

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

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

Materials:

- Bible
- Session 5 handout for each participant
- (Choose one option) small glasses and large clown glasses; an eye patch; or use action of covering one eye with your hand
- 4 to 5 oranges (or another kind of fruit, all the same kind)
- 11 Blessing and Purpose Signs from the Teaching Aids folder
- 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 three main components we need to include in our mobilization efforts with children.

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

These components are 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.

Communicating God's Word

Before we talk about sharing God's Word with our children, let's think about our own personal Bible reading and study.

Partner Discussion

On your handout, look towards the top of the page where it says, “Partner Discussion Question.” (Allow participants to find this section.)

Turn to the person sitting next to you and share how you have viewed and read the Bible up to this point in your life.

How have you viewed and read the Bible up to this point in your life?

- 1. Rule Book: It tells me what to do and warns me about what not to do*
- 2. Spiritual Protection: A verse a day keeps the devil away*
- 3. Map: It helps me know God’s plan for my future, spouse, job, etc.*
- 4. Spiritual cup of coffee/tea: It helps me wake up and get the day started right*
- 5. Family doctor: I turn to it when I need something to make me feel better*

(Allow participants to share with a partner. Then with the large group, have participants raise their hands for each one to see a general idea of where everyone stands.)

These are not bad views of Scripture, but by themselves, each one is limiting.

They can lead to our seeing the Bible as a random assortment of spiritual stories, statements, and rules with no overriding theme or purpose.

Earlier we learned that the Bible 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.

Communicating this overarching story of God to our children may require a change of focus on our part.

Let us look at the two main ways of viewing the Bible and the impact each one has on how we as parents communicate God’s Word to our 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 view the Bible as a book that can help you personally. When you read God’s Word, you are looking for yourself and how it applies to you.

When you share God’s Word with children, you want them to know what it says about them – their life, their circumstances, their decisions.

You teach it with small, me-centered lenses (put on small glasses/eye patch/cover one eye with you hand).

Or, do you view the Bible as one book about one main character - God?

When you share God's Word with children, you want them to discover first and foremost who God is and more about His global purpose.

You teach it through God-centered lenses. (Put on the big glasses/remove eye patch/remove hand so can see with both eyes.)

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

However, when we read or share God's Word, our first question should not be "What does this say about me?"

Instead, we should ask, "What does this say about God, the main character?"

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

Importance of Balanced Teaching

Balanced Bible teaching is important.

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 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/eye patch/cover one eye with you hand.)

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 ultimately came to seek and save the lost and become the Savior of the world.

How Teaching God's Word Affects Development

As we saw in the development chart, at the beginning, our children are completely dependent on the adults in their lives. Their focus while they are young 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 egocentric 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.

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

Researchers 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 portray God as someone who exists to care for and serve them, 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 share with your children. First, read through the passage.

Then choose specific parts of the story that you could share 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. Many times these people are unbelievers.*

(Divide the room into groups, and give each group a story. If there are less than twenty people, break the room into 3 even groups. If there are more than twenty people, break the room into 6 even groups and give two groups the same story. Only one group needs to share for each story.)

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

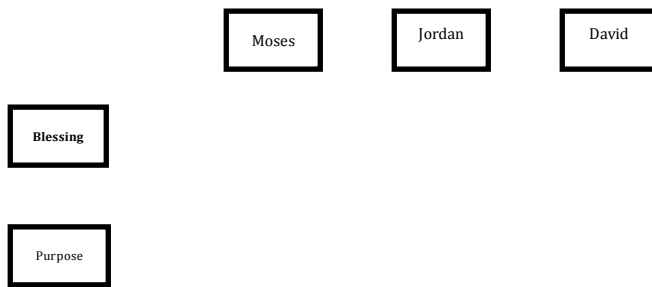
Crossing the Jordan River – Joshua 3:14-17; 4:19-24

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:



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 of participants 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 group here], an unreached people group in ___ [insert geographic location], 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.

Family Devotions

For most of us, sharing God's Word with our children is not something totally new.

If you read Bible stories to your children at home or discuss passages of Scripture, God's Word is already part of your family time.

No matter what Bible story or passage you are sharing, you can help your children 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 way you introduce the Bible story, how you read or tell the story itself, and how you discuss and apply the Bible story.

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

What are other activities you could add into your family discipleship that will give your children the big-lens view of God?

Bible Memory Verses

How about memorizing God's Word?

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 singing? Do 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.

Sharing Bible stories as a family, memorizing scripture together, and worshiping God through singing are aspects of family discipleship you can incorporate into your weekly routine. They will eventually become habits for your children.

Impact of God-Centered Teaching

What could happen if we as parents teach our children to view the Bible, the world, and themselves through God-centered lenses?

Discipling children to know God's purpose as revealed in His Word will impart to them a purpose greater than themselves.

God-centered children know 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.

God-centered children have a balanced perspective of God's blessings, in light of His purposes.

They grow to know how God has blessed them to in turn be a blessing to others.

They begin to use the things God has given them -time, abilities and talents, possessions, opportunities- to bless the nations.

God-centered children see the world around them through God's eyes and understand how God is working in it.

Many times their prayers expand to include not only family and friends, but also people around the world who have no way of hearing about Jesus.

What lenses are you giving to your children?

Do they live life with me-centered lenses? (Hold up the small glasses/eye patch/or cover one eye with you hand.)

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/remove eye patch/or remove the hand covering your eye.)

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

Conclusion

In 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 in discipling our children?

We want our sons and daughters to look at us and say, "Mother, Father 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 the Bible through God-centered lenses.

Whenever you share God's Word with your children, you are shaping their view of God, His heart, and His purposes.

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