
Renewal for Children

With so many lessons of faith to teach children, it is easy to focus more on the task of informing rather than the privilege of transforming hearts for deeper dedication and service. Ninety-nine percent of the lessons we teach children have the potential to transform, but we often move far too quickly from one activity to the next to have any one of them reach their full effect! Luther took on this challenge when he went beyond his presentation of the catechism to ponder a personal interpretation of its meaning. His phrase, “So, what does this mean?” invited children and their families to take each thought to heart so that the information could become inspiration for living and serving.

Most children come into faith and community so vulnerable and new that renewing their hearts is just a matter of providing the opportunity! Instead, we impress them with a myriad of creative and entertaining thoughts and activities and before long they get a whole different picture of what faith is all about. Consider the following story.

A mother was putting her two young children to bed one night. One child was a three year-old “seasoned” Sunday-schooler and the other one had yet to encounter the privilege.

The younger one was on her top bunk facing a window. As she gazed upon the clear night sky, she asked, “Mom, what do you think God looks like?”

The mother raced through her files of possible songs to sing and thoughts to enrich this moment as she encouraged her little one to share her own impressions.

“I think God shines like those stars in the night,” the child replied.

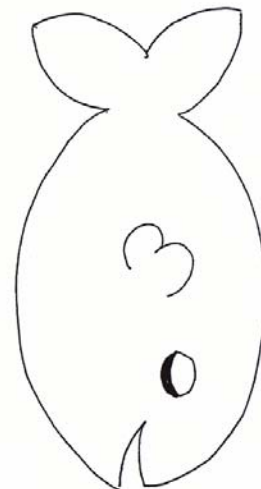
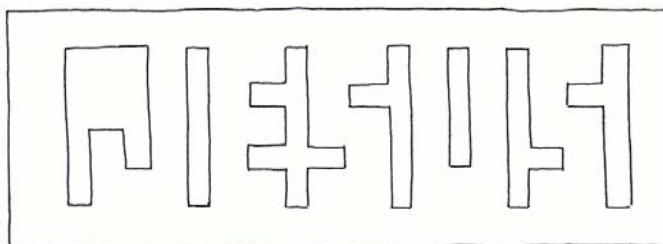
Humbled by the child’s comment, the mother walked over to embrace and affirm her younger one. But, before she could express delight in the response, her seasoned Sunday-schooler called out from the bottom bunk, “He does not!” He’s on this piece of paper and you can punch him out if you want to!”

So....WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The bottom-line question we need to ask as we engage young children in lessons and activities is how will this experience deepen and widen their sense of awe and wonder in God, their creator, Jesus their dear friend and Savior and the Spirit who guides and inspires their daily walk? To do this honestly and effectively, we must first engage our own hearts in the content of each lesson. A vital preface to facilitating transformation in others is being initially open to it ourselves.

Now, let's take this lesson to "H.E.A.R.T."

- H** - After you do the opening activity, introduce the two things Jesus asks people to do in the story. (1) To come and follow him. (2) To go and find people to follow him. Then, engage your participants in the presentation of the story.
- E** - Explain to the children that Jesus used the illustration of "fishers for people" because it was an easy way for the fishermen to understand the job Jesus wanted them to do, but, Jesus' invitation to follow him is actually meant for everyone, no matter who they are or whether they fish or not!
- A** - Inform the children that not all the people who followed Jesus were fishermen. Matthew was a tax man before he decided to follow Jesus and Simon was in the military service. People have hundreds of different jobs they can do today. Ask them to identify some jobs people do. Point out that there are a lot of important jobs that children do, e.g. going to school, doing household chores, being good friend. The point is, that no matter what people choose to do, their job responsibilities can be great occasions to do amazing ministry. And, what's a ministry? It is an opportunity to share God's love with others through our words and actions. Sing the song "Faith Walkin' Talkin' People" to help children understand this concept.
- R** - Enlarge and display the Jesus puzzle (below). Ask them to identify what they see (Jesus' name). Explain that it isn't always easy to see Jesus' name at first, but once you do, it's almost impossible not to see it. Compare it to people and experiences they might encounter. Ask them to identify some ways they see God in action in their lives, e.g., through kind and helpful people or folks who tell stories about God's love. Explain to them that they can be a sign of God's presence and activity in people's lives by how they relate to other people and how they choose to act. Invite them to think about some ways they could share God's love with others and then encourage them to ask God to help them be open and willing to do so.
- T** - As you are making the paper fish, help the children understand that fishing for people was an easy way to describe how fishermen could be Jesus helpers. Invite your participants to think about some ways they can share God's love and invite people to follow Jesus while doing the jobs and hobbies they like to do.



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