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Dear GCP Family,

This is the second edition of GCP’s annual magalog for 2020–2021. It’s sort of like a catalog, but it’s also sort of like a magazine. So, we call it our magalog.

We hope to assist you in at least two ways. First, the catalog part. The catalog part shows you all the materials that we have for you to teach God’s Word to your children, youth, and adults. There is nothing more important and life-changing that we can do than discipling all the generations of God’s people in your church with the truth of God’s Word.

Our job and intent are to partner with you in your planning and teaching of the Scriptures. And that’s the “mag” part of our magalog. There are plenty of helps and hints throughout to help you as you educate the covenant children in your church. The fancy word for this is catechesis. A wise pastor, many years ago, said that “the church of God will never be preserved without catechesis.” You are doing something that will reach all the way to eternity as you serve our Lord in discipling and teaching this new generation.

We call our magalog Heart 2 Heart because your heart is drawn to the children God has put in your classroom, and you are reaching the hearts of the children that the Holy Spirit is drawing to himself. All of us are to be faithful and fervent in teaching all parts of Christ’s Church. There’s plenty in Heart 2 Heart for all the generations in your church. We do this to the best of our abilities, knowing that as we sow the seeds of God’s Word, that it is only the sovereign God who works this in someone else’s heart. This is a high duty and obligation in the discipling ministry that God has given us. He alone can change hearts, but we must be faithful in this calling.

We want to support you in your ministry in any way we can, so feel free to call, text, or email any of us. We offer you many materials and services in Heart 2 Heart, as well as on our website. There you can find links to webinars and on-demand videos to help you wherever you are.

May our God richly bless you in this task in the kingdom of God. It is a high and important thing to do. Thank you for your willing hearts.

SDG!

Marvin Padgett
Executive Director
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6 The Joy of Teaching God’s Word!

“Education is teaching our students what we know—for example, 2+2=4. Christian Education is teaching our students to become what we are—a follower of Jesus.”

“Children loved remembering they can always get free from Doubting Castle using the key of God’s promise. I highly recommend this curriculum.”
Tara, San Antonio

“I want curriculum that supports the pulpit ministry of my church. GCP does this better than any other curriculum.”
Helen, Houston

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ARE YOU OPENING this “magalog” with a weary, tired exhaustion? Are you swamped trying to make decisions about curriculum, spiritual development, discipleship, music choices, volunteer recruitment, and all the other ministry decisions on your plate?

“Here I go again, trying to decide what we really need and what our budget can afford. I have so much to do, I don’t have time to spend on this. I’m so drained, so overwhelmed. It’s all too much.”

Is it hard to remember why you began doing ministry? Have you lost your joy? How often do you think about “joy” and “enjoying God forever” when considering how one grows and matures in Christ? What place does joy have in spiritual development and discipleship? How do we convey this sense of joy to our children and adults as they learn at the feet of Jesus—in worship, Sunday school, Bible study, and fellowship?

Think about how often joy is emphasized in God’s Word. If you were to look up the word joy in an online Bible concordance such as Bible Gateway, and read through the phrases, your heart would be encouraged with the exhaustive number of times God’s Word focuses on joy. Read the verses scattered throughout this article aloud, and ask God to renew your joy as you continue with the task of choosing Bible study materials for your children and adults.

This magalog presents so many rich resources for teaching our children and adults. Curriculum is a toolbox with many different tools that we use to teach and learn the truths of God’s Word: hearing God’s Word, reading God’s Word, studying God’s Word, memorizing God’s Word, and meditating on God’s Word.

HAVING A FIRM GRASP
An illustration using the fingers of the hand helps us understand how these various ways of learning God’s Word work together. The little finger is hearing God’s Word, the ring finger is reading God’s Word, the middle is studying God’s Word, and the index finger is memorizing God’s Word. All of these are important avenues of learning all that God has revealed about himself. What seals these learning avenues to our hearts is the thumb of meditating on God’s Word. As we meditate on what we hear, read, study, and memorize, the Holy Spirit activates God’s truth so that it flows out into our daily lives and choices.

To take the illustration a little further, what if you held your Bible with only your pinky and thumb? You can grasp the Bible, but weakly. You could easily grab the Bible with your other hand and remove it. If you add your ring finger, you have a better grasp. Even stronger with three fingers and your thumb. But your firmest grip is when you’re using all five of your fingers to grasp your Bible. And so it is, spiritually as well.

FROM TODDLERS TO TEENAGERS
In Show Me Jesus, toddlers and preschoolers mainly use the hearing and memorizing fingers to learn the amazing stories of Jesus. They also begin to learn to “sight read” the name of Jesus and other words of the faith through repetition in visuals and activities such as coloring. As teachers and parents ask their littlest ones to tell about the stories they hear and to recite the verses they memorize, our children are learning what it means to meditate on what they hear and memorize.

As children move into first and second grades, reading becomes a major activity, so they add reading to hearing, memorizing,
“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.”

and meditating on Bible truths. As they memorize the books of the Bible, discover how to find references, and learn how to read simple verses, they add another layer of hiding God’s Word in their hearts. And along with each Bible lesson, they are encouraged to meditate on what the truths mean by applying them to their lives.

In middle and older elementary grades, reading is a growing skill, so studying God’s Word takes a major focus. Students open their Bibles and read passages aloud, learning to note key words, major themes, and put together chronological sequences. They further meditate on the Word as they think through what the text says, what it means, and what it means to them as they apply it in daily living. Our children move from “Show Me Jesus” into G2R (Genesis to Revelation) Bible Survey, where students take an exciting journey through every book of the Bible. This lays the groundwork for the study of God’s amazing covenant promises in their teenage years.

Middle and high school students are able to put all five fingers together, digging deep into God’s Word as they hear, read, study, memorize, and meditate on it. G2R (Genesis to Revelation) God’s Promises for middle school traces God’s major covenant promises to send the Savior. Students have aha moments as they see God’s unfolding promises to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David leading to the fulfillment in Jesus. In So What? youth Bible studies, our teenagers begin to own their faith in a deeper way. Through topical studies and studies of entire books of the Bible, they relate faith to life and to faith.

**JOY IN LOVING GOD TOGETHER**

At every age, students learn that these five elements are not only given by God to be used in private quiet times and devotions, but are corporate gifts for the body of Christ in worship, Sunday school, Bible studies, discipleship groups, and more. These wonderful tools of comparing and contrasting, cross referencing and word studies—along with many other Bible study skills—allow them to grasp God’s Word in deeper and deeper ways, always with the focus of getting to know their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

These are not only cognitive ways of learning God’s Word. Students are encouraged to engage the Word with various learning styles. They draw, write poems, compose prayers or songs, role-play, sing, and encounter biblical stories and truth in many other creative ways. However, even these five fingers of the hand can become dry exercises unless there is a heart element: an attitude of joy as we look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Jeremiah reflects, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.”

In Jesus’ parables of the master and servant, Jesus concludes with the words believers the world over want to hear when they see Jesus face to face: “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” It isn’t just hearing his words “well done, good and faithful servant” that Jesus emphasizes, but also entering into God’s joy, glorifying and enjoying him forever. The beloved John records Jesus’ words to you: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” As you continue with your tasks for the day, and as you hear, read, study, memorize, and meditate on God’s Word and teach your children and adults to do so, “may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

**JoAnna Willaims is Senior Editor at Great Commission Publications.**

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...for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.”

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

The joy of the Lord is my strength.

At every age, students learn that these five elements are not only given by God to be used in private quiet times and devotions, but are corporate gifts for the body of Christ in worship, Sunday school, Bible studies, discipleship groups, and more.
SEEING THE BIG PICTURE WITH KIDS

by B.A. Snider

OK, LET ME JUST GO ON THE RECORD as saying I love kids. And if you are in children's ministry, you are probably saying, "I do too!" Some folks think I'm crazy when I say I love babies even when they are crying. Or I love 2-year-olds even when they are throwing a tantrum, and 5-year-olds when they are being stubborn. I also love babies when they are cuddled up just under your chin and smell so good. And 3-year-olds when they are so proud of themselves after singing a song or telling you something so sweet you can hardly keep tears of joy from flowing. I love hearing 4-year-olds pray with such faith that they indeed believe that God can move a mountain or anything else of his holy will that he wants to accomplish. Basically, I love kids of all ages—even teenagers!

Now, you might be saying to yourself, What does that have to do with the title of this article? Well, I think that sometimes as children’s ministry leaders, parents, or teachers, we get so involved in the age group we are in the midst of that we forget to look at the big picture. For instance, with preschoolers we may think we should wait until they are older to teach them to spend time in God’s Word. After all, they can’t even read yet! But what if we read a Bible story to them every night before bed and remember to say, "When you get bigger, you can read your Bible all on your own like Daddy and I do every day because hearing God’s Word and praying are some of the most important things that we do." After all, we spend tons of time helping them with schoolwork so that they can read, write, understand math, and know a myriad of other things that are necessary in this life but have very little eternal significance. We must be continually seeking the life God calls us to in the midst of our other responsibilities.

Another way to think about this is, What do you want your children to look like and be as Christians when they are 18 and leaving home for college/career? Or as young parents teaching your grandchildren? Now, first let me acknowledge that only a miracle of God saves our children’s hearts and has them calling on the name of Jesus to be saved. But I’m not fulfilling my calling if I don’t teach them when they are young the things that will help them be the 18- or 25-year-old who follows Jesus and his Word. I must be praying for God’s grace to turn them into the men and women of God I hope for and am discipling them for now.

One of my favorite Christian education thoughts goes something like this: Education is teaching our students what we know—for example, 2+2=4. Christian Education is teaching our students to become what we are—a follower of Jesus. We pass along knowledge, yes, but more importantly we model for our children a life of biblical repentance, faith, and new obedience.

Having the big picture in mind as children’s ministry leaders, parents, and teachers helps us not get caught in the everyday urgency of life and lets us take time to pray with and for the children in our ministry, our home, and our classrooms.

GCP has taken a great deal of time to develop a strong scope and sequence for every age level as well as a strong scope and sequence over all from toddlers to teenagers. Our Show Me Jesus curriculum is helping you look at the big picture even in the midst of our everyday lives. Blessings to you as you pass along “the glorious deeds of the Lord” (Psalm 78:4).

Do you want your grown children to...

... be worshipers of God? Then teach them now to worship in spirit and truth both corporately and privately.

... know and live by the truths of Scripture? Then teach them now the whole Bible in age-appropriate ways from Genesis to Revelation.

... serve God in the church and the community? Then teach and model for them now how to serve, whether by teaching their Sunday school class or VBS or by serving at the local food bank as a family.

... teach your grandchildren about Jesus? Then teach them now the big truths of God’s Word at the breakfast or dinner table with family devotions and memorization.

... tell others about Jesus? Then model evangelism and missions for them now.

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Show Me Jesus is an outstanding tool to disciple your children through the Bible and to bring them face to face with Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.
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Toddler

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The two departments of G2R (Genesis to Revelation) explore these amazing stories and promises in distinct ways. When else will you have this great opportunity to take your soon-to-be adults through the whole Bible and prepare them for life out on their own? How will you deepen their understanding of and love for our covenant God?

G2R Bible Survey
An exciting journey through EVERY book of the Bible
Grades 4 5 6 7

At this age, our kids are beginning to make a lot of connections. They are able to understand chronology and history, and can grasp God’s plan through the Bible. They are taking the stories they’ve heard as children and putting together the one big story of God’s redemption through Christ. How does G2R Bible Survey lay this foundation?

G2R Bible Survey takes students on an exciting journey through EVERY book of the Bible. Through these studies, they will connect the dots of the history of God’s grace at work in his people. They will trace the story of God’s redemptive plan from Creation through the coming of Christ.

Using timelines and interactive methods, students will discover the unfolding story of Jesus and draw the Old and New Testaments together in ways they never saw before. They will be encouraged to spend time with the Author of Scripture and their Savior during personal devotions. This 8-unit overview of all the books of the Bible is essential for our covenant students and a great tool for introducing unchurched teens to God’s Word.

G2R God’s Promises
Amazing Aha! moments discovering God’s covenant of grace
Grades 6 7 8 9 10

Once our students have a solid foundation of people and events in the Bible, they can go to a deeper level—tracing God’s covenantal promises and their fulfillment in Jesus from Genesis to Revelation.

“I will be your God, and you will be my people.” Through G2R God’s Promises, teens will discover that Scripture is held together by the covenant of grace—the scarlet thread of God’s promises in the Bible. They will make covenant connections and be amazed to see that not only do the Bible stories fit together in one big story, but that God entered into a covenantal relationship with his people, making and keeping promises over thousands of years and in thousands of lives, ultimately fulfilled in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

They will marvel that our triune God is a covenant God—the God who makes and keeps his promises.

In 8 units, teens will have amazing aha! moments discovering God’s covenant of grace. In this age of broken promises and loneliness, think of how wonderful it will be for our teens to be reassured that God is trustworthy and that Jesus Christ is our Immanuel, God with us.

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G2R: GENESIS TO REVELATION

“My heart overflows with gratitude for this engaging material that challenges young people with the promises of God’s covenant. As we grow in our understanding of his promise that he will be our God, we will be his people, and he will live among us, our intimacy with the Triune God increases. Receiving him is the only thing that gives meaning, purpose, joy, and hope that will give purpose to life and sustain us for a lifetime.” —Susan Hunt, author of Heirs of the Covenant

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AMAZING AHA! MOMENTS DISCOVERING GOD’S COVENANT OF GRACE

- Explores God’s unfolding covenant promises to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ
- Focuses on the why and how of God’s unfolding covenant of grace
- Traces the gospel from the promised Seed in Genesis to Jesus, the Promised Messiah in the New Testament
- Emphasizes interactive discovery using the Bible as the primary source
- Encourages time alone in the Word using Aha! devotional booklet

ESSENTIAL FOUNDATION FOR YOUTH

Your students will...

- Discover the unity of the Bible as they learn that covenant is an overarching theme of Scripture and shows God’s faithfulness, goodness, love, and grace
- Be directed to Jesus Christ as the One who fulfills all the requirements of the covenant
- Be better equipped as they grow in trusting and obeying God, serving him and others out of gratitude for his great salvation
- Be challenged to claim God’s promises for themselves

OLD TESTAMENT (4 STUDIES) AVAILABLE ANYTIME!

WE’VE LISTENED TO YOU!

- Now in ESV (English Standard Version)
- The apex of Show Me Jesus curriculum from toddler to high school focused on covenant promises
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Shema

This command in verse 4, called the Shema, was God’s command to the Israelites to worship him.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9

1. Why is it so important that we worship together?
2. Does it matter to God what we do when we worship?
3. What happens when believers worship?

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Benjamin, how sinful are you by nature?

“I am corrupt in every part of my being.”

THIS WAS THE MOST IMPRESSIVE MOMENT in our year-end program celebrating the memory work of our church’s covenant children. Why? Five-year-old Benjamin looks like a cherub, and this profound truth could hardly be accepted coming from his young lips. We all gasped and giggled a bit. But in our children’s church Kids’ Quest Catechism Club, Benjamin had memorized First Catechism answers 1 through 46 and was delighted to be sharing that accomplishment.

Most all our preschoolers who attend children’s church were able to stand alongside him and answer those weighty questions with eternal words of truth. “Can anyone go to heaven with this sinful nature?” “Who can change a sinner’s heart?” “How then can we be saved?” Yes, they had not only memorized 46 catechism answers, but the gospel message had also been driven into their memory, plain and simple.

Have you considered Kids’ Quest Catechism Club for children’s church? It is a perfect fit for our church because the materials can be easily condensed into the 40 minutes that four- and five-year-olds are dismissed during the sermon. The Bible teaching that goes along with the catechism memory and review is theologically sound and age-appropriate, and the activity pages are perfect to take home so that parents can follow up each week. If you cannot find any good time to focus on children’s catechism, consider using Kids’ Quest for your children’s church curriculum.

But here’s the best reason for going through Kids’ Quest with the children in your church. The process inspires parents to take up and stick with the task of catechizing their kids. The first few weeks, as the parents read the take-home paper, you will hear responses like this—“We are learning so much!” “Our older children never memorized those questions, so we are doing it all together as a family.” “Josh is wanting to keep up with the class and he reminds me to help him learn the new questions each week. I love this!” “Could we get some extra First Catechism books for friends and family members?”

Parents need this encouragement and support. As their lives are filled with the business that so easily entangles us, catechism is the most effortless path to Deuteronomy 6 moments with their kids.

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house (maltimes), and when you walk by the way (in the car on the way home), and when you lie down (right before bedtime), and when you rise (getting ready for the day).” Deuteronomy 6:7

Kids’ Quest Catechism Club is the complete package:

• Solid Bible teaching for any church-time programs
• Age-appropriate activities for both preschoolers and elementary kids grades 1–4
• Take-home papers that lead parents in the discipleship of their kids
• Consistent training that accomplishes the completion of First Catechism Q/A 1–150

Kids’ Quest and children’s church go together! 32

Sue Jakes is the Director of Children’s Ministries at Westminster Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Atlanta, Georgia. She is also the Children’s Ministry Coordinator with the Committee on Discipleship Ministries of the PCA.
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4- AND 5-YEAR-OLDS

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- First 46 questions

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  - Teacher’s Manual 080113

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**BEGINNING VOLUME THREE**
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EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD ADVENTURE STORY. Wouldn’t it be amazing if while your kids got caught up in a dramatic tale of ups and downs, and of liars and truth-tellers that they also learned about the most important story of all—the gospel?

_Pilgrim’s Progress_ is an allegory. An allegory is a story with two meanings. First, this is an exciting adventure story of a man and his friends on a journey to a wonderful place. On their way they meet many challenges, dangers, and enemies. But it’s also a story that teaches important truths about Jesus and every Christian’s journey through life.

**STORYBOOK AND CURRICULUM FOR 6- TO 12-YEAR OLDS**

A long, long time ago, a prisoner sat in a cold jail in England. In his cell, he had a Bible, a pen, and some paper. Over many months, he wrote an adventure story that, in many ways, was like his own life. The man’s name was John Bunyan, and his story became a famous book called _The Pilgrim’s Progress_.

In the hundreds of years since John wrote it, many people all over the world have read and treasured it. It has been translated into over 200 languages. The Bible is the only book that has ever sold more copies. We have adapted this classic work of literature for children ages 6 to 12 so they may learn about the Christian life from this great adventure story.

The book and curriculum take kids on an adventure from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Using a beautifully illustrated map in the storybook and curriculum, they see the twists and turns through the Slough of Despond, House Beautiful, Vanity Fair, and many other exciting places.

With a word-for-word dramatic reading of the storybook—complete with sound effects and character voices—young pilgrims will not only understand and enjoy Bunyan’s allegorical tale but learn spiritual lessons and biblical truths along the way. Readers come face to face with the challenges confronting the pilgrim named Christian and discover that they, too, deal with similar obstacles in their own lives, and that Christ saves, leads, and protects them.

“I know of no book, the Bible excepted, as above all comparison, which I, according to my judgment and experience, could so safely recommend as teaching and enforcing the whole saving truth according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, as in The Pilgrim’s Progress.”

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TEACH LIFE-CHANGING TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL
Both the curriculum and book are designed to equip kids with life-changing truths:
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• the necessity of God’s Word, the Holy Spirit, and other believers for teaching, instruction, encouragement, and support
• the true definition of a Christian
• a picture of the Christian life—a pilgrim’s journey with ups and downs, distractions, and difficulties as a believer presses toward the Celestial City
• insight into the heart and character of Christians and non-Christians
Each of the 13 lessons focuses on one chapter in the book and what it teaches your children, through reading, listening, exploring, singing, and a variety of activities for different learning styles. The teacher’s manual guides you through each meeting step by step. Your young pilgrims will learn about God and His Word as they read and hear Christian’s story lesson by lesson. And you too will be encouraged and grow in your faith.

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3. Have an awesome time as a family going on this journey with Christian to the Celestial City and discussing amazing gospel truths about the Christian life!

For free sample downloads of the book and curriculum, and to hear samples of the dramatic reading and music, visit childrenspilgrimsprogress.org.

Pilgrim’s Progress Deluxe Classroom Kit

Deluxe Classroom Kit PP1111 $85.00 (over $100 value)
Includes everything a teacher needs to lead Christian’s adventure to the Celestial City.

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Confessions of a Ruling Elder

I’VE BEEN A RULING ELDER IN THE CHURCH for nearly three decades, which means I have done my share of Sunday school teaching. It’s part of the job description. I have taught on books of the Bible, on doctrinal standards, theology, church history—you name it. And all to adults, of course. by John Muether

But about a year ago I ventured into unfamiliar territory—teaching four- and five-year-olds. What possessed me, you ask? For one, I had a growing conviction that the men of our church should pitch in to teach the young’uns. Also I thought it would be good stewardship for me to familiarize myself with Great Commission Publications’ curriculum that our denomination provides. Finally, we had a shortage of teachers, and I thought that an elder condescending to take on this “lowly task” might set a good example for others. The idea struck many in my church as almost comically implausible (not least my adult children, who long suspected that my patience level with children in the church registered fairly close the standard set by W. C. Fields).

Despite my impressiveness Sunday school curriculums sit, I underestimated what was in store for me. I can’t say I wasn’t prepared by the teacher’s manual from GCP, which gave me plenty of warnings: the kids in my class would have only five- to ten-minute attention spans (a vulgar overstatement, I am convinced), they are literal and concrete thinkers, they are curious and talkative (you think?), and they tire easily—or would that refer to the teacher?

Still, I thought to myself, I’ve got this covered! After all, there were just five kids in the class. The superintendent even secured for me an assistant, whom I tried to wave away so as not to needlessly burden “no imposition at all,” she insisted, “I am happy to help you. Oh, and yes, you will need me.” Five minutes into my first class, a young pupil announced it was time for her bathroom break. My assistant took her hand, smiled at me, and escorted her out of the classroom.

While the teacher’s manual promised that I would be “enlightened and enriched” in this experience, I set a different goal: survival. Compared to teaching adults—I can yack about anything for 45 minutes—this was work. At times the lesson plan seemed to this beginner to be foot or famine—either too ambitious or limited in its combination of teaching and activities. So I learned critical clock-management techniques. With time running out, I employ a hurry-up offense through the lesson with the precision of a Tom Brady. With time to kill, there is always another chorus of a song or a review of catechism. And if I am really desperate, I pull out the crayons. What kid doesn’t like to draw?

I committed my share of rookie mistakes. One day I was planning to teach the kids a song to the tune of a familiar nursery rhyme. I practiced diligently the night before, in the presence of my wife. But when it came time to lead the singing, I could not recall the tune. My co-teacher drew a blank as well, which prompted one five-year-old to observe, “Well, this is awkward.”

Even though the teacher’s manual gave me great help; a recurring struggle was to keep lessons focused on one simple take-away every week. Leave them with a simple message. God created a wonderful world that we see and touch and smell; or, God gives us grace to trust and obey him. I strove to keep my words simple and my sentences short. This is hard for me to do. But what is not hard is telling whether I am getting through. Adult students can disguise their boredom. Kids don’t hide it.

An experienced teacher once told me of the importance of addressing students at eye level. So I consciously make efforts to bend down and make eye contact. It is a maneuver that reminds me how soon loose replacement lies in my future.

If the challenges have proven daunting (and don’t even get me started on the crafts), the rewards were even greater than I imagined. “Hi Mr. John!” they holler when they see me every Sunday. Two weeks after the beginning of our class, a conversation with a friend before evening worship was interrupted when a young girl ran up to me and gave me a big hug. My friend’s jaw dropped, and I proudly explained that she was among my “june.” I imagine these kids a decade later, seated before the session, stumbling to make a credible profession of faith, and I am heartened to think that one familiar face might put their minds at ease.

More than shaping me as a teacher, this experience has prompted reflections on my life as a learner. In public worship a few weeks ago, a paraphrase of Psalm 113 offered this thanksgiving to God:

Yet I may love thee too, O Lord,
Albeit I boast of thee,
for thou hast stooped to ask of me
the love of my poor heart.

This is the doctrine of accommodation on which John Calvin has written so eloquently. For who even of slight intelligence does not understand ‘be as he asks in his ordinances,’ “that as supervisors do, so we supervisors do, with infants, God is wont in measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness” (1.13.1).

Stooping and loping. Short sentences and simple words. Don’t this the essence of verbal revelation? If you study textbooks on Christian education, you will find one consistent theme: Jesus is the “master teacher.” I have no argument with that claim; but I question the grounds often provided to support it. They range from his confounding the wise, or exposing the proud, or confronting stubbornness and pride, or appealing to emotions. Those explanations may just serve to flatter ourselves, and they overreach the obvious. Jesus knew how to lisp.

John Muether, OPC ruling elder, is the library director of Reformed Theological Seminary and serves on the board of trustees of Great Commission Publications. The author of several books, he also serves as Professor of Church History at RTS, teaching core courses on education in the church, Christian engagement with culture and church government, as well as elective courses on various topics.

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Do you know how to use TRINITY HYMNAL’s tunes and meters to improve your worship?

Last year, I was asked to give a lecture on “How Can We Use Our Hymnals Better?” One answer to this age-old question is nothing new. For centuries musicians have practiced the art of contrafactum, that is, substituting one text for another, without any significant changes to the melody. It’s a procedure that, when used effectively, can help a congregation expand its knowledge of hymnody (poetry) and help pastors and musicians more intentionally coordinate their sermons and musical hymn selections for worship. To put it more simply, it’s a way to set many different hymn texts to the same familiar tune.

We have several contrafactum in the Trinity Hymnal. One that is particularly effective is the Horatius Bonar text “O Love of God, How Strong and True,” set to Hubert Parry’s tune JERUSALEM. This tune is most commonly associated with William Blake’s poem, “And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time,” a well-loved English nationalistic song. The external attributes of God as depicted in Bonar’s poetry makes a perfect match for the majestic character of Parry’s music. Another equally effective contrafactum is Michael Perry’s hymn “O God beyond All Praising,” set to Gustav Holst’s THAXTED, a tune excerpted from the noble and moving fourth movement of Holst’s orchestral suite, The Planets, Op. 32.

There is a way for all of us to use contrafactum in our worship services or at home, but we have to understand a few things about our hymn page to be able to proceed. First, we need to understand what the information in the bottom right-hand corner of a hymn page means.

What Does that Tiny Text Mean?

At the bottom right-hand corner of a hymn page, you will first see a name in all capital letters. This is the name of the hymn tune, and it is followed either by a series of numbers (for example, STUTTGART 8.7.8.7) or by an abbreviated symbol, also in capital letters (such as L.M., C.M., S.M.D., etc.). These numbers or symbols tell us what the meter of the hymn text is. Meter is the fundamental rhythmic structure of a poetic verse or lines of a verse. The collection of lines of a verse in a hymn is called a stanza (more on this shortly).

If you take your Trinity Hymnal and turn to the back, you can find two appendices—one titled TUNES, and the other immediately following titled METERS. The one that is most helpful for this exercise is the latter. You will see that hymn tunes are organized under subheadings with the aforementioned metrical letter and number assignments. Essentially, you can take any hymn with a particular meter and match it to another tune. The important thing to remember is that the character of the hymn text and musical character should be a good fit.

We’ve done this at my church with many hymns. Sometimes I’ll come across a hymn text that I like very much and that would fit perfectly with the sermon text that morning or evening. At times, it can be best to teach the congregation the new hymn altogether. At other times, it is more expedient and effective to use this contrafactum procedure by printing the hymn text in the bulletin with a tune that the congregation is more familiar with. For example, singing Charles Wesley’s text “Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies” is a wonderful way to begin a worship service:

- Dark and cheerless is the morn
- Unaccompanied by thee.
- Joyless is the days return
- Till thy mercy’s beams I see.
- Till they inward light impart,
- Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

If you open the Trinity Hymnal to this hymn, it is set to the tune LEX PXIMA, with a meter of 7.7.7.7.7.7. This tells us that one stanza of the hymn has six lines, each containing seven syllables. (Don’t be ashamed to count the syllables out on your fingers!) Your congregation might not know the hymn tune or text, but if you turn to the MEITER appendix in the back of the hymnal and locate the subheading 7.7.7.7.7.7, you will see numerous other hymn tunes. If you skim through the hymns under that heading, you will likely find a hymn with which your congregation is familiar. In this case, DIX (“For the Beauty of the Earth”) works quite beautifully with Wesley’s hymn. The best way to double check that it’s a good match is to make sure you sing through it first. Enjoy the process of discovering, learning, and teaching new hymns. It will be a blessing to you and your congregation.

Dr. Daniel Cole is the Director of Music at First Presbyterian Church (ARP) in Columbia, South Carolina.
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Sherry Kendrick
Children’s Director
Covenant Church of Naples
Naples, Florida

GCP: How long have you been in children’s ministry? Sherry: Officially I’ve served as a children’s director for nine years. As a volunteer, I’ve been in children’s ministry most of my life. As a teen, my church and our church camp gave me many opportunities with mentors to enable me to serve in areas of children’s ministry. As a young pastor’s wife and a young mother, I was always involved in children’s ministry in our church as my children grew. I taught Sunday school, planned VBS, reviewed curricula, and recruited volunteers. I see both of these early opportunities as the Lord preparing me for the calling to children’s ministry I got to enjoy now.

GCP: How or why did you get involved in children’s ministry? Sherry: Even as a teen, it was obvious that teaching was my primary gift, so I majored in elementary education in college and started into a teaching career. I taught both in public and private schools, and I taught many different grade levels from younger elementary to middle school. I loved watching children learn and grow throughout the year. However, all the time I was teaching school, I was also volunteering and somewhat directing the children’s ministry of my church. When I offered a ministry position as a children’s director, it was an easy decision for me. It’s my dream “job” because it combines my love for the church, my love for the gospel, my love for children, and my love for teaching and directing the process of partnering with families in the spiritual discipleship of their children.

GCP: How do you get involved in children’s ministry in your church? Sherry: As a volunteer, I’ve been in children’s ministry most of my life. As a young pastor’s wife and a young mother, I was always involved in children’s ministry in our church as my children grew. I taught Sunday school, planned VBS, reviewed curricula, and recruited volunteers. I see both of these early opportunities as the Lord preparing me for the calling to children’s ministry I got to enjoy now.

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GCP: What words of advice do you have for others in children’s ministry? Sherry: First, love the children in your children’s ministry. Love them enough to want them to know Jesus! And build a children’s ministry that works in your context around the ministry of the gospel to them. What you are doing is important work in the next generation.

Second, remember that the programs and events—while important—are not the “why” you do what you do. The “why” is so the children can hear the call of the gospel, learn the content of Scripture, grow in community within their church family, and learn to worship in the church. Enjoy the programs and events in the context of the bigger “why”!

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GCP: How do you develop relationships or a support network with other children’s ministry leaders? Sherry: I attend workshops and conferences and meet other children’s directors. I exchange contact information with them. If they live near me, I try to go visit them and have them come visit me. Hosting a PCA Established children’s conference helped me meet other children’s ministry leaders in Florida, and I continue to enjoy those relationships. Attending the Children’s Leadership Retreat at Ridge Haven has helped me meet people beyond Florida. I love talking with other children’s directors and sharing information and ideas.

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