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★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Keine Stimmen

How much Bible can a child take?



The more Bible knowledge we impart to our children, the better equipped they will be for life. Is that so?

At a conference of Bible reading covenant workers among children in 2001, a cold shiver ran down my spine. I realized that in telling Bible stories I was passing on knowledge in a rather one-sided way. And that I was probably not completely alone in this. The test of whether we pass on (over-)weighty biblical knowledge can be observing what we do after the telling. I loved having any thoroughly creative quizzes up to that point: What was the name of that guy who climbed a tree to get a better look at Jesus? What is the name of that type of tree (gives 3 points)? I can refrain from giving any more examples. Do you love this too?

1. Biblical Knowledge

How important is it for my life that I know the name "Zacchaeus"? Or more blatantly, how important is it in the view of eternal life? I am sure that when we enter heaven we do not have to take and pass an entrance test in which we are tested in Bible knowledge. It is only a question of whether our relationship with Jesus Christ is alive and whether our Christianity has led to corresponding deeds (letter of James sends his regards). Nevertheless:

Bible knowledge is awesome!

I am thankful that I was able to study theology and pass on from it today. But it didn't and doesn't end there, thank God: There are new things to discover every day, one understands certain contexts better, etc. Since only a few biblical stories are even known among young people today, and the Bible is often completely misquoted and misused, it is absolutely important to know about the Bible (e.g. about its origin) and about its content.

Biblical Stories

This brings me to another intermediate observation that is important to me: I do not impart Biblical truths as doctrine, but rather share from the Bible's treasure book by telling the Biblical stories. They are full of wonderful treasures of experience from people who have had experiences with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit before us. I prepare the stories so well that when I tell them, I can let the essential content shine out that the story contains. By the way, when I manage to tell the Bible stories from the children's everyday life and pick up where the children are, the feedback practically never

comes:

I already know that! Because that's when they sense: this is about me now, this story has something to say to me.

This brings us to the second point.

2. Experience, Experience, Feeling

Equally important to our desire to impart biblical knowledge is to appeal to the experience and feeling of the hearers. Otherwise, we "preach" completely past them. So I try to connect to their background of experience and bring them further: "Have you also experienced/thought ...?" Often I don't even need to address this directly. When I tell a story in colour, the children are automatically involved in the story and experience what my narrators experience. This should lead them on to new experiences of their own. It should motivate them to try things in the days to come.

So, as I prepare, I need to think urgently and thoroughly: Where/how do children's experiences feature in my lesson/story? Where do I speak to their feeling? This will have implications for my decorations, for the play street, for the song selection, for the way I tell the story, for the whole process. I will spend enough time and energy, after setting up the room in a timely manner, to make the children feel warmly welcome

Learning Theory

There is another consideration that comes into play, and that is how we learn. There are many theories about this, one being that we learn by *hearing* something, *exploring* it, making *discoveries* of our own, *appropriating* them, and finally *doing* them. Having "heard" something does not mean that we have already memorized it and that we can apply it. Learning consists of several steps. We must give incentive and space to do the further steps after hearing. Only then we come to the third point:

3. Consequences for life

The biblical message must not be exhausted in the fact that we "know" it. It wants to shape our lifestyle. It wants to change us permanently, to make us more and more like what God intended us to be. So we don't invest many hours in good preparation just so that our telling of Bible stories will make them score better on the quiz. But we pray that it will shape the listeners. There is a future generation growing up and we can help to pass on important values to them. Making God known to them as their Creator and Father, loving Jesus as Lord and Savior, and pointing them to God's Holy Spirit who gives us strength to live godly lives. This goes far beyond knowledge!

Missings

I remember a lesson (thankfully it was way back) where I was telling a Bible story and it was about peace. After saying goodbye, two immediately went at each other outside and a brawl ensued. If only it had been a peaceful fight! Today I know: I might have given theoretical knowledge about "one should make peace and behave peacefully etc.", but I did not address the experience and the lifestyle in such a way that it would have been changed (at least not with these two).

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Three questions to ask when preparing

That's why asking myself the three-part question when prepping is an imperative for me today:

1. What is the biblical text trying to tell the children? What is the goal of the story and, by extension, the entire lesson? What is it trying to convey?
2. Where can I connect with the children? What experiences can I already assume? What experiences occur in the story that they can immediately apply/transfer to themselves? Where do feelings have a place?
3. What does all this have to do with the children's lifestyle? Where can the biblical message shape this?

These three questions and answers are equally weighted. Depending on how we are ourselves, one or the other side will have preponderance in our lessons. That may be, that's where we complement each other as a team. But it must not be the case that we completely neglect one point. It is too crucial if the children are to take "something" with them from the time spent together with us.

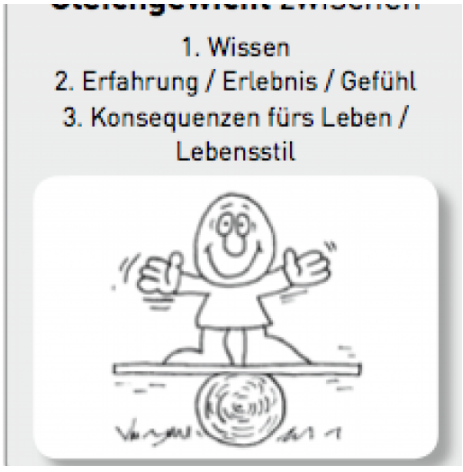
Pestalozzi sends his regards

By the way, Pestalozzi spoke of head, heart and hand in his school system. He used it to paraphrase exactly the same thing that is being emphasized here. And, *Good Start*-Treff, the online material from the Bible Reading Alliance for children's workers is structured just like this. Feel free to check it out at www.bibellesebund.ch.

Once again, when a child says, "I already know that story," it can be a signal that they've been under the impression so far that children's ministry is simply about imparting knowledge that you need to know. But you don't want that at all after reading this article! Neither in personal Bible reading nor in listening to Bible stories is it decisive whether I already "know" a Bible text or am hearing it for the first time. Rather, the only important question is: What do you, God, want to say to me today?

Initial Question and Conclusion

A child endures quite a bit of Bible! The question, however, is whether he merely "endures" it, or whether the Bible shapes his life. Whether God meets him through the occupation with the Bible, or whether this is a must and the Bible remains a "dead letter" for him. This is not only true for the child, but for you as well!



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