lesson. You have about five minutes to plan. Afterwards, each group will share what they planned.

(After about five minutes, call groups back together. Allow more time as needed. Have one group from each component report what they planned. The group should state which story they had and then share what they created.)

As parents and teachers, we need to be intentional in how we introduce, tell, discuss, and apply Bible stories.

Think about the age and developmental stages of your children. Choose a few ideas from this session to try in your class or home now. Introduce other ideas later.

The goal is to develop a habit of seeing the Bible through God-sized lenses.

Impact of God-Centered Teaching
Discipling children to know God’s purpose as revealed in His Word will impart to them a purpose greater than themselves.

It gives them a balanced perspective of God’s blessings, in light of His purposes.

A child who has a God-centered understanding of the Bible can grow to know how God has blessed them to in turn be a blessing to others.

They understand the world around them and how God is working in it.

A God-centered child knows that they exist for God, to bring Him glory, not the other way around.

Their identity is secure.

They know that they are participants in God’s story, deeply loved and called into the service of the King.

What lenses are you giving to your children or students?

Do they live life with me-centered lenses? (Hold up the small glasses.)

Do they think life is about God blessing them for their own personal good and nothing more?

Or, do they live life with God-centered lenses? (Hold up the big glasses.)

Do they understand that God has blessed them to be a blessing to others, so that God is made known in all the world?

ConclusionIn John 4, we find the Samaritan woman at the well.

After meeting Jesus and realizing that He was God, she ran back to the village to tell the others.

After inviting Jesus back to their village for several days, the Samaritan men said to the woman,

*We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.* (John 4:42)

Is this not our greatest goal?

I want each child in my life to look at me and say, “\_\_\_ [Insert your name], I no longer believe just because of what you said to me. I have heard and know myself that Jesus really is the Savior of the world.”

In order for that to happen, we have to teach our children God’s story through God-centered lenses.

Whenever you share God’s Word with children at church or in your home, you are shaping their view of God, His heart, and His purposes.

You are also shaping their view of themselves as agents of ministry, children who God desires to use in His big story.

Puzzle Activity #3

We are going to work on our puzzle handout again. Look at piece three. (Point to the third puzzle piece on the handout.)

I am going to ask you a question. Discuss your thoughts with one or two people around you.

Then, write or draw your responses on the third puzzle piece. Remember, your answer can be one word, a picture, whatever you want to express.

Here is your question: Think about what you have learned in the past session. How does the knowledge of God’s purpose through Scripture affect our children’s view of God and strengthen their identity in Christ?