

DISCIPLE-MAKING AND ZERO TO TWOS

Building Block of Faith:

Trust (which develops out of experiences of love, acceptance, and safety)

Corresponding Baptist Emphases:

- Soul Freedom and Religious Liberty
- Children must develop the sense that they and others are trustworthy to come to trust God.
- They also need to develop a sense of personal freedom to be able to make a personal commitment to Jesus.

Characteristics:

- yearn for and actively seek relationship
- experience God's love through consistently positive relationships with adult caregivers
- incorporate images and narratives into their world-view
- developing notion of self apart from others ("No" and "Me do it!" are signs of healthy development!)
- developing object constancy (objects and persons still exist when not seen)
- testing trustworthiness of the world (touching and mouthing things is essential)
- "oversee and overhear" faith



Understanding of God:

- Adults are experienced as concrete representations of God.
- God is a source of comfort (like a "blankie").
- Later, God is imaged as a real person who lives in heaven or at church.

Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- Communicate belonging and joyous welcome to the family and church family.
- Provide models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith.
- Provide loving care and consistently meet needs.
- Sing hymns while holding or rocking the child.
- Include religious symbols in their world.
- Share Bible story books and picture books.
- Provide a safe place for toddlers to explore.
- Celebrate independence, even—or especially—if it is communicated with "No!"

Special-needs Children:

- Affirm their gifts and strengths to both the children and the parents.
- Help others see beyond the labels of special needs.
- Ask parents for specific supports needed.
- Including their child in your program may be the only respite that families get.

RESOURCES

PRESCHOOLERS

Building Block of Faith: Initiative

Corresponding Baptist Emphasis:

- The Priesthood of All Believers
- “Why?” is a favorite question of preschoolers.
- Questions about God and the church are first steps toward making the faith my faith.

Characteristics:

- concrete, literal thinkers
- unrestrained imagination
- limited ability to distinguish fantasy from reality (They aren’t lying!)
- developing large motor skills
- egocentric (unable to distinguish their needs from others’ – this is not the same as selfishness)
- curious, lots of questions
- awareness of feelings
- developing essential skill of setting personal boundaries

Understanding of God:

- God is powerful and mysterious and potentially frightening.
- Images and stories portraying an angry, punishing God will have life-long negative effects.



Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- Communicate belonging to the family and the church.
- Welcome participation and contribution within the family and within the church family.
- Provide models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith.
- Remember that play is their work.
- Welcome curiosity and celebrate initiative, providing a safe place for making choices.
- Use movement: clap, run, dance, and stomp.
- Pair concepts with concrete experience.
- Include them in the rhythms, rituals, symbols, and gestures of faith.
- Providing clothing, props, toys, and supplies for unstructured imaginative play around Bible stories.
- Honor *their* interpretations of the stories.
- Share stories that have the power to transfer fear to hope, such as the rescue of Paul and Silas from prison.
- Invite play with religious symbols and rituals.

Special-needs Children:

- Let other children know it is ok to ask questions about their needs, so it is matter of fact and course.
- Encourage peers to play with those who may need help playing.

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

Building Block of Faith: Industry

Corresponding Baptist Emphasis:

- Outreach and Mission
- Keen sense of justice and fairness makes this an ideal time to introduce the Baptist commitment to others.
- If a child is empowered in his or her desire to do things that make a difference for others (industry), he or she will develop a strong “I can change the world” perspective.

Characteristics:

- intuitive/literal thinkers
- eager to please
- developing ability to understand abstractions
- developing ability to understand space and time
- enjoy group work
- keenly aware of justice and fairness
- highly operative sense of morality
- very sensitive to approval and disapproval
- aware of others’ feelings
- increased importance of peers
- connectedness with creation and other-than-human creatures
- developing essential skill of setting personal boundaries

Understanding of God:

- God as a superhero.
- God imbued with human characteristics.



Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- Communicate belonging to the family and the church family.
- Welcome participation and contribution within the family and within the church family.
- Provide models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith.
- Provide opportunities for service beyond the church.
- Honor their concerns for persons, animals, and creation.
- Engage in simple role plays of Christian empathy (e.g. forgiveness) and events in Bible stories (e.g. Jesus calling the first disciples).
- Provide opportunities to develop and present dramas, news reports or other creative retellings of Bible events.
- Engage in noncompetitive activities. For example, work together as a group to memorize the books of the Bible and celebrate the whole group, rather than individuals.
- Teach specifics about Christian symbols, rhythms, and rituals.

Special-needs Children:

- As at any stage, ask families and the child’s school teachers for inclusion ideas.
- If issues come up about supporting a child, ask the other children for ideas of how to include or support someone.
- Get children to help buddy or mentor other kids

OLDER ELEMENTARY CHILDREN/EARLY ADOLESCENTS

Building Block of Faith: Industry and Competence

Corresponding Baptist Emphasis:

- Regenerate Church Membership and Faithful Living
- Older elementary children are moving toward taking personal responsibility for their faith choices. In order to be empowered to make these choices, they must develop a sense of competence and a belief in their own ideas and abilities.

Characteristics:

- spiritual inquirers
- abstract, reflective, and practical thinkers
- active/observational learners
- increasing attention span
- capable of scientific inquiry
- self-identity tied to performance—often anxious, worried, and competitive
- enjoy language games
- friends are vital; peer group supersedes family in identity
- need for independence/increasingly self sufficient
- physical growth spurts may make them tired, moody, or self-conscious
- understand time and geography
- beginning logic and symbolic thought
- developing individual ideas, skills, interests, and talents
- tend to adopt heroes and emulate adult role models

Understanding of God:

- God is at work in systems that shape the world.
- God is the creator and a friend who cares about me personally.
- God's works are puzzles to investigate.



Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

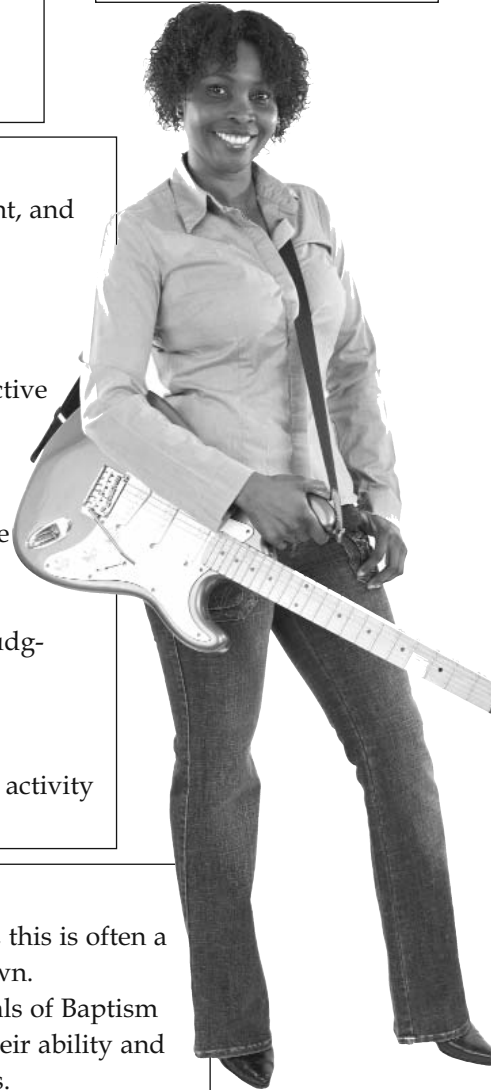
- Communicate belonging to the family and the church family.
- Welcome participation and contribution within the family and within the church family.
- Provide models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith.
- Provide respite from increasing pressure and competition of school.
- Introduce them to Bible history and chronology through charts.
- Introduce them to the concept of literary genre in the Bible.
- Encourage them to identify and interpret biblical themes, such as forgiveness, grace and covenant.
- Encourage making connections between Bible stories and their real-life experiences.
- Nurture inquisitiveness and investigation.
- Begin developing Bible study skills.
- Tell stories of heroes of the faith.
- Provide freedom to investigate faith
- Provide opportunities for choice-making.

Special-needs Children:

- Guide classmates to assist kids with special needs so they do not feel left out or behind.
- Help all of them see that people learn in different ways.

ADOLESCENTS

Building Block of Faith: Identity Formation



Corresponding Baptist Emphasis:

- Believer's Baptism, the Authority of the Bible, and Autonomy of the Local Congregation
- The primary task of adolescents is to form identity, making this a time ripe for faith commitments, recognizing the role of the Bible in defining who we are, and in inviting them into the process of defining the faith community.

Characteristics:

- crossroads in which emotions, hormones, judgment, and body are in flux
- seeking identity
- grappling with big questions
- capable of abstract conceptualization
- logical-hypothetical thinkers who engage in deductive reasoning and critical thinking
- experiential and experimental learners
- preoccupation with self characterized by egocentrism ("Everyone's watching me.") and extreme sense uniqueness ("No one understands me!")
- sense of indestructibility/immortality
- prefrontal cortex, the area of brain that provides judgment, is not yet developed
- diminishing reliance on authority of community
- need to commit to causes and groups
- struggling to distinguish God's work from human activity
- aware of multiplicity of perspectives

Special-needs Children:

- For those who have been included in earlier years, this is often a time when peer pressures break that inclusion down.
- Help kids with special needs to participate in rituals of Baptism and communion with their peers by teaching to their ability and hearing their statements of faith in their own ways.
- Provide opportunities for them to tell other youth their own stories, what faith means to them, and how they feel God's call.

Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- Develop reflection-action (shared praxis) experiences in which activities are reflected on according to beliefs and beliefs are unpacked in experiences.
- Provide guided practice in disciplines of discernment, such as stillness, meditation, critical reflection, and service.
- Teach basic skills of biblical interpretation and provide opportunities to explore the Bible through study tools, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and concordances.
- Allow space to ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, and explore a variety of perspectives.
- Practice acceptance and trust—avoid communicating fears about "wrong" ideas or doubt.
- Provide opportunities to participate in rituals of belonging, such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper when they feel they can do so with integrity.
- Allow them to take the lead in identifying areas of exploration so that discipleship efforts connect with their actual experiences of daily life.
- Create safe places for experimentation and exploration—this includes setting appropriate parameters for behavior and providing adult oversight.
 - Encourage reinterpreting traditions and expressing them in language and rituals that reflect their understandings.
- Offer support groups and education to parents of adolescents that emphasize the need to allow youth to move outside the authority of the family in order to mature in faith and the need to provide enough structure to accommodate the not-yet-developed judgment center of their brains.

Understanding of God:

- God is confidant, guide, and counselor.
- God is concerned with personal moral behavior.
- God operates behind the scenes but not always clear where God is at work.