

 Teach | Talk | Walk



Love **GOD** Most

*What this means for children
and why it's so important*

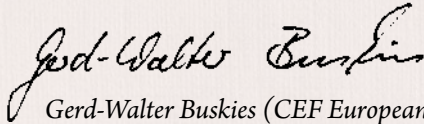


Since 1937

CEF
CHILD EVANGELISM
FELLOWSHIP®

Reaching children worldwide

OFFERING QUALITY TRAINING THAT IS ACCESSIBLE FOR THOSE TEACHING GOD'S WORD TO CHILDREN HAS always been a priority for *Child Evangelism Fellowship*® (CEF®). This is why we have launched the “D6:7” (*Deuteronomy 6:7*) training series—a new resource allowing you to access foundational CEF training from your own home or church, at any time! D6:7 booklets are designed to help you as you teach (formally), talk (informally) and walk (live out) the truths of God's Word to children. *Love God Most* is the first book we have produced in this format as a small group/self-study training resource. Our prayer is that as you work through the various sections of this book, not only your skills in communicating truth from God's Word to children will develop, but also that your life and personal relationship with Him will be enriched.



Gerd-Walter Buskies (CEF European Regional Director)

© 2022 Child Evangelism Fellowship of Europe. All rights reserved.
Cover photo by Adina Voicu from Pixabay.

D6:7 resources are offered freely as digital downloads (teachkids.eu). For more information about printing these resources please contact us at: education@cefeurope.org.

D 6:7 Deuteronomy 6:7

Love **GOD** Most

*What this means for children
and why it's so important*



Since 1937

CEF

CHILD EVANGELISM
FELLOWSHIP®

Reaching children worldwide™

D 6:7

*You shall teach them
diligently to your children,
and shall talk of them
when you sit in your house,
and when you walk by
the way, and when you lie
down, and when you rise.*

DEUTERONOMY 6:7

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 7 |
| SECTION 1 – START WITH YOURSELF | 9 |
| <i>Set the Example</i> | 9 |
| <i>Create the Atmosphere</i> | 17 |
| SECTION 2 – GOD’S LOVE IS THE FOUNDATION | 23 |
| <i>External vs Internal</i> | 23 |
| <i>Nurturing and Ordering Affection</i> | 29 |
| SECTION 3 – THE PATTERN OF GROWTH | 35 |
| <i>Reliance on Self</i> | 35 |
| <i>The Beauty of the Gospel</i> | 41 |
| SECTION 4 – LEADING CHILDREN TO LOVE GOD MOST | 47 |
| <i>Truths to Teach</i> | 47 |
| <i>God delights in you!</i> | 47 |
| <i>You can enjoy God!</i> | 49 |
| <i>God looks at your heart</i> | 51 |
| <i>God is ready to listen to you</i> | 53 |
| <i>God wants to speak to you</i> | 54 |
| <i>God is ready to help you!</i> | 56 |
| <i>You can tell God how great He is!</i> | 58 |
| LEADER’S GUIDE | 61 |

How to lead a child to Christ

Make sure the child understands about:

God

- Who is God?
- God made us. He speaks to us through the Bible.
- God is holy and pure. He loves us.

Sin

- What is sin?
- Sin is disobeying God's commands. It is against God.
- Speak about specific sins.
- The child is a sinner by nature and act. (We sin because we are sinners.)
- Sin deserves punishment.

The Saviour

- Who alone can take away your sin?
- God the Son died on the cross for sinners.
- The Lord Jesus rose again from the dead.
- He is Lord of all.

Explain how the child can be saved

- Explain what the Lord wants us to do, and what He will do.

Use a Bible verse. (*John 1:12, John 3:16, John 6:37, Acts 16:31, Romans 6:23 or Romans 10:13.*)

What does the Lord want you to do?

What will the Lord do?

- Warn about difficulties.
- Ask, "Do you want to trust Christ, or would you rather wait and think about it?"
- Encourage the child to pray audibly (if ready).

Speak about assurance of salvation

- Go back to the Bible verse you used.
- Speak about a changed life.
- Tell him what the person who is truly trusting in Christ can know.

Give the child (later) some advice about the Christian life

- Read and obey your Bible.
- Talk to God, your Heavenly Father.
- Tell others what the Lord has done for you.
- Ask God to forgive you when you sin.
- Meet with other Christians.
- Remember the Lord promises, "*I will never leave you*" (*Hebrews 13:5*).

Did you know that as a parent, Sunday school teacher or children's worker, you have one of the biggest privileges and highest responsibilities? Guiding children to love God most of all!

As you do this, remember:

You can make a difference with whatever time you have.

You can significantly impact a child's relationship with God as you parent daily or as you teach each week. Don't underestimate the ways you can influence a child's heart towards a love for God in whatever amount of time you have.

A close friendship with God is for those who have believed in Jesus.

Before children can grow to love God most, they must belong to Him. Even children must believe in Jesus as the way of salvation (*Romans 10:9-10*). This act of trust changes their standing with God. It also enables the Holy Spirit to begin changing their hearts (*Philippians 2:13*).

This book provides inspiration and practical ideas to help believing children develop a special friendship with the God who saved them. If you teach children who have not yet believed in God, continue to present the Gospel and invite them to salvation. A useful resource designed to help you lead a child to Christ is located on the previous page, should God give you this wonderful privilege. Check out other great resources that are available for you to use from CEF. Details are given in the back of this book.

Love is the foundation.

Love forms the basis of growing relationships, not duty, or commitment or striving. Ask God to fill your heart with a love for Him and for the children you teach. This will enable you to grow closer to both God and the children. Your heart of love will then overflow in tangible ways, and God will use it to reach the hearts of the children He has entrusted to you.

As you work through this book, know that you have been prayed for! We echo the words of Paul in Ephesians 1:15-23 and thank God for your faith in Jesus and love for His children. We ask that God would give you wisdom in the knowledge of Himself and in how to share truth about God with children. We pray that your heart would see and be amazed at the hope and power of the Gospel through Christ, and that your lips would be filled with joy and praises to Him.

Getting Started

You can work through this book on your own or with a small group of friends or fellow-teachers. Each chapter ends with a reflection section.



READ IT

(Scriptural basis)



THINK ABOUT IT

(Personal reflection)



TALK ABOUT IT

(Questions for group discussion)



PRAY ABOUT IT

(Personal and/or group prayer prompts)



DO IT

(A simple idea to implement or question to consider)

These questions are designed to help you reflect on the ideas, process truths, and identify ways to implement them. You will get the most out of the ideas here when you take the time to answer the questions and talk about the ideas with others (*if possible*).

If you are leading a small group of parents, Sunday school teachers or children's workers in your church, there are tips and additional content in the Leader's Guide in the back designed to help you go deeper. Be sure to take a look (*even if you're going through the book on your own*)!

You might also consider forming a social media group (*WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.*) with those you will lead through the study. This will not only allow you to remind them of the next meeting, but also allow you to share Bible verses and encouragement from time to time.

We recommend that as a small group leader, you read through the entire book before beginning the study. This will allow you to see the development of teaching in the various sections and so enable you to guide the group through the book more effectively.

Set the Example

1 Corinthians 11:1—Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

It's almost impossible to teach another person something you don't know yourself. I say almost, because I know someone who taught bowling lessons without ever bowling herself! This is the exception, though, not the rule.

Knowledge is a requirement to teach others. Personal experience with that knowledge is even better. Personal experience and knowledge, together with a deep love for what is being taught, is best. This love produces individuals whose enthusiasm and joy about the subject naturally spring from them as they instruct others.

Primary Influences

What does this mean when it comes to teaching children about God? It means that who you believe God to be, how you relate to Him, and how you enjoy your personal walk with Him shape the type of teacher you are and the influence you have. Your inner life shapes your outer life (*Proverbs 4:23*).

Emphasis is often placed on preparation of the lesson or devotional material itself. This is important and there is a time and place for thorough preparation. But the reality is, your preparation begins before you ever open the curriculum, devotional, or Bible you are using with your children.

You prepare to instruct children every single day whether you realise it or not, even if it is not an intentional decision. You prepare to instruct when your heart spontaneously cries out to God for help in a situation. You prepare when your heart bursts forth in praise to God and a song is on your lips. You prepare when you

interact with God in personal ways throughout your day because thoughts of Him permeate all you do.

Your Walk with God

It is possible for your relationship with God to become stale, predictable, and duty-filled. But that's not what God intends. Scripture uses words like abundant, full, overflowing, filled with joy, and whole to describe life with God (*John 10:10; 15:11; 1 Peter 1:8*).

Even if you are reading your Bible and praying regularly, would you say you're enjoying it? Looking forward to the time with anticipation? It is so easy for a relationship with God to become one more thing to do instead of a life-giving relationship that is entered into and enjoyed.

Enjoying God

The word enjoy is so full and rich when we begin to unpack it. When you enjoy something you:

- Experience joy in it.
- Delight in it.
- Relish it.
- Take pleasure in it.
- Find your satisfaction in it.
- Savour it.

We were made to glorify God and the way we do that best is by enjoying Him!

You can't enjoy something when you're distracted. A sunset. A quiet moment amidst the chaos. A verse of Scripture. A song. These can be entered into and enjoyed. They can also be hurried through, or missed. In order to enjoy God, attention must be fixed on Him.

Enjoyment is also not an item to be checked off. You cannot enjoy something that is merely a duty. Our relationship with God should not be based on duty, requirements, obligations, and burdens. Our relationship with Him is intended to bring life, abundant and free (*Psalms 84:1-2*).

Enjoyment of God is one way to glorify Him. This happens as you naturally acknowledge how amazing God is and then show others what He is like.

God Enjoys You

God's heart is towards you. He enjoys you. He delights in you. He takes pleasure in you. He is personally relating to you every day. Every morning He shows you favour and love. Every morning He initiates relationship (*Lamentations 3:22-26*).

As you sense His enjoyment of you, you can relax and enjoy Him too. As you experience His delight in you, your heart becomes delighted and enamoured with Him (*Psalms 103:1-2*).

Take time to pay attention to the ways God is delighting in and enjoying you (*not the things you do, but you as a person*). Allow your affections, your love, to respond to His initiative and creativity. See your heart grow in enjoyment of God. And know that this will enable you to instruct children about God in the best way possible!

Reflection



Psalm 16:11

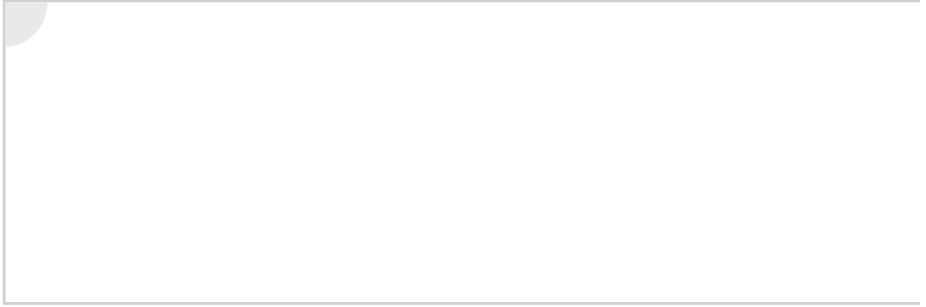
You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 37:4a, Psalm 149:4a

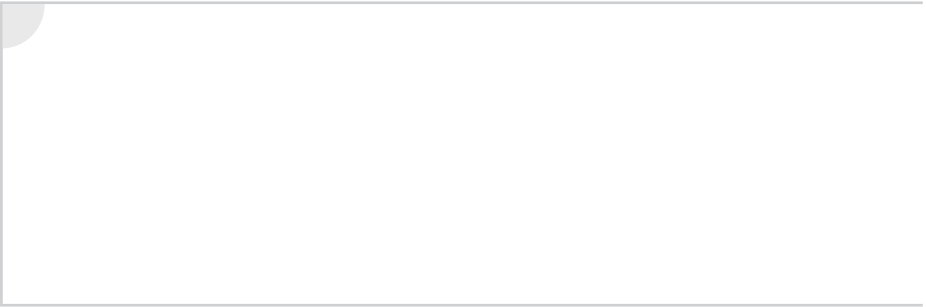


NOTE: We all have room to grow. As you complete this section, don't become discouraged by your answers or believe the lie that God is condemning you (*Romans 8:1*). Simply confess anything God shows you, tell Him you want to enjoy Him, and ask Him to show you one way to do that this week.


Substitute the other definitions of enjoy into the verses from Psalms. What stands out to you?



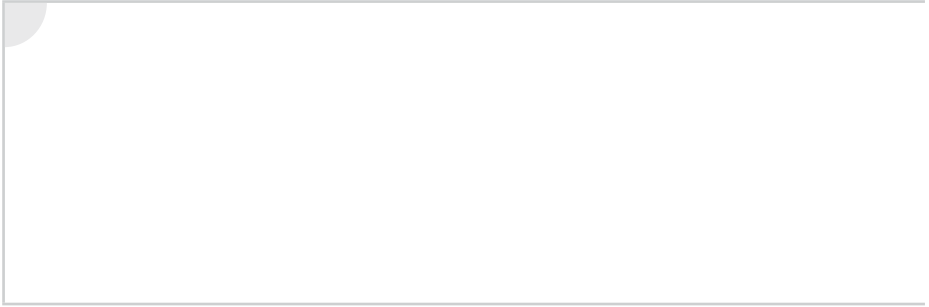
What would the lives of the children you minister to look like if they followed your example of loving and enjoying God?



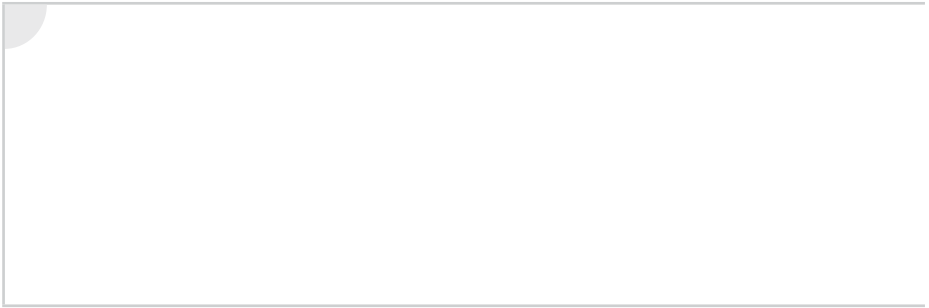
Does spending time with God ever seem like a duty? Why do you think that is?



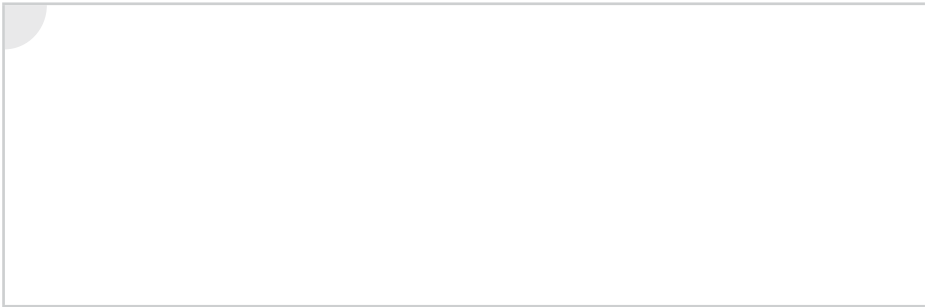
What is distracting you from enjoying God?



How have you seen God personally relate to you recently? *(What has made you smile? What has He provided for you? How have you experienced His love even when circumstances in life have been difficult?)*



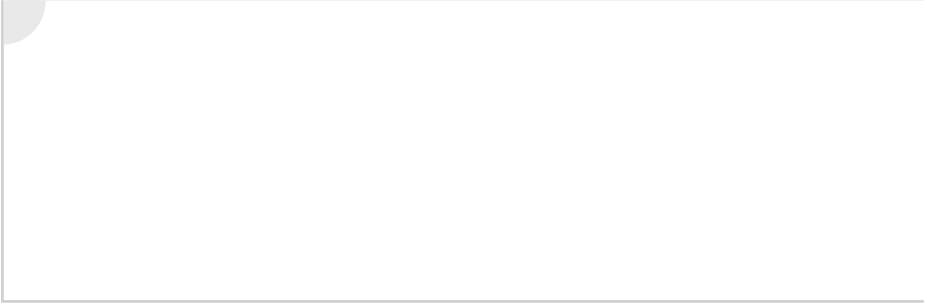
What are practical ways you enjoy God?



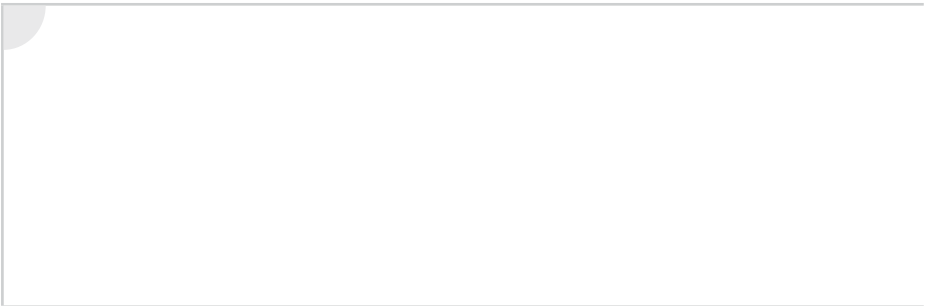
What do you think of this quote by John Piper?

“Your task in Bible reading is not to make profound insights or understand every verse, but to enjoy more of God.”

How would it change your time in God’s Word?




What one idea stood out to you the most? What is God saying to your heart about this?



Ask God to help you enjoy Him. Ask Him to help you see how He relates to you every day. Ask Him to do a work in your heart that will influence the children around you.



What can you do this week to help you enjoy your relationship with God more? Choose something that will bring enrichment, depth, delight, enjoyment, and anticipation of the special time you get to spend together with Him!



NOTES



Create the Atmosphere

1 Corinthians 13:4-7—Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Have you ever noticed how some people change their words or actions based on who they spend time with? There are times I can tell who my child has been around because of the way he speaks and acts.

A child's view of God is shaped in much the same way. As a parent or teacher, my child learns about God from what I teach, yes, but also by the way I interact with him. My interactions are absorbed into his heart and mind and reflected back in his behaviour.

God is Love

It is primarily out of love that God relates to us. He designed us for fellowship with Him. He made a way for fellowship to be restored after sin destroyed it. Love is the motivator for everything—for blessing, training, discipline, and even suffering (*Proverbs 3:12*).

It's why 1 John 4:8 says, "God is love." It's why Jesus identified the greatest commandments as loving God and loving others (*Matthew 22:36-40*). It's why God sent Jesus to Earth (*John 3:16*). Christ's death was the ultimate display of God's love.

It's also a picture we see repeatedly in the stories of Scripture.

In the story of the prodigal son, for example, the father's love is a picture of God's love. He longed for his son's return. He offered complete and immediate forgiveness. He rejoiced, and welcomed, and celebrated. He could not contain his joy (*Luke 15:11-32*).

How Jesus Loved

Jesus loved everyone—even those who felt unloved by others or were hard to love such as the lonely, the outcast, the hurting, the arrogant, the self-sufficient, and the elite. His love showed them what God was truly like. His love reached their hearts in ways that rules, commands, or direct instruction never could (*Matthew 9:36; 14:14; Mark 10:21*).

People were drawn to Him, even children, because He saw them for who they were and loved them in spite of it. He created each person, saw who they were meant to be, understood how sin had ruined their lives, and desired to restore them to fellowship with God.

Others didn't always see as Jesus did because they didn't love as Jesus loved. Sinners were cast out. Women were condemned. Children were pushed away. But Jesus stopped. He listened. He looked. He spoke. He welcomed. He forgave.

Why Love Comes First

Jesus' love prepared these people to know God for who He really was (*John 14:8-9*). This is how it should be with our children as well.

They must be assured of our love in the home and in the classroom. In the way we speak. In the way we welcome. In the way we train and discipline. In the way we help.

By displaying love first, their hearts will be connected to ours and then to God's in a way that will soften them to the truths of who God is and the necessary discipline required to grow in Christ-likeness.

Reflection



Psalm 86:15

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Joel 2:13b

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster

Psalm 103:8, Psalm 145:8, Exodus 34:6, Jonah 4:2, Nehemiah 9:31



List the attributes describing God in these verses.

Consider how you display these same attributes to the children in your home or classroom.

- Are you merciful and tender?
- Gracious and kind?
- Not easily angered?
- Immense in love?
- Do you never, never quit?

What adjectives would you use to describe the atmosphere of your home or classroom right now?

How would you like children to experience God's love through you in your home or classroom?



Have you ever considered how the way you interact with children influences their view of God? Why do you think that is?

Discuss how the disciples' and Jesus' reaction to the children coming would have portrayed God's character differently (*Mark 10:13-16*). How do you think Jesus might have interacted with the children? What was His face like? How would He have shown interest in them? How would He have made them feel comfortable?

What one idea stood out to you the most? What is God saying to your heart about this?




Ask God to help you see the ways He loves you every day. Ask Him to do a work in your heart so you can create a loving atmosphere for the children you influence.



Creating a loving atmosphere depends less on you trying to do so, and more on you receiving God's love into your heart and soul first.

To help do this, meditate on Psalm 86:15 each day this week. Read it slowly and thoughtfully. For each attribute ask:

- How has God related to me in this way in the past?
- What feelings or reactions fill my heart as I think of God relating to me in this way?
- What do I want to say to God in response?



NOTES

External vs Internal

Luke 6:45—The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Training a child is serious and all-encompassing work. It is in childhood that habits, worldviews, and paradigms are set. There’s always something to teach. While the goal as parents and teachers is not to simply train behaviour, but to train the heart, we must not forget that God must be at work in the child’s heart for change to take place.

Training the heart can be difficult at times. Behaviour can be seen. Internal motivations cannot. Perhaps a child:

Is motivated by pride to memorise and say the verse each week.

Is a people-pleaser and so is quick to volunteer to help.

Expresses genuine love and excitement for God by being loud and boisterous.

Shows kindness in order to earn praise.

Interrupts with stories as they connect biblical truth to their own life.

God Prioritises the Heart

Throughout the Bible God’s desire has always been for people’s hearts to be towards Him.

Throughout the book of Deuteronomy there are woven together instructions regarding God’s laws and entreaties for the people’s hearts to be towards God (*Deuteronomy 5:29*).

When God chose a king from Jesse's sons, He didn't choose the tallest and strongest, but the one whose heart was oriented towards Him (*1 Samuel 16:7*).

One of Jesus' greatest rebukes was of the external behaviour of the Pharisees. Nearly the entire chapter of Matthew 23 shows us how Jesus condemns the external behaviour that brought them so much pride and admiration. He identifies the greed, self-indulgence, and hypocrisy in their hearts (*vs 25-28*).

God created us and knows the power of our hearts. Our hearts are where our choices are made. It is in our hearts that our actions originate. Our external life is a reflection of what is in our hearts (*Proverbs 27:19*).

Ways to Prioritise the Heart

It is important then, that we too prioritise the hearts of the children in our homes and classrooms, even above their behaviour. Reaching the heart, the affections, the will, is what creates long-term connection and appreciation, not just knowing and understanding facts.

How do we do this?

- We point them to God's Word that reveals their hearts (*Hebrews 4:12*).
- We help them grow in intimacy with God not just knowledge of Him (*James 4:8*).
- We rely on the Holy Spirit to change them (*2 Corinthians 3:18*).
- We instil habits in our children that lead them to Jesus and cause them to know Him better and love Him more (*Proverbs 22:6*).
- We live out what we teach as we interact with them (*1 Corinthians 11:1*).

Because habits tend to be more externally focused, it's important to take care in how this is done. Habits should focus us on our relationship with God and not just the completion of a task or required element. For example,

- Teach children that prayer is not just words we say but an act of pouring out our hearts to God and depending on Him (*Psalms 62:8*).
- Teach children to read their Bible not as a task to check off and complete but as a source of nourishment and delight (*Job 23:12; Psalm 19:7-10*).
- Teach children to cultivate generous hearts so they give as God leads even above the commanded tithe (*2 Corinthians 9:7, 11*).

Children don't need a list of things that they should do every day or even every week. But they do need their hearts to be shaped and moulded so that from the overflow, their words and actions will more and more emulate and bring glory to God.

{ Reflection }



Deuteronomy 5:22-6:5 (*make time to read the whole passage*)



How do you see instruction regarding both the internal and external in these verses? What did God promise to those who loved Him, feared Him, and followed His ways?

Do you tend to focus more on behaviour or on the heart as you train your children? Why do you think that is?

Which aspect would you like to implement in order to better prioritise the hearts of your children? *(Point them to God's Word, help them grow in intimacy with Jesus, rely on the Holy Spirit to change them, instill habits that lead them to Jesus, live out what you teach.)* Why this one?



Would you say it is harder to train the behaviour or the heart? Why?

Share which of the five aspects you want to begin doing to prioritise the hearts of your children. Brainstorm ideas of what that might look like.


Do you act as if God is most concerned about your heart or your behaviour? How does this influence how you live? How does this influence how you train your children?



Ask God to use you as a tool in His hands to help shape the hearts of your children. Ask Him for help to prioritise the heart over the behaviour.



Choose one way to implement the aspect you chose in the **Think About It** section this week.



NOTES



Nurturing and Ordering Affection

Psalm 73:25-26—Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

People were created to form attachments. Newborns, families, spouses, friends, and, ultimately, man with God. People also form attachments to things—sports, work, nature, hobbies, animals, and so much more.

Attachment emanates from the heart and is intricately tied together with our love and affection. The word affection actually means, “a fond attachment, devotion, or love”. It is our affection for something or someone that causes us to relate to it and find delight in it.

Nurturing Affection

If our desire is that children will be devoted (*attached*) to God and have an intimate relationship with Him, it begins by encouraging their love (*affection*) for Him.

Affection cannot be forced. It is not enough to simply tell children to love God. Or even to give them reasons why they should love God. Affection is only produced when a child experiences God’s goodness, kindness, and graciousness towards him and responds to it, not when they know something intellectually.

This is very evident in much of the Psalms. A psalmist often begins by pouring out his troubles and pain. He then considers God’s kindness to him, God’s goodness in his life, God’s rescue when all seemed hopeless. And how does the Psalm end? By the psalmist recounting his love and adoration for God! (*See Psalm 3; 4; 5 and 13 as examples.*)

The good news is that affection can be nurtured! It's not something that happens by chance. Nor is it something that automatically happens in the heart of a child who is taught the truth of God. With intention and watchfulness, you can become aware of teachable moments to begin nurturing affection towards God in the heart's of your children.

Affection in its Proper Place

A difficulty in nurturing affection for God in the heart is that there are many other affections vying for attention as well. God knew this would be the case. It's why He gave the first commandment instructing us to put Him first (*Exodus 20:3*).

Children are bombarded day in and day out with many other things to love besides God. They are validated in these affections by friends, media, and even caring adults. They learn from an early age to love fiercely things that will never satisfy their souls, and so they begin a life-long journey seeking for what only God can provide.

The problem is not that they have attachments other than God. In 1 Timothy 6:17 it tells us that God "richly provides us with everything to enjoy." Notice the source of these things—God. We are not to simply enjoy what He provides, but to acknowledge and praise Him as the giver of these good gifts.

The problem with attachments to other things only occurs when those things take the place of God. There are many good things to love, but none more than God.

Creating Affection for God

We can and must foster the growth of a child's devotion towards God on a daily basis in the home and during each class time. We can identify for them when God is kind towards them. We can teach them ways to respond to God in worship, praise, and love. We can help knit their hearts to God's, leading them towards a life-long affection for Him.

Why is this important? Because once a child's affection is towards God, it is far more likely that affection will carry on through his life and produce an intimate relationship with God (*Proverbs 22:6*). It can also translate into an affection for God's Word and a recognition of the guidance of the Holy Spirit which will save much pain and heartache in his life.

Yes, there will still be ups and downs in a child's spiritual life, but our prayer is that nurturing affection for God from a young age will enable their relationship with God to grow and flourish. We cannot guarantee a child's close relationship with God

no matter what we do. We can only be faithful to nurture and pray, and then depend on God to draw the child to Himself and change his heart.

Reflection



Psalm 63:1

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psalm 42:1-2a



Can you relate to the psalmists' prayers above? How? If not, how does their experience differ from your own?

What things and people have you created attachments with? How has experiencing and giving love and affection helped create these attachments in your life?

How does your affection for God rate compared to the other things and people that you love? Is it first? How can you tell? What might need to be reordered in your own heart?



How would you explain to someone else why affection (*love*) for God is so important?

How are children encouraged in their love of people and other things? How does this increase their affection for and attachment to those people and things? In what practical ways could you encourage children to grow more in their love for and attachment to God?

Share a time your affection for God grew as you experienced His care, goodness, or kindness in your own life. Share how it increased your devotion to Him.



Pray the **Read It** verses as prayers to God from your own heart. Then pray they would be true for the children you teach.



Choose a verse in the **Read It** section to pray every day during the next week.



NOTES

Reliance on Self

Romans 7:22-23—For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

As we begin this section, let's review the key ideas we've considered so far.

- 1** You must set the example in loving and enjoying God in order to lead children to do the same.
- 2** Your love towards children helps them to see and accept God's love.
- 3** Your priority is training the heart, not behaviour.
- 4** You can nurture children's affection and help prepare their hearts to love God above all else.

As children (*or anyone*) in relationship with God grow to love Him more, they will also grow in their desire to obey Him (*1 John 5:3; John 14:23-24*).

The question then becomes, how is a person able to obey God? How do you instruct someone to grow in Christ-likeness?

Our Culture Relies on Self

Before we get to the biblical answer, it's important to examine some cultural tendencies that will influence the way we unconsciously think and act.

From the time children are quite young, they are encouraged towards independence, self-sufficiency, and personal accomplishment. Every milestone from crawling, to walking, to eating, to dressing one's-self is celebrated.

Repetitive encouragement is given until mastery takes place. Praise is the reward for hard work and a job well done. Children learn to try harder, do better, and ultimately accomplish the next goal.

These tendencies can easily carry over into the spiritual life, resulting in believers who work hard on their own to live in a way that pleases God.

We Cannot Obey on Our Own

This way of living is not only discouraging and impossible, but also against the very way God designed spiritual growth to take place.

Consider the apostle Paul. He knew all about living a life of self-sufficiency.

Do you remember Paul's description of his own life in Philippians 3? Born into the tribe of Benjamin and a Pharisee, he spent much of life striving to live according to God's law so that he could earn his own righteousness and favour with God (*Philippians 3:3-9*).

It didn't work. It couldn't work. After his salvation, Paul spent much time cautioning about reliance on self not only for salvation but also for growth in the Christian life.

Paul teaches that:

- Our flesh cannot do the good we want to do (*Romans 7:18*).
- Our desires are in conflict with the desires of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:17*).
- Our sinful nature can never please God (*Romans 8:7*).
- Believers are filled with the Holy Spirit who gives life (*Romans 8:11*).
- Only the power of the Holy Spirit can win over sin (*Romans 8:13*).

The Goal is Not to Live Up to Christian Standards

We'll spend time in the next chapter looking at the Gospel as a means of growth, but for now, here's the key takeaway:

In order to grow in Christ-likeness, our children must be taught to fix their eyes on Jesus and rely on the Holy Spirit (*not self*).

Growth won't happen by painting a clear picture of what a Christian life should be and helping children work towards that. Growth won't even happen because of a desire to obey.

But God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (*2 Peter 1:3*), and we can lead our children into that truth.

Reflection



Galatians 5:16-25 (*make time to read the whole passage*)



From the passage above, how are the works of the flesh in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit? How do these lists relate to the idea of trying to grow in Christ-likeness on our own versus with the power of the Holy Spirit?

What are some cultural ways you tend to rely on self and become self-reliant? How can you see these influencing your spiritual life as well?

Would you say your journey towards spiritual growth happens in a manner similar to Paul's before he was saved (*striving on his own*) or after (*reliance on the Spirit*)? Why do you think that is?



What actions or attitudes should characterise a Christian's life? How do those things become a part of a Christian's life?


Share one way you see cultural self-reliance and effort creeping into your own spiritual life or Christians in general.




Ask God to change any faulty ways of thinking that lead towards self-reliance. Tell Him you want to rely on His Spirit for growth towards Christ-likeness.



Write down times during the week when God reveals how you are working in your own strength instead of relying on the Spirit.



NOTES



The Beauty of the Gospel

Psalm 107:9—For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

The story of religion is man trying to get to God by gaining favour and approval. The story of the Gospel, however, is very different.

The Gospel is God:

- Coming to man (*John 1:14*).
- Doing for man what he could not do for himself (*1 Peter 3:18*).
- Restoring the relationship broken by sin (*John 1:12*).
- Living His life through His children (*Galatians 2:20*).
- Conforming His children more and more to the image of His Son (*Romans 8:29*).
- Pouring out His love again and again (*Romans 5:5*).

The Gospel: We Can't

God came to man when we were helpless (*John 1:14*). We couldn't do right, didn't love God, and wanted our own way (*Romans 3:10-18*). God didn't run away and leave us to ourselves.

When we could do nothing on our own, Jesus did everything for us. This is the basis of saving faith. And it is also the basis of ongoing growth (*Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9*).

Even after salvation, we can't do right, love God more than anything else, order our affections, please God, or earn His favour. We continue to need Jesus every single day of our life (*Galatians 2:19-20*).

The Gospel: Jesus Can

Only Jesus was able to perfectly obey the Father. Only Jesus loved unconditionally. Only Jesus sacrificed every time. Only Jesus met the demands of the law (*Romans 10:4*).

And He did these things not for His own sake, but for ours. He gifts those who believe in Him with His own righteousness (*2 Corinthians 5:21*). He enables the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers and imparts the very life of God (*2 Peter 1:4*).

Somehow, it's "easy" to see Jesus as the only way for salvation, but harder to see Him as the only way for growth as well. Our heart's desire is to do something for Him, to prove our love, to win His delight.

We're not the first to feel this way. The Galatians did too, and Paul reminded them that what was initiated by God (*salvation*) could not flourish and grow in their lives through their own fleshly efforts (*Galatians 3:3*). They still needed Jesus only.

Only the Gospel

That is one of the beauties of the Gospel—simply Jesus.

Jesus provides the way for our relationship with the Father (*John 14:6*). Jesus enables God's delight to pour onto us through His righteousness. Jesus secures the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives to bring about change. Jesus satisfies our desires with Himself (*John 6:35*). Jesus brings growth in our lives.

What does that mean for us and for our children? That we need more of Jesus. Everything we do must be centred on Him. We must seek Him, love Him, draw near to Him, depend on Him.

We must turn to Him for comfort, not the comforts of this world. We must depend on Him for hope, not success in this world. We must run to Him for help before running to others. We must believe that He is our life, not the next new thing life offers.

Growth is God's work—not yours, and not the child's. This takes the pressure off! The spiritual lives of your children are not solely dependent on how well you teach, or how perfectly you do things! (*Philippians 1:6*)

Your primary responsibility (*in your own life and in the lives of your children*) is to develop a personal love for and enjoyment of God.

With a deeper love comes a greater desire to know God. With a greater knowledge comes a deeper trust. With a deeper trust comes more relinquishing of your will and your rights which leads to a place where God is able to work inside you to change your heart and live His life and His will through you.

May this become the pattern of your life and the lives of the children you teach.

— { Reflection } —



Psalm 16 (*make time to read the whole Psalm*)



Make a list of all the ways the psalmist runs to God, trusts in Him, and enjoys relationship with Him. Then list all the blessings he experiences as a result.

Which is harder for you—to trust Jesus for salvation? Or for spiritual growth? Why do you think that is?

What idea stood out to you today? Consider what might change in your life if you took it to heart.



How should the Gospel influence a believer's daily life? Think of someone who seems to exemplify running to Jesus and depending on Him. What makes their relationship with Jesus attractive?

How do you react when you hear these two statements?

- The spiritual lives of your children are not solely dependent on you.
- Your primary responsibility is to develop a personal love for and enjoyment of God.


How are you living your life as if these two statements are true? What changes will help you live out the truth of these two statements?



Talk to God about where you find yourself. Honestly tell Him what you desire. Ask for His work in your heart to bring it about.



This week, when you're feeling angry, tired, sick, hurt, lonely, afraid, hungry, bored, etc., make a conscious decision to turn to God and seek satisfaction in Him.



NOTES

Truths to Teach

Matthew 22:37-38—And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”

In this section you will find practical teaching ideas you can use with children. You will find several **Truths to Teach** that include explanation and insight for you as a teacher to study and understand. Following each one are several activities designed to teach the specific truth.

Truths and activities can be taught in any order and are designed to stand alone. Fit them into other teaching you already have planned, choose one to do on its own, or plan several together. Do what works best for you and your children!

TRUTH *to* TEACH

God delights in you!

God’s heart is a heart of delight. He delights in His children. He desires for us to delight in Him. He gives us gifts every day to bring delight, joy, and pleasure into our lives.

God’s delight is not merely for our enjoyment. God’s delight is not given based on anything He sees in us. His delight is because of His own heart. He gives joy from Himself. He rejoices because it is in His nature to do so. He exults from an overflow of who He is.

Delight touches a child's heart. While young, children are still unencumbered and free to delight in what we, as adults, often overlook or see as insignificant. Children are often eager for others to enter their delight, and God is more than ready to oblige!

ACTIVITY: Why were we made?

SAY: Sometimes people make things because they need them. Sometimes people make things so they can enjoy them.

DO: Give children examples of things that have been made. Have them categorise if they were made because they were needed or if they were made to be enjoyed. (*Older children can come up with their own examples.*) Suggestions: cars, paintings, music, electricity, pictures, medicine.

ASK: Why do you think God made people? Because He needed them? Or to enjoy them?

READ: Acts 17:24-25 and have children listen for the answer.

SAY: God doesn't need anything! He made the world. He gave life to every person. God is so powerful He can do anything He wants! God chooses to use people. He wants us to be a part of what He is doing. He wants us to help others. But the real reason God made you is so He could enjoy being with you!

ACTIVITY: God enjoys you!

DO: Watch for a time when a child is enjoying something. Take time to enter into the delight with them. Be enthusiastic! You could ask, "Do you think God sees that you found this treasure? Yes! He sees everything! Do you think He was pleased to see how you enjoyed it?" Or you could say, "You please God. He loves watching you grow and learn new things!"

READ: Psalm 149:4a

TEACH: In this verse we see God's delight towards His people. You can say to children, "God enjoys you!" Be careful not to tie this delight to actions or attitudes that are exhibited by the child. God's delight is a gift of grace. It comes from Him and is not earned by us.

ACTIVITY: Hidden in nature

PREPARE: Identify an outdoor space that children can explore, or gather items from nature to bring inside.

SAY: God cares for and delights in all of creation! Find something in nature, and then we'll talk about how God cares for it and how it might bring Him delight.

DO: Discuss with the children how God cares for each part of creation they found—providing food, shelter, rain, the right habitat, wind, etc. Think about how God might delight in each one—enjoying its beauty, fragrance, design, purpose, uniqueness, etc.

SAY: God loves and delights in the things He has made. He sees flowers that no person will ever see. He watches mountain goats give birth. He cares for everything so carefully. Imagine then how much He loves and delights in you!

READ: Matthew 6:28-30

SAY: You are more special to God than the things in nature He has made. You can be sure He sees you and knows you. You can be sure He cares for you and delights in you!

DO: Say together, “God delights in me!” and sing a song of praise to God.

TRUTH *to* TEACH

You can enjoy God!

John 17:3 tells us that eternal life is knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ. This knowing is an experiential kind of knowing. Not just to know about intellectually but to know relationally and personally.

This is the gift God desires for His children. Knowing them personally and intimately. Enjoying time spent together loving, talking, listening, worshipping.

This is the type of relationship with God we want to nurture in the lives of children. A relationship they look forward to. A relationship that is meaningful to them personally. A relationship that isn't built on rules and lists, but rather on love and joy.

ACTIVITY: Share your joy with God!

DO: Have children share about times they have been excited about something (*a birthday, holiday, trip, etc.*). Ask leading questions to help them describe how they enjoyed that time. Examples, “Were you glad, happy or joyful then? Did you sing to help celebrate? How did your excitement show on your face?”

SAY: When you enjoy something, it’s easy to show others how much you love it. You are excited and full of joy. You can’t wait to talk about it. You can enjoy God in these ways too.

READ: Psalm 37:4a; Psalm 32:11; and Psalm 100:1-2. Have children listen for the words that represent enjoyment or show expressions of joy.

SAY: What is one thing that fills you with joy when you think of God? (*Allow response.*) You can share your joy with God anytime! He delights when you talk to Him about your life. He loves to see the joy in your eyes. He wants you to tell Him about your day. He is always ready to welcome you.

RESPOND: Have children think of something exciting about their life. Encourage them to share their joy about that aspect of their life with God. As they do this, encourage them to think about how God is listening to them.

ACTIVITY: What do you enjoy?

DO: Have children share something they enjoy doing. If you have time, let them draw a picture or act out their chosen activity for others to guess.

SAY: God has given us so many good things to enjoy!

READ: 1 Timothy 6:17

SAY: It is good to enjoy the life God has given you. He has given each of you different talents and different activities you enjoy doing. But did you know God wants you to enjoy Him even more than all of these things?

READ: Psalm 16:11

SAY: When you spend time with God, He brings joy into your relationship with Him. Your time with Him can be special and different, like time spent with your best friend!

RESPOND: Have children choose a way they can enjoy time with God this week and invite Him into what they delight in doing. They could paint a picture that reminds them of some of the good things God has given them to enjoy and use

it as a way to thank God for those things. Or they could read their Bible outside with God, make up a song for God, go on a walk with God, smell and marvel at wildflowers with God.

TRUTH *to* TEACH

God looks at your heart

If it's difficult for adults to be aware of the heart, its internal motivations, and its importance, it's even more difficult for children. The heart can't be seen, yet it plays a part in nearly everything we do.

To make matters worse, the heart is deceitful (*Jeremiah 17:9*). We need the help of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to see our hearts accurately and to bring about change in them.

Children need an understanding of the importance of their heart and how it can help or hinder them in their life and in their walk with God.

ACTIVITY: What's inside comes out

DO: Get several containers that do not see through and fill them with something unexpected. (*For example, put chocolate milk in a ketchup bottle or juice in a milk carton.*) Have a child choose a container, guess what will come out and then squirt it into an empty bowl.

SAY: Were you surprised at what came out of those bottles? Why did you think ketchup would come out of the ketchup bottle? Whatever is inside has to come out! The same is true of our lives.

READ: Matthew 12:34b-35

SAY: Your words and actions come from somewhere—your heart. You can't just decide to change what you do or what you say, you have to ask God to change your heart first.

RESPOND: Have children think of something they have been trying to change in their lives—show kindness, speak lovingly, obey cheerfully, share generously, etc. Have them pray quietly and ask God to change their heart and fill it with love so they can do those things. Close in prayer together.

ACTIVITY: Who is the best?

DO: Show children a picture of a strong, good looking man and a young, small boy. (*Or have two actual people stand in front.*) Ask, “Who is the strongest? Who is the wisest? Who would make the best king?”

SAY: Sometimes we look at the outside of people and decide who is best. But there is another part of people that is even more important—their heart. We can’t see their hearts but God does. And a person’s heart is most important to God.

READ: 1 Samuel 16:1-12. (*You could use visuals for this story, or people to act it out.*)

SAY: Samuel thought God would choose Eliab, because of the way he looked. But God knew Eliab’s heart was not a good heart. David was handsome on the outside too and had beautiful eyes, but God didn’t choose him for that reason. God saw a beautiful heart inside David and chose him to be king. When God looks at you, it doesn’t matter what is on the outside. He is looking at your heart.

RESPOND: Draw a heart and have children decorate it (*one per person or as a group*). Encourage them to put it somewhere where they will see it and remember that God cares most about their heart.

ACTIVITY: What makes you angry?

DO: Get two clear containers of the same size. Put baking soda in the bottom of one and flour in the other. Make a paper heart that says, “I want my way” and attach it to the baking soda container. Mark a second heart that says, “Others are more important” and put it on the flour container. Get a jug of white vinegar and a deep tray for the bottles to sit in.

SAY: What makes you angry? What would help you not be angry in those situations?

READ: James 4:1-2

SAY: God says our anger comes from our hearts, not from what is done to us. It starts inside and then spills out.

Do these bottles look the same or different? (*Show both bottles so children can’t see the words on the hearts.*) Even though they look the same, there is an important difference inside. This bottle shows a person whose heart wants its own way. (*Show the bottle with the baking soda and pour the vinegar in. Hold it over the deep tray!*) This person gets angry when something happens where she doesn’t get her way.

This other bottle shows a person whose heart loves others and values them as more important. (*Show the bottle with the flour and pour vinegar in.*) No anger comes out of this person when he doesn't get his way because his heart is different.

Only God can change your heart. He wants to do it!

RESPOND: Give children a copy of Psalm 51:10. Encourage them to pray it each day and anytime they react in anger. If you have time for a craft, have children make two heart shapes out of paper and tape or staple them together. They can use this heart pocket to hold a copy of the verse.

TRUTH *to* TEACH

God is ready to listen to you

One of the easiest and most concrete ways for children to learn to relate to God and enjoy friendship with Him is by talking to Him. Most children are natural talkers! They love to talk about their world and things that are meaningful to them.

An attentive parent or teacher can quickly build a close relationship with a child by showing interest and listening well. They can also model acceptance by allowing a child to share anything, even emotions or feelings that might not be desirable.

God models this same interest and acceptance in an even greater way! He is never distracted. His interest never wanes. He welcomes the true expression of our hearts. He invites us to come and share freely about everything! (*Psalm 62:8; Philippians 4:6*)

ACTIVITY: Tell God everything!

SAY: God created people and wants to be close to them. He enjoys listening to His people talk about their lives. He enjoyed walking and talking to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

READ: Genesis 3:8a

SAY: Many people believe that before Adam and Eve sinned God came down and visited them each day. What do you think they talked about? (*Suggest possibilities as needed—Do you think they told God about their day? Asked Him questions? Shared their ideas? Told Him their favourite discoveries of His creation?*) You can talk to God about everything in your life too!

READ: Proverbs 5:21

SAY: God sees you every day. He is interested in the things you do. You can tell Him about what makes you happy or sad, and ask Him for help when you need it.

DO: Have children draw a picture of something that happened during the last few days that they want to tell God about. Give them time to tell God out loud about the event. Encourage them to find something every day to tell God about.

ACTIVITY: Give your worries to God

DO: Have children draw a picture of something they have worried about this week. Older children can write a key word that describes what they worried about during the week on a piece of paper.

SAY: Everyone worries about things sometimes. But worry isn't good for your body. It can keep you awake at night. It can distract you from learning at school. It can even make you have problems breathing. God tells us what to do with our worries!

READ: 1 Peter 5:7

SAY: Casting means giving or throwing. God wants you to give all of your worries to Him. He loves you so much and is always looking out for you. There is no one better to give your worries to! One way you can give your worry to God is by telling Him about it and asking for His help.

DO: Give children a few quiet moments to tell God about the picture they drew or what they wrote and then ask Him for help. Next, have them crumple the paper into a ball and toss it into a bucket while they say, "God, I give you my worry. Please take care of this!" (*If children don't want to crumple their paper, have them hold it up in the air while they say the phrase.*)

TRUTH *to* TEACH

God wants to speak to you

God desires relationship and direct communication with His children. He speaks to us, and we can speak to Him. This is one of the benefits of the Gospel that Jesus secured for us.

God speaks through His Word (*Psalms 119:105*) and directly to our hearts (*Psalms 32:8*). What is the goal of God speaking to us? Instruction, yes. Comfort, yes. Knowledge, yes. But mostly, increasing our delight in and love for Him.

Helping children enjoy Scripture and look forward to hearing from God will help them establish a close and personal relationship with their Father.

ACTIVITY: Read more, love more

DO: Get honey and gold (*or pictures*), a 100% sign, and a heart.

SAY: Have you ever received a message from someone who loved you? Maybe for your birthday, or when something special happened. What was special about the message? How did it make you feel? Did it help you feel closer to that person and love them more?

The Bible is God's message to us. Everything written in it helps us understand God better and love Him more. God's message fills us with joy and draws us closer to Him.

These verses help us know how special God's message is. As I read, listen to see how these four pictures (*or items*) can teach us about God's message.

READ: Psalm 19:7-11

DO: Hold up items one at a time and have children tell what they remember.

- 100% = God's message is perfect and puts our life right.
- Heart = God's message brings joy to our heart.
- Gold = God's message is better than gold.
- Honey = God's message is sweeter than honey.

RESPOND: Encourage children to read God's message every day this week. At the end of each Scripture have them consider, "How does this message help you love God more?" If you'd like to suggest passages for each day consider either a story in the Gospel of Mark or these Psalms: 23; 42; 100; 103; 121; 130; 139.

ACTIVITY: Listen for God

SAY: Have you ever been in a situation when you were about to do something wrong and heard your parent's voice in your mind telling you not to do it? They might not have even been close by. You didn't hear their actual voice, but your mind heard their words. God speaks to us in this way too.

READ: Isaiah 28:23

SAY: God will put ideas into your mind. He can give you new ideas about things you have never thought of before. He will remind you of what is right. He will help you know what to do. He can give you a love for someone you hate. He can help you want what is good. He can help you choose to do what is best.

When God puts these ideas into your mind, He is speaking to you! God's voice will always agree with the Bible, and will always be kind and truthful.

DO: Have children make a book. Include a page for each day of the week that has several questions on it. Encourage children to take time each evening to choose one question to answer with one way God spoke to them during the day. Sample questions could include:

- When did you think something kind you don't usually think?
- When did you show love or want what was good?
- When did you have an idea to help someone?
- When did you show love to someone who hurt you?
- When did you put someone else first?

Discuss some of their answers the following week. Help them see this is God speaking to them during their everyday life!

TRUTH *to* TEACH

God is ready to help you!

A believer's life is a new life (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). Living the new life God gives doesn't depend on hard work and effort. God was powerful enough to raise Jesus from the dead. He is also powerful enough to change us and give us new life (*Romans 8:11*). God wants to live His life through us.

What good news for us and for our children! It's not up to us to fight against sin on our own (*Romans 8:4*). We don't have to work really hard to change and be different. But what is required, is that we allow God's Spirit to work inside us.

ACTIVITY: I am changed when I believe

PREPARE: Get a sponge, piece of wood (*about the same size*), jug of water and tray or bucket that will hold the water, small sponge pieces (*one per child*).

SAY: When you believe in Jesus, your life is changed. What are some things that change? You might have some attitudes change, and you might stop doing some things or start doing other things. But those changes don't come from your hard work. They happen because of a change that happens inside of you.

DO: Hold up piece of wood over the tray and pour water over it.

SAY: Before you believed in Jesus, you probably heard or read God's Word. You might have felt or acted different for a short time, but it didn't really change you very much. Everything just dripped off you.

DO: Hold up the sponge over the tray and pour water over it.

SAY: After you believe in Jesus, what happens is very different because you are different. God's Spirit now lives in you and He changes you on the inside. He helps you want to obey God. He gives you strength to want what is good and love what is right. The Holy Spirit lives God's life through you. And everyone can see the difference He makes!

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:17

SAY: Once you believe in Jesus, you begin to change. The Holy Spirit now lives in you! He is ready to help you know God, enjoy God, and obey God! You can put this piece of sponge somewhere you will see it this week to remind you that the Holy Spirit lives in you once you believe and changes you on the inside.

ACTIVITY: Two different ways to live

PREPARE: Get paint or drawing materials and paper (*you either need individual papers for each child, or two large pieces for the group*).

SAY: We're going to draw two pictures to help us compare two different ways to live life. For the first picture, use colours and pictures that you think of when you hear these words—body, dead, sin. (*The paper can simply be covered in colours—no*

pictures are needed. If children are young, have them tell you colours that would represent these words and you draw or colour the picture.)

Now for the second picture, use colours and pictures that you think of when you hear these words—Spirit, life, perfectness.

READ: Romans 8:10

SAY: Paul describes the difference the Holy Spirit makes in a person's life. On their own (*in their body*) sin leads a person to death. Even the good things they try to do aren't really good because there is nothing good in people. (*Refer to the paintings and the sadness and darkness they represent.*)

But once a person believes in Jesus, the Spirit comes to live in him. The Spirit brings Christ's perfectness (*righteousness*) to that person's life and leads them into life the way God always wanted it to be! Life with God and not on their own! (*Point out the differences in these paintings from the first ones.*)

RESPOND: Let's pray and thank God for the gift of His Spirit and the difference He makes in the life of a believer!

TRUTH to TEACH

You can tell God how great He is!

The more children grow in their closeness to God, the more their hearts will swell with gratitude towards God that they will want to express. Children naturally express love and exuberance in many ways—hugs, kisses, small gifts, snuggles, holding hands, kind words.

As parents and teachers, we need to help children see how they can translate their love and affection for God into words of praise. Praise is telling someone how wonderful they are. It shows you think highly of them, are glad you know them, and want to be around them.

This is what God deserves from His children (*1 Chronicles 16:23-31*), and what children are naturally oriented towards!

ACTIVITY: Popcorn praise!

DO: Bring in popcorn kernels and/or popped popcorn to enjoy together.

SAY: When popcorn kernels are heated, they can't stay kernels very long. At some point they have to pop open! Have you ever felt this way? Maybe you felt so wonderful, or had something exciting you knew about and felt like you were going to "pop"! (*Give opportunity to share.*)

Let's read a few verses about someone who was so excited she couldn't hold it all in! See if you can remember what made her so happy.

READ: Luke 1:46-55

SAY: Do you remember the good news given to Mary? She was going to be the mother of Jesus! The more she thought of how wonderful God had been to her, the more she felt she was going to "pop" with praise for Him. She did just that and sang the beautiful song I just read.

DO: Take a few minutes to let children offer up "popcorn praises". Give everyone a minute to think of something wonderful God has done for them or something they love about Him. Then begin a praise sentence and let children "pop up" one at a time and finish it with a praise to God. Ideas could include:

- God, I love you because ...
- God, thank you for ...
- God, you are ...

ACTIVITY: Make a gift for God

SAY: Have you ever found or made something beautiful to give to someone? Why do you enjoy giving gifts to people? Making and giving gifts is a wonderful way to show someone how much you love them!

A lot of times we love people because they love us first. Tell me something someone you know does for you that causes you to love them. Did you know that we love God because He loved us first?

READ: 1 John 4:19

SAY: How did God love us first? (*By sending Jesus to Earth, by saving us, by helping us, by giving us the Holy Spirit, by changing us.*) Let's make something for God today to show Him how much we love Him!

DO: Provide materials and ideas for children to create something for God. (*You can make something as a group or individually. Ideas: write a poem or song, make a card.*)



NOTES

If you are leading a group, don't panic! Your goal is only to facilitate conversation and encourage others. Leading doesn't mean you have all the answers or do everything perfectly. It simply means you want to be part of what God is doing to bring about change in the lives of a group of people committed to helping children love God most.

Meeting

You should plan to work through this book in five–eight weeks. Participants should work through the content before each meeting and come prepared to discuss the ideas.

Depending on your available time, participants could work through one or both topics of a section each week. (*Doing one topic a week would mean you would meet for seven–eight weeks. Doing an entire section each time would mean you would meet for five–six weeks.*) Use the last week or two you meet to try ideas from the final section with children and discuss how it went.

Schedule

Allow 30 – 60 minutes for your group discussion each week. Larger groups will need a longer time in order for everyone to share.

Use the Reflection section at the end of each topic to guide your discussion. General ideas to facilitate each part are given below.

- Read It: Ask, “What verse stood out to you? How did God use it to teach you?”
- *Think About It: Ask, “What idea or question challenged you the most in this section?”
- Talk About It: Discuss as many questions as time allows.
- Do It: Ask, “Who would like to share what they plan to do this week?”
- Pray About It: Spend time praying all together, in small groups, or in pairs.

Be prepared to share your personal observations or reflections as needed to get conversation going.

For each topic, you will find other specific ideas to use for the discussion times in the sections below.

** Some personality types desire perfection, others feel they are never enough, and still others believe their weaknesses define them. While God is against sin, He is for His children (Romans 8:31). Reinforce the truth that God does not condemn (Romans 8:1) and is instead gracious and kind towards His children (Psalm 86:15). He desires and will enable our growth in Christ-likeness!*



Specific Discussion Ideas for Set the Example

Here are some examples of the Psalms verses to share for the first **Think About It** question.

For Psalm 37:4a, “Delight in the Lord,” you could say,

- Experience joy in the Lord.
- Take pleasure in the Lord.
- Find your satisfaction in the Lord.
- Relish the Lord.
- Enjoy the Lord.
- Savour the Lord.

For Psalm 16:11, “In your presence there is fullness of joy,” you could say,

- In your presence I experience joy.
- In your presence I find pleasure.
- In your presence I find satisfaction.
- I relish being in your presence.
- I enjoy being in your presence.
- I savour being in your presence.

For Psalm 149:4a, “For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;” you could say,

- For the Lord finds joy in his people.

- For the Lord finds satisfaction in his people.
- For the Lord relishes his people.
- For the Lord enjoys his people.
- For the Lord savours his people.

Here are some practical ways to enjoy God you can share for the **Do It** section:

- Go on a walk and identify God's attributes in creation.
- Watch a sunrise and tell God what you love.
- Meditate on a Scripture passage.
- Worship God through music.
- Look through old photos and thank God for his care.
- Make a list of blessings.
- Use written prayers to guide your conversation with God.
- Personalise a Psalm.
- Choose a poem or passage from Scripture to pray each morning.
- Artistically express your praise or prayer to God.



Specific Discussion Ideas for Create the Atmosphere

Sometimes it's easier to consider questions in light of concrete examples. You can suggest some of these scenarios when discussing the attributes in the **Think About It** section.

How do you (*or could you*) display these characteristics when a child:

- Won't stop talking?
- Has a bad attitude?
- Repeatedly breaks a rule?
- Does not obey?
- Does something clumsy?
- Is overly silly?
- Doesn't want to sing?
- Can't sit still?

How can you still show love and acceptance of the child (*reaching their heart*) so that your instruction (*affecting their behaviour*) is received? How can you relate kindly to them while training their will?

How should your discipline of the child differ when behaviour is simply childish compared to outright sinful?

What is your primary motivation in discipline?

- Ease of classroom or home management?
- Anger or frustration?
- Helping the child grow in Christ-likeness?

Note: Lack of discipline is not loving. Desiring Christ-likeness in a child's life will lead to loving and effective training of their will because it begins by reaching their heart.

Consider creating a simple card, printout, bookmark or fridge magnet of Psalm 86:15 for each person to take home and display somewhere they'll see it each day. Or provide supplies for everyone to make a simple verse card of their own at the end of the discussion. You could also simply send out the verse to your group through your social media platform during the week.



Specific Discussion Ideas for External vs Internal

As you move through this discussion time, keep pointing out that both love and obedience are to be evident in the life of the believer (*John 13:34-35; 14:15*). The question isn't which is most important, but which one enables the other. Obedience cannot enable love, but love enables obedience, even to the point of sacrifice (*Philippians 2:8*).

In the **Talk About It** section, further the conversation by asking, "Does training the heart or the behaviour lead to quicker short-term results? Which one leads the way to long-term change?" Sometimes we are looking for the quick fix that helps with the management of class or home, but that approach is short-sighted and not always in the best interest of the child.

Specific ideas for prioritising the hearts of children and implementing the various aspects can be found in Section 4 of this book. You can reference those ideas now if needed.

As you discuss the final question in the **Talk About It** section, help parents and teachers think through how their behaviour and actions reveal what they believe God is most concerned with.

Are they always concerned with doing right, meeting expectations, obeying perfectly, trying harder? Then they tend to prioritise behaviour and this will be evident in the way they instruct and train children.

Do they run to God, rest in Him, pursue relationship with Him, enjoy time with Him throughout their day? Then they tend to prioritise the heart and will easily model this to the children they lead.



Specific Discussion Ideas for Nurturing and Ordering Affection

Throughout the discussion time continually bring the conversation back to the key idea:

It is our affection for something or someone that causes us to relate to it and find delight in it. If we want children to be devoted (*attached*) to God and have an intimate relationship with Him, it begins by encouraging their love (*affection*) for Him.

You can do this as you explore:

- The individual's own affections and attachments (***Think About It*** questions 2, 3).
- Children's affections and attachments (***Talk About It*** question 2).

Be prepared to share a personal example of how your affection for God grew and so increased your devotion to Him. This concrete example will help illuminate the key idea.

Encourage everyone that many of the activities in Section 4 are designed to help develop this affection in the hearts of children. They can follow the ideas there as they seek to lead children to love God more and more!

Consider creating a simple card, printout, bookmark or fridge magnet of Psalm 86:15 for each person to take home and display somewhere they'll see it each day. Or provide supplies for everyone to make a simple verse card of their own at the end of the discussion. You could also simply send out the verse to your group through your social media platform during the week.



Specific Discussion Ideas for Reliance on Self

Because of our learned behaviours within society, it can sometimes be difficult to identify self-reliance in our spiritual lives. Here are some ideas to help facilitate discussion.

- Moving from spiritual highs to spiritual lows based on how your actions align with God's commands on any given day.
- Believing obedience is your responsibility once you are saved.
- Prioritising Christian values and appearance over intimate relationship with God.
- Being overly concerned with what others think about you.
- Thinking more of yourself than of God.
- Carrying burdens instead of giving them to Jesus.
- Feeling constant condemnation for not measuring up to God's standards.
- Trying to do things for God in order to please Him.

As we've noted before, the goal of these questions is not to condemn and burden but rather to illuminate and bring freedom. Encourage participants to embrace the truth God reveals and turn from self to the Spirit as God brings awareness. God's heart is towards His children and He is leading them deeper into real and abundant life through His Spirit.

The more you are able to share personal stories and examples, the easier it will be for others to open up and do the same. It will also help them see that each person is still growing in their understanding and walk with God. Ask God to give you an open life and heart that will encourage others.



Specific Discussion Ideas for the Beauty of the Gospel

You'll notice that this final section circles back around to the foundation laid at the very beginning—the importance of developing a personal love for and enjoyment of God.

- This is what Jesus secured for us on the cross and what He enables through the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- It is the priority for teachers and parents to cultivate within their own lives and in the lives of the children they teach.
- Keeping a religious set of rules or meeting or living up to a certain standard is not what God desires.

Here's a list of observations from Psalm 16 that can help identify how the psalmist interacts with God (**Think About It** question 1), as well as offer ideas for how the Gospel can influence a person's daily life (**Talk About It** question 1).

- Looks to God to preserve him (*and his reputation*). Doesn't try to do it on his own.
- Runs to God for refuge.
- Acknowledges that everything good comes from God.
- Delights in the lives of other believers.
- Recognises that following anything other than God will bring sorrow long-term.
- Chooses God as all that he needs.
- Trusts that God designs his future.
- Holds onto the hope of the good in store for him after this life.
- Blesses God.
- Receives counsel and instruction from God.
- Puts God first.
- Remains steady in life because God is with Him regardless of what happens.
- Overflows with gladness and rejoicing.
- Dwells in security because of God's promise to never abandon him.
- Knows the path that brings life.
- Finds complete joy and pleasure in fellowship with God.



Specific Discussion Ideas for Leading Believing Children to Love God Above All

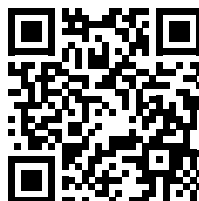
You can move through this section in a variety of ways depending on the need of your group and the amount of time you have.

Choose 3 – 4 Truths to Teach and discuss them together. Then have each person choose an activity to use with children during the next week. Share stories of how the teaching went when you meet again. You could do this for several weeks as you move through all the ideas given.

Discuss all of the Truths to Teach and have everyone choose an activity from the truth that is most relevant to a need they have. Share stories of how the teaching went when you meet again. Encourage everyone to continue implementing activities on their own once your time together is finished.

As you work through Sections 2 and 3 together (*God's Love is the Foundation and The Pattern of Growth*), choose one Truth to Teach to discuss and implement that goes along with what was read. Encourage everyone to implement one of the suggested activities, then discuss how it went as you discuss the section's teaching at your next meeting.

*For more information about the CEF
training ministry in Europe check out our
website at cefeurope.com/education*

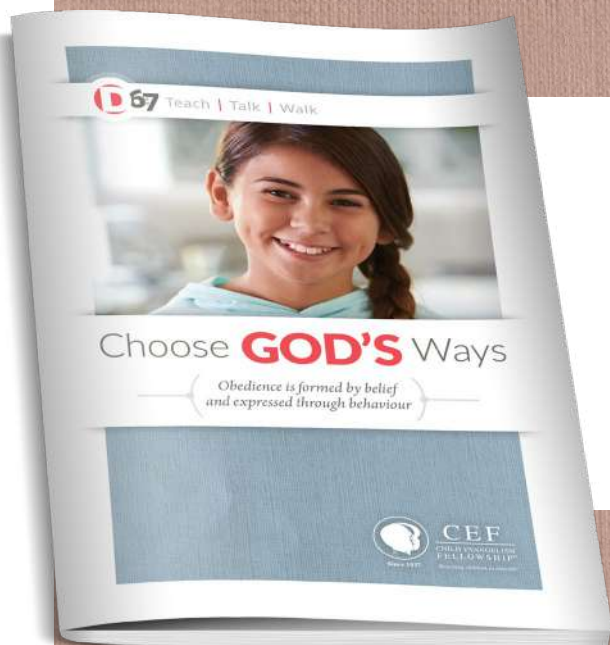


*Find out more about CEF resources:
cefeurope.com/resources/*

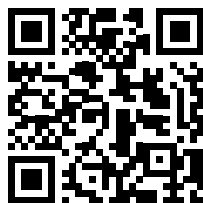




IF YOU LIKED
Love God Most, CHECK
OUT THE COMPANION BOOK,
Choose God's Ways.



Available on
teachkids.eu/training



Watch for more helpful **D6:7** books to come!

Love **GOD** Most

CHILDREN LEARN SO MUCH, SO FAST! THE BIBLE IS FILLED WITH CHARACTER TRAITS, ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOURS AND motivations that should mark the life of believers. It's easy to let our time with children focus on training them in these ways. But is that really what should mark the foundation of their lives? Of our lives?

Do you ever wish there was a clear priority as to what we should teach children during this significant time in their lives? Jesus shed light on this subject. He said the most important thing for any believer is loving God (*Matthew 22:34-38*).

This includes children who have believed in Jesus as Saviour. They need to love God more than anything or anyone else. They need to be awestruck at His grandeur, drawn into intimacy with Him, and have their beliefs and behaviours shaped as a result of that love.

When this happens, their lives will be marked by an intimate relationship with God. They will long for God, praise Him, be satisfied in Him, meditate on Him, and cling to Him just as David did in Psalm 63. In this book, you will find inspiration and practical ideas to help you lead believing children to God in this way.

Yes, saved children need to be taught. And they should be taught. You can teach them—to pray, to read their Bible, to praise God, to choose friends wisely, to interact with others biblically. And the basis of all of these, the foundation, is love for God. What a wonderful truth to instill in a young life!