

Missionary Sunday School Conference Plan for Preschool Leaders

Prepared by:

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Purpose: To provide a two-hour teaching experience for Preschool Sunday School leaders for the purpose of identifying and implementing a strategy for becoming a Missionary Sunday School

How to use this plan

- For the local church: Use to train Preschool Sunday School leaders and members during a local church training or kick-off event.
- For regional and state training: Use to train Preschool Sunday School leaders and members in state or associational training events.

PREPARE:

Provide the following resources for use throughout the training:

- Nametag for each participant (A nametag template is provided in the zip files for this 2012 Missionary Sunday School Emphasis Kit.)
- Copies of *Levels of Biblical Learning*. You will need 4 for an activity, but preferably provide a copy for each participant. (These can be purchased in packs of 25 or downloaded free from <http://www.lifeway.com/n/Church-Strategy/Levels-of-Biblical-Learning>.)
- Obtain representative samples of LifeWay *Bible Teaching for Kids* Preschool Sunday School resources plus other support materials such as *Early Bible Steps, Music and More for Babies, 1s & 2s Enhance CD ROM, Music and More for 3s—Pre-K Enhanced CD ROM, Kindergarten Connection, Music and More for Kindergarten Enhanced CD ROM*, and a *Holman CSB® Read to Me Bible for Kids (Preschool)*.
- Preschool Handout 1: Approaches to Learning
- Preschool Handout 2: Preschool Age Group Characteristics
- Preschool Handout 3: Putting It All Together
- Preschool Handout 4: Preschool Missionary Sunday School—Additional Tools
- Prepare Preschool Handout 3: Putting It All Together activity utilizing the above *Bible Teaching for Kids* curriculum.
 - 1) Select one dated lesson for each age group (the same lesson for all groups).
 - 2) Highlight one activity in the Leader Guide for each group.
 - 3) Pull from the Leader Pack any item(s) needed for the highlighted activity.
 - 4) Highlight the group time from the 3s—Pre-K curriculum.

Download the following materials:

- Provide one copy of *Missionary Sunday School* by David Francis for each participant. The book is available as a free download or you can order copies for \$1.50 each at www.lifeway.com/davidfrancis. The book can also be purchased at the Apple iStore.
- PowerPoint presentation: Missionary Sunday School—Preschool.ppt

Prepare a display of the following resources:

- *Missionary Sunday School* by David Francis
- Representative samples of LifeWay Preschool Sunday School resources



- *ParentLife* magazine
- *Holman CSB ® Read to Me Bible for Kids (Preschool)*
- *Kids' Discipline 101*

Prepare the room for learning:

- Arrange chairs in rows of semicircles facing the front of the room.
- Reproduce handouts and place in chairs.
- Place copy of *Missionary Sunday School* in each chair.
- Place a nametag on top of the handouts and provide markers.
- Place three copies around the room of the *Levels of Biblical Learning* showing the eight biblical concepts for at least the three preschool columns—preferably taping these to the wall so a group can stand together looking at the document. Use poster board or construction paper strips to identify each copy with one of the following age groups: Babies–2s, 3s–Pre-K, and Kindergarten.

PRESENT:

1. INTRODUCTION (15 min.)

In the introduction set the stage for preschool leaders to start thinking like missionaries by providing some ideas for beginning that exciting journey.

[SLIDES 1-3]

Welcome conferees personally as they enter the room and provide each one an “I’m a Missionary” nametag. Be sure each one has a copy of *Missionary Sunday School* by David Francis.

Begin the session by referencing David’s book and invite conferees to turn to page 4. Summarize the information he shares on this page.

[SLIDE 4]

Enlist someone to read the final statement at the bottom of the page and the question at the top of page 5:

*In this book, the focus will be just one of the elements: **Missionary Mentality**. The question I’ll attempt to answer is: What might a Sunday School look like if it saw itself as a missionary enterprise: thinking and acting out of a missionary mindset?*

[SLIDE 5]

Ask conferees to pair off with a neighbor and discuss briefly their answer to this question. Invite participants to share with the large group what things were mentioned during their discussion.

Convey your hope that David’s book and this conference will be sufficient to motivate them to start thinking like missionaries and to provide some ideas for beginning that exciting journey.

Lead in prayer.

Briefly share information about America’s most famous Sunday School missionary, Stephen Paxson. Encourage conferees to learn more about this unique man in *Missionary Sunday School*.

Recount the story on page 6 of Paxson’s last days and his statement:

“Will you be so kind as to tell me, in the fewest possible words, the gist of the book—what this man did in the world that was worth the doing?”

[SLIDE 6]

Pose the same question with a little twist: *In your service as a preschool leader, what is it that’s worth the doing?*

State: *As we consider the things that are indeed “worth the doing” as preschool leaders, we will focus on the three big ideas of Missionary Sunday School: One Mission, His Story, Every Person.*

2. ONE MISSION (15 min.)

Personally consider and then convey to the participants the following: *In this section of One Mission we are reminded that the Sunday School story is a missionary story, and as preschool leaders, we have a significant role in that story.*

On page 8, David Francis states, “The missionary Sunday School has One Mission: transformation.”

[SLIDE 7]

Share the last three sentences of paragraph one on page 9.

Long before it was sponsored by local churches or embraced by denominations, Sunday School was a missionary movement that cut across—and sometimes against—the grain of traditional church structures. In fact, its primary mission was to reach, teach, and minister to persons who were outside the church and far from God. In a missionary Sunday School, that’s still the mission.

Emphasize that many of us have only known Sunday School as a church or denominational program. But Sunday School is actually a movement—a missionary movement.

Summarize the two streams of Sunday School explained on page 19.

To set the stage for the remainder of this training experience, explain: *Both streams are missionary expressions. You may indeed find yourself now or in the future serving as a Sunday School Missionary in areas where children simply “don’t do church.” These missionaries are needed now as much as they were in the 19th century. However, more than likely most of you find yourselves in the first stream of the missionary story. Your calling is to fulfill the One Mission of transformation in the “church Sunday School” where you are currently serving.*

That being said, challenge the participants to consider the following perspective:

Missionaries usually focus on a particular unreached people group. We will talk further about this a little later in our training. However, for now think of the major age divisions in your church—preschool, children, students, and adults. If you identified each age group as a distinctive “people group” within the context of your church, answer this question: Which age group represents the most unreached “people group” in your church?

Invite response.

This may feel like a trick question, but consider the weight of it. Of all of the age groups in the church, the preschool division in the literal sense will most likely have the greatest percentage of people who have yet to make a decision of faith! It's true that most preschoolers are simply not ready to make a faith decision. However, think about this. Are these first years of life not absolutely vital in building the foundation toward making that decision of faith one day?

Don't the preschoolers in your church need devoted missionaries in their young lives and in the lives of their parents, helping them to build a foundation for transformation? Is this not our One Mission?

Before moving to the next section, allow conferees time to respond with their thoughts about serving as preschool leaders with this kind of missionary mindset.

3. HIS STORY (20 min.)

Share that on page 22 David Francis makes the following declaration:

There is no argument: the centerpiece of the Sunday School movement is Bible study; more specifically, people gathered together for Bible study.

[SLIDE 8]

Remind conferees that our goal should be to provide for as many Bible study groups as possible at an appropriate age and developmental level, to meet the social, ministry, and discipling needs of all individuals.

Explain that the most significant and powerful missionary tool is the Bible—His Story—communicated in the language of the people being reached.

Our missionary challenge is discovering and developing the best way to communicate the treasures of God's Word to the various age-levels of preschoolers.

Explain: We know that people at different ages and stages of life are capable of understanding His Story in different ways. A baby may not understand the deep things of God's Word but she can understand some things: Church is a safe and happy place. The Bible is a special book. The name Jesus sounds beautiful. People who love Him love me enough to meet my basic needs.

Emphasize that the way we communicate His Story in the language of preschoolers is through identifying visible milestones related to biblical knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the designated levels from birth through kindergarten. Call attention to *Levels of Biblical Learning*.

[SLIDE 9]

Comment: The Levels of Biblical Learning guides curriculum development for LifeWay Kids from birth through preteen. It also identifies some of the things teachers and parents can expect their children to learn centered around several biblical concepts.

Invite conferees to move around the room to the copy of *Levels of Biblical Learning* on the wall that is labeled with the age group with whom they work. Ask them to look together at the *Levels of Biblical Learning* and identify and discuss among themselves the truths stated in each biblical

concept for their particular age group. (See p. 38 of *Missionary Sunday School* for an example for Babies-2s.)

Allow adequate time for the groups to share with one another. While groups are still standing together by their respective document of the *Levels of Biblical Learning*, identify one biblical concept of your choice from the document (for example, Jesus or self). Ask participants to take note again of the particular truths within the chosen concept for the age group with whom they work. Starting with the Babies-2s leaders, ask them to call out the truths related to that concept in their respective column. Then proceed by asking the group of 3s–Pre-K leaders to call out their related truths within that same concept, and conclude with the Kindergarten leaders.

Ask the group as a whole to respond to what impressions they have about the value of this tool in providing visible milestones as we guide preschoolers in their spiritual growth.

Invite learners to return to their seats. As a point of closing emphasis, invite participants to take note of David’s comments about Babies-2s on pages 36-37:

Please pardon a brief rant about a very important people group: babies, ones, and twos. Members of this people group may not be particularly adept at talking or walking. But they can and do learn—especially in those first important years. So it concerns me when a church decides that all babies, ones, and twos need to experience when they’re at church is babysitting in the nursery. Babies, crawlers, and toddlers need teachers! Teachers committed to sharing Bible concepts and singing spiritual songs. Teachers committed to helping babies learn important lessons beyond what is said.

Conclude by reinforcing the missionary challenge of communicating His Story in the language of preschoolers, allowing for any additional thoughts or questions from the participants.

4. EVERY PERSON (25 min.)

State: *The missionary Sunday School is satisfied only when everyone within its reach has access to a Bible study group appropriate for his or her age, stage of life, and ability to learn. If you were training as a modern missionary, you’d likely be assigned responsibility for reaching, teaching, and ministering to a people group. The next important missionary challenge is learning about the people.*

[SLIDE 10]

Begin by conveying there are certain basics common to all preschoolers. Ask the participants to call out what are basic needs of preschoolers. Be sure answers include the following: *love, trust, acceptance, independence, freedom, security, guidance, sense of accomplishment.*

Ask participants to identify some common ways that all preschoolers learn. As different ways are mentioned, invite the group to offer illustrations for these. The list should include *senses, curiosity, hands-on experience, satisfaction, relationships, imitation, play, repetition.*

Emphasize that the basic needs of preschoolers and the ways preschoolers learn are descriptive of this “people group” as a whole. As a missionary, we also need to recognize individual distinctives of preschoolers.

Comment: *One set of distinctives has to do with preferred learning approaches or learning styles. We all have certain approaches to learning that are unique to us. And even though it may*

be early to readily recognize them in some preschoolers, these approaches to learning are still very much a part of their make-up. This means we need to accommodate all approaches in our teaching.

Invite participants to examine these more closely, first by identifying them in themselves. Distribute Preschool Handout 1: Approaches to Learning. Direct conferees to read and identify their own preferred approaches to learning. After everyone has had an opportunity to work through the handout, review each approach as a group. With each approach you review, ask those who identified that approach to raise their hands. Also, with each approach, ask how that approach might be exhibited by a preschooler in their class.

Emphasize the need to consider as many of these learning approaches as possible when planning Preschool Bible study. Encourage learners to remember that each preschooler is a unique person who is wonderfully made.

Conclude this section by leading the conferees to consider the characteristics of preschoolers and help conferees consider the implications of these characteristics for the particular preschool age group with whom they work. Distribute the Preschool Handout 2: Age Group Characteristics. (For more insight on age group characteristics, download *Essentials for Excellence* at <http://www.lifeway.com/ArticleView?storeId=10054&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&article=essentials-for-excellence-free-sunday-school-downloads>.) Ask participants to get into groups according to the age groups they teach. Though the size of the group and churches represented will dictate how you group the folks, seek to have at least the following four age groups represented: Babies, 1s-2s, 3s-Pre-K, and Kindergarten.

Instruct learners to discuss in their groups which characteristics they readily see as they work with their preschoolers. Ask them to also identify reasons knowing these characteristics are important. From where they are sitting as a group, let each group share with the larger group some of the things mentioned about the importance for knowing the characteristics.

5. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER (30 min.)

[SLIDE 11]

Invite the participants to remain in their groups. Share: We've taken the time to learn more about our people group of preschoolers. Now we need to begin looking for ways to create a "cultural bridge" that will effectively connect "His Story" to those they are seeking to reach for Christ. It is with the physical and learning environment that we primarily create the "cultural bridge" to connect His Story to preschoolers.

Direct participants to discuss with one another a description of their classroom (furniture, walls, supplies, etc.) and to answer this question: *How does my room communicate that learning happens here?*

After allowing time for group discussions, explain that the focus of the room set-up should be learning. This is done best through multiple learning activities for Babies–2s and learning center activities for 3s–Kindergarten. Emphasize that centers include well-planned activities that allow children the freedom of exploration while maintaining necessary classroom order. Effective learning centers are not chores to complete but chances to discover (see "Why Use Learning Centers" by Kevin Lintz in the Fall 2012 Kindergarten Leader Guide).

Explain that when children work in centers, they can choose what they want to do. Making choices is a crucial life skill. Help children develop this skill by providing several appropriate

choices and allowing children to follow their interests. Always provide at least four center choices each week with the understanding that teachers can normally be responsible for more than one center.

Successful classrooms use a variety of centers because they provide a highly effective “cultural bridge” to connect with the people group of preschoolers. Your curriculum is your guide for building this bridge.

[SLIDE 12]

Explain that the best way to understand this teaching concept for preschoolers is to experience it. Emphasize that each planned activity is to support and reinforce the stated Bible truth.

Direct learners to remain in their groups. Distribute Preschool Handout 3: Putting It All Together and appropriate curriculum for each age group. Select two people to prepare the group time from the 3s-Pre-K curriculum. Explain that each group is to prepare the highlighted activity and complete the handout that relates to that activity. Upon completion of your assignment, be prepared to share with the whole group.

Call for reports, then reinforce how multiple learning activities and learning center activities contribute to the “cultural bridge” to connect His Story to preschoolers.

6. CONCLUSION (15 min.)

Call attention to the Appendix in Missionary Sunday School (pp. 42-61) and remind learners that this section of the book contains additional tools related to working with preschoolers. Share Preschool Handout 4: Preschool Missionary Sunday School—Additional Tools as further help for them. Allow time for questions.

Conclude the training time by stating: *As a disciple of our Lord, we are all challenged to join the church in making disciples of all nations. We need not shy away from that commission, for He is with us always. Some of you may be stirred by His Spirit to venture into a place of missionary service that reaches out to a literal “unreached people group,” perhaps a group of children who are totally unchurched.*

Yet, as long as you are a preschool leader in your church, recognize you are no less the missionary. As we consider the things that are indeed “worth the doing” as preschool leaders, let us remain faithful to our One Mission, His Story, Every Person.

Invite each group to close out the conference by sharing among themselves prayer requests toward fulfilling the call of being a Missionary Sunday School, and invite them to pray in their individual groups to dismiss.

[SLIDE 13]