

Shaping the Hearts

of Kids with Special Needs

Spring 2015



In this issue . . .

| | |
|-------------------------|------|
| "No! No Hosanna!" | 1-2 |
| Age-Level Helps | 3-14 |
| Tips and Encouragements | 15 |

"No! No Hosanna!"

As a person who was raised going to church services each week, experiences such as Resurrection Sunday held special significance for me. Like many people, I have pictures of my sister and me dressed identically in frills, ruffles, and bows each year until either our mother tired of the process or our sizes were

blond, blue-eyed boy. The hustle and bustle of a large family gathering offered so much stimulation that he was in tears before we offered a blessing over the ham and yeast rolls. Noah was completely uninterested in anything I could put in a basket, hide in an egg, or sprinkle with coconut. It was disastrous, and I was heartbroken.

"Noah was completely uninterested in anything I could put in a basket, hide in an egg, or sprinkle with coconut."

-Vangie, Georgia

Then there were the church services. Special schedules and larger-than-normal crowds distressed us to the point of exhaustion. One Resurrection Sunday morning, when Noah was around 5 years of age, he broke into tears in his car seat on the way to the church building. He was barely verbal, but he managed to sputter out, "No! No hosanna!" It only took a moment to realize that Triumphal Entry Sunday had been too triumphal for Noah's limited sensory threshold. I sat in the parking lot with a crying child who was dreading the retelling of the best story ever told. At the time, I desperately just wanted to worship my risen Lord, because I knew He was my daily source of hope for navigating this new world of disability and advocacy

no longer complementary. Easter baskets, church breakfasts, and big Sunday suppers were cherished traditions that I hoped to pass along to my family. It didn't take me too long to understand, however, that autism would change my Resurrection Sundays and all those treasured traditions.

Crisp linen outfits in pastels might as well have been sackcloth and ashes for my little

continued on p. 2



continued from p. 1

each day. But on that day (and other such days), it felt like, for all the hope resurrection brought us, our disability had won.

As the mother of a child with special needs, I urgently need every Sunday's reminder of the resurrection. That story tells me God has always been—and still is—watching over His people. He sees the tears of all parents and hears their frantic prayers for healing and hope. The story of Jesus' resurrection is the fulfillment of a promise to restore and make whole. My son will always have autism, but because of the resurrection, I can recognize Noah as whole and made in the image of a God who defeats death. It is a story of newness and hope—something I greatly needed each day as we learned to meet Noah's challenges with grace, humor, and that same hope.

Parents of children with special needs won't find the hope they need in a chocolate bunny or at the bottom of an Easter basket. They may not find it at family meals celebrating this special holiday. But they can find hope in the peace of mind gained when the church offers help so they can attend the worship services of Resurrection week—and every other week. As it turns out, our disability didn't really change Resurrection Sunday for the worse. It made me believe in it more!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Looking back, Vangie says there probably were a few simple things they could have done to proactively ward off much of the anxiety they experienced as they tried to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. In this issue's Tips for Teachers (p. 15), Vangie offers some ideas for reaching out to families who struggle with the limitations their child's disabilities bring to special events and holidays. Celebrating holidays are important to every family in your congregation, but may be even more so for these families because they are in need of an extra measure of hope.

✍ by Vangie Rodenbeck

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2015 *Toddlers & 2s Teacher*.

Toddlers & 2s

Friends at Church

Materials

materials as need for selected activities

An important part of unit 1 is the recognition that at church, every child belongs. Most parents want their child's deepest and longest-lasting relationships to be the ones they make through the church. This desire is no different for a family affected by special needs. Because their children will have fewer opportunities to make friends, these families probably are counting on the friendships made at church to be some of the few true friendships their child will make during childhood and into adolescence. During this unit of lessons, the teaching about being good friends is crucial to the development of those long-term friendships. Small acts of recognizing, accepting, and including each child, even those who seem disengaged because of their limitations, can forge tremendous bonds of friendship that make a lifetime of difference!

Lesson highlight for:

"Fun with Blocks," lesson 1 Activity Time; "Calling All Friends," lesson 2 Discovery Time; lesson 4 activities

Signs and Signals

A common classroom management issue with toddlers and 2s of all abilities is difficulty in making transitions from one activity to another. While consistent routine goes a long way toward accepting predictable transitions, some children may still struggle with this concept. Consider using a fun cleanup song as a cue that it is time to stop one activity, put away items being used, and move on to another activity. The benefit of a simple cleanup song is that it can be sung repeatedly in cheerful tones until the task is accomplished.

Lesson highlight for:

all lessons

Toddlers & 2s

A Will—and a Way

Materials

materials as needed for Bible Time

One of the best features of Immerse's Toddlers & 2s curriculum is the diversity of ways in which you can deliver Bible Time. Typically by the spring quarter, most children have transitioned well to the classroom routine and are ready for a more structured Bible Time. Children with developmental delays, however, may still need a more individualized instructional time. For children who do not seem to have the attention span for the longer version of Bible Time, consider carefully selecting one part of the lesson that really gets their attention and is enjoyable. Don't feel ineffective or inadequate if these children still aren't ready to listen for the same duration as the other children. Our goal is that all children are happy and feel at home while at church each week. Your small faithful act of sharing God's Word will not return empty!

Lesson highlight for:

all lessons

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2015 *Preschool Teacher*.

Preschool

Egg-stra Special Verse

Materials

slips of paper, marker, hollow plastic eggs

Teaching Tip

Consider using this activity for other units in the quarter. Replace the Bible word slips with new ones for each unit's Bible Memory.

While this Bible Memory game can be successful as written, a simple adaptation may make it even more doable for the child with limited language abilities. Write each word of the verse on separate slips of paper. (Words: You, are, the, Son, of, God) Be sure to include the Scripture reference on one slip. (Reference: Matthew 16:16) Place each slip inside a plastic egg and hide the eggs around the room. When the eggs have been found and opened, have the children repeat each word, one child at a time. Then say the entire verse together. This activity will be a winner with children of all abilities for the following reasons:

- Even children who are nonverbal will be able to participate by hunting for the eggs.
- Children with limited language ability may be able to repeat the one word they found in their eggs, even if they cannot recite the whole verse.
- A child confined to a wheelchair can assist the teacher by opening a "special egg" that contains where the verse can be found in the Bible.

Activity highlight for:

"Bible Memory Search," Jesus' Resurrection lesson Grow and Go

Feelings Frenzy

Materials

Resources CD Feelings Faces printable file

Children with developmental delays, especially those on the autism spectrum, may have difficulty naming emotions from facial cues. Asking, "What feeling does this face show?" can be as daunting as asking what the pictured person's date of birth might be.

Consider giving each picture a circumstance that the child might identify with in order to help the child label the emotion. Instead of pointing to the face that looks angry and just asking for the emotion, say: **It looks as though he is on the playground waiting for his turn to swing, but someone has pushed in front of him. Now he has to wait again. Does he feel happy or angry?** A few extra cues can make these activities more successful for children who are still learning to process emotions through facial cues.

Activity adaptation for:

"How Are You Feeling?" and "Finding Feelings," lesson 2 Getting Started; "Show My Feelings," lesson 2 More! Getting Started

Following the Leader

Materials

2 paper plates, green and red markers, craft stick, glue stick

How well a child does or does not follow directions may not be an accurate measure of obedience or the child's desire to obey. Children struggling with learning disabilities and attention disorders may have so many distractions in their environment that your voice is just one among many things competing for their attention. Children with autism-spectrum disorders may struggle with delays in processing verbal directions that make them appear to be completely tuned out to verbal instruction. Level the playing field for these students by adding visual cues to your verbal instruction.

Here's how:

- Before you begin the activity, tell students exactly what your directions are going to be. In this way, they get to hear the instructions twice.
- Consider posting written instructions or pictures of what the directions will be.
- Give a physical cue for a certain desired set of directions. For instance, let the children see you hop simultaneously as you give the verbal direction to hop.
- Model "stop" and "go" directions through the use of a two-sided sign. With a green marker, write "Go" on one paper plate. Using a red marker, write "Stop" on a second paper plate. Glue the plates back to back, gluing a craft stick handle between the plates.

Capturing attention through the added use of visual cues can make classroom management easier as children learn to both watch and listen for your directions.

Activity adaptation for:

"Teacher Says," lesson 4 More! Getting Started; "Teacher Says," lesson 8 More! Getting Started

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2015
Pre-K & K Teacher:

Pre-K & K

Wonderfully Made

Throughout unit 1, children will be learning about Jesus and the miracles He performed. In several lessons, you will be talking about the emotions and feelings felt by the people who received healing. This means exploring how people affected by disability might feel about their limitations.

This topic might seem uncomfortable in a class that includes a child or family affected by disability. Rather than skip this part of the lesson, consider using it as a time to affirm both the negative and positive feelings associated with the child's special need. Because Jesus' ultimate goal in healing was restoration and wholeness, we can recognize all the ways a person is still whole despite the limitations. SAY: **Even though Tyrone's legs don't work the way ours do, God still uses him every day. See how Jesus uses Tyrone to encourage us each week! He can paint and sing and is such an important part of our church family because of his gifts and abilities.**

When we acknowledge the limitations and recognize how God continues to work in the lives of people with disabilities, we begin to understand God's work of restoration in each of our lives.

Lesson highlight for:

"Special Needs, Special Feelings," lesson 2 Getting Started; any lesson about healing

Heartfelt Praise

Materials

(optional: colorful fabric or crepe-paper streamers)

This quarter's special unit includes a lesson about the triumphal entry, focusing on welcoming Jesus through our praise. During the lesson, teachers are encouraged to talk about ways to praise Jesus through singing, praying, and Scripture recitation. Even though these are certainly excellent ways to praise, children who are nonverbal are left with few options in which to express their heartfelt praise.

Consider the strengths of students with disabilities and think of ways they can use those strengths to praise God. Do you have a child who likes to run and move? Could that child use his body to praise the Lord by waving a piece of colorful fabric or crepe-paper streamers? Perhaps you have a child who can do little but sit in a wheelchair and smile at others. Is there a way you can point out that her kind smile is a reflection of God's love for us and is, therefore, an expression of praise? Thinking outside the box about what praise might look like if you couldn't speak or sing will enrich every child's heartfelt expression of praise.

Activity adaptation for:

"Singing Praise," Triumphal Entry lesson Grow and Go; "Scout's Day to Praise" and "Let's Praise Jesus" Triumphal Entry lesson More! Grow and Go

Canines to the Rescue!

Materials

laptop (or phone or tablet with Internet access)

Because several of this quarter's lessons focus on people struggling with disability, you have a great opportunity to raise awareness among your students about the issue! In lesson 4, Scout encounters a guide dog and shares with the children about the experience. Physicians and therapists are finding that dogs can be an effective part of not only the healing process but also the daily life of a person with special needs. Canine assistants are used in a variety of therapeutic settings, including children's hospitals and senior living facilities.

Consider watching during class time a video about the life and work of service dogs. Search YouTube for "Galion Therapy Dog Shepherd Center." The two-minute video, narrated by Galion, a therapy dog, presents a beautiful picture of God using His own creation to heal and restore.

Activity highlight for:

"Scout and the Seeing Eye Dog," lesson 4 More! Grow and Go

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2015 *Early Elementary Teacher*.

Early Elementary

One of a Kind

Materials

poster board, marker, pictures of things people do (eat, work, play, etc.), index cards, reusable adhesive

Before Class

Write on index cards attributes and actions of God. (Examples: never sins, knows everything, creates from nothing, all-powerful)

Being Bold

Materials

selected pictures for activity (see below), poster board, glue sticks, marker

Before Class

Search the Internet or magazines for images that show adults and children doing something dangerous or without fear (climbing a rock wall, hang gliding, fighting a fire, etc.)

The idea that Jesus was both human and God is an abstract concept—even for adults! By creating a visual representation, children will be able to process the idea more effectively. SAY: **When Jesus came to earth, there had never been anyone like Him! Jesus was a man, but He also is God. Let's explore things that people can do and things that only God can do.**

Draw three columns on a poster board and label the columns in the following order: God, Jesus, People. Show the pictures and prepared cards. Have the children identify each picture and card and attach it to the board under one of two headings, either God or People. Then have the children discuss which pictures and cards apply to Jesus. As each quality of Jesus is identified, move the picture or card, under the Jesus heading on the chart. SAY: **Jesus was both a person and He is God! He is the only one who is both!**

Activity adaptation for:

"Who Is Jesus?" Triumphal Entry lesson Focus In

Being bold and having courage are abstract concepts. Seeing pictures that depict these concepts can be helpful.

SAY: **When people do things that are dangerous or difficult, we say they have courage. When people speak out or do something hard without fear, we say they are doing it boldly. Let's look at some pictures that can help us understand these words.** Give each child one of the pictures you have gathered. Allow the kids to show their pictures to the group and explain what they see in the pictures. Add each picture to the poster board and ask children to help you think of a title to write at the top of the board.

ASK: **Have you ever done something boldly? When have you needed courage to do something?** Reassure kids that sometimes it is hard to be courageous and bold—and that's OK. God loves us. He can help us have the courage we need.

Activity adaptation for:

"Being Bold," lesson 8 Focus In

Permission is granted to reproduce the Bible Flash Cards for use with this activity adaptation—not for resale.

Early Elementary

Philip Tells

Materials

Bible, world map, two male dolls or action figures, toy horses and a chariot (or toy to use as a chariot), scroll (or sheet of paper rolled), tub of water (optional:
Early Elementary Resources sheet 7 Bible Cover Story Scenes 9a and 9b)

Teaching Tip

Showing the *Resources* story scenes 9a and 9b can help students visualize the story characters and setting as they might have appeared in Bible times.

Following a story while doing motions might be difficult for students who have motor-planning issues, visual motor-integration issues, or difficulty remaining on task. With the use of props, these children can visually experience the story as it unfolds and retell it to reinforce the concepts.

SAY: We are going to learn how Philip, who was a disciple of Jesus, helped someone else learn about Jesus' love. Show the children where this story is in the Bible. (Acts 8) Point to the country of Ethiopia on the map. Using the props, tell the story about Philip and the Ethiopian official.

SAY: It is always an important Bible story when someone learns about Jesus. Let's review the story so we can remember it and tell it to our friends and family. Allow children to take turns retelling the story, using the props.

Activity adaptation for:

"Bible Exploration," lesson 9 Explore His Word

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2015
Middle Elementary Teacher.

Middle Elementary

I Love It!

Materials

whiteboard and tack magnets (or poster board and reusable adhesive), old catalogs and magazines, scissors, unlined index cards, markers

Before Class

Gather a selection of catalogs and magazines that would show images of things kids might love (places, toys, electronics, etc.).

Trying to recall the previous students' responses might be very hard for some children (as in the activity "I Love This, You Love That"). In the "Love Posters" activity, some children may have difficulty writing or drawing their ideas, and some may have trouble retrieving the names of people and objects. Providing catalogs and magazines can allow these students to participate without the need to retrieve names or other words.

SAY: We all have things that we really love—sports, games, people, and so on. Today we are going to talk about how we use the word *love*, and then we will discover what Jesus says about love.

Model the activity by placing on the board three pictures of things you love. (Examples: pictures of children, a computer, a beach) Then encourage each student to find (or draw on index cards) three pictures that show people or things that he loves. Allow kids to place their selected pictures on the board, and offer an opportunity for sharing about the pictures.

SAY: We love different people, places, and things. The way in which we love these things is different too. For example, we feel affection for our relatives or friends, but we feel excited about being at a beach and happy that we have favorite possessions.

Activity adaptation for:

"I Love This, You Love That" and "Love Posters," lesson 4 Focus In

Ready and Waiting

Materials

Resources sheets 2 and 6 (oil lamp and jar), *Middle Elementary Teacher*

Kids with autism and kids with anxiety might have a difficult time with the parable of the 10 virgins. These students may perseverate on (continue to think about) Jesus' coming back and wonder if that will be scary. They might be frightened by the thought of being separated from their families and friends. Consider rewording the review questions so kids can be reassured as they process the amazing truth that Jesus was teaching.

After the story, ASK: **What did Jesus want the people to learn?** (that He is going to return and He wants people to love and obey Him while they are on earth) **What did the wise people in the story do?** (prepared for the special event that was coming) **What does Jesus want us to do?** (prepare for Jesus' coming by obeying Him)

SAY: Jesus wants us to be ready for His return. When we go to Heaven someday, we will have everything we want and need, and we will not be afraid or sad ever again!

Activity adaptation for:

"Bible Exploration," lesson 5 Explore His Word

Middle Elementary

Let's Remember

Materials

kitchen towel, tray, holiday objects (Valentine card, shamrock, flag or picture of fireworks, Halloween decoration, Pilgrim figurine, Christmas ornament), whiteboard, dry-erase marker, picture of Communion elements (or actual elements)

Before Class

Place the holiday objects on the tray. Then place the tray on a table where kids will see it.

In the “Remembering” activity, children who struggle with anger and impulse control may be upset that they were not told that they were supposed to be observing the teacher’s clothing and objects being held. Kids who have difficulty processing spoken information may have trouble with an activity that asks, “What holiday do you think of when you see a _____?” Giving clear directions and providing actual objects to look at can help kids focus more easily on the task and draw meaning from it.

As the kids arrive, draw their attention to the tray with objects on it. **SAY: I want you to notice the tray on the table. This is a looking game, not a touching game. Fold your hands while you look at the objects. Try to remember as many objects as you can.**

After all kids have observed the tray, cover the objects with a towel and ask the kids to list what they recall. List the objects on the board. Then ask whether the kids know what the objects have in common. (Answer: Each object represents a special day.) Show a picture of Communion elements (or the elements themselves), and ask the children whether they know what these elements represent. (Answer: the Lord’s Supper)

Activity adaptation for:

“Remembering” and “Memory Game,” lesson 6 Focus In

Special Note: Teaching Kids About Communion:

Some children may perseverate on the “blood and guts” aspects of Communion. If you have children in your class who fit this profile, be factual but brief with these descriptions. Rein in conversation if necessary by saying, “We are finished with that topic now.” Remind kids that we use symbols for lots of things, and these particular symbols represent Jesus’ love for us.

Consider having children help with Communion preparation, perhaps counting out Communion cups, setting a Communion table, or baking bread. This allows the kids to actively participate in this special observance and gives them an opportunity to serve the church.

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Spring 2015 *PreTeen Teacher*.

PreTeen

Give Me a Hand!

Materials

writing utensil, container of sand (or sheet of paper), medium-size object to move

For kids whose special needs require the use of electronic equipment, such as hearing devices used with cochlear implants or hearing aids, you must always be cautious with activities involving water. Any contact with water can cause irreparable damage to the device, making it inoperable and leaving the child unable to hear anything.

You can alter this activity by simply allowing students with electronic devices the opportunity to complete a different activity—without the use of their hands but with the same challenge. With hands behind their backs, they could try writing their name in sand or on a piece of paper, or they could try moving an object on the table from one place to another.

After the activity, discuss the importance of each body part functioning together and supporting each other. Compare this to the church and point out how each person is an important part of the church. We all need each other, and everyone is needed!

Activity adaptation for:

“A Healthy Body,” lesson 5 Live It Out

Who Would You Choose?

Materials

2 adults to lead the game

Kids with processing disorders quickly can become overwhelmed when given a series of instructions to follow. When elevated voices or over-the-top delivery is added, as suggested in *PreTeen Teacher*, these kids may pull back from the activity and isolate themselves in an effort to manage the sensory assault they are experiencing.

Alter the activity by having your two adult leaders offer a brief explanation of how they will lead their games in two different styles. Allow the students to choose the leader and game style they prefer. When kids have completed the chosen activities, ask them to share why they chose their preferred leader. Encourage kids to share how they think they might have done had they participated in a game under a leader with a different style. **SAY: People sometimes choose to follow or not follow other people based on what they know (or think they know) about those people. We’re going to find out how some people in the Bible responded to Jesus’ leadership when He showed up as king.**

Activity adaptation for:

“Follow the Leader,” lesson 7 Focus In

In Your Own Words

Materials

praise song recording, MP3 player (or other digital media player), copies of printed lyrics, highlighter

Before Class

Review the praise song you have chosen for this activity. Highlight on the printed lyrics any phrases that include abstract thinking.

Kids on the autism spectrum often are concrete thinkers. Figures of speech and abstract phrases used to convey emotions in songs can elude kids who think this way. For example, in a song like “Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah” there are a number of phrases that would confuse a concrete thinker. It would be difficult for some to comprehend the “sun and moon and stars on high” praising Jehovah.

Before playing the song you have selected, have kids find partners. Give each pair a copy of the song lyrics. Explain that sometimes songs use familiar words or phrases to represent ideas that are harder to understand. Have the kids work with their partners to read the words of the song. Partners can discuss highlighted phrases that use imagery to convey an emotion or relationship with Christ. Have everyone come back together. Ask volunteers to share what they think the song lyrics mean. Then listen to the song and sing it together.

Activity adaptation for:

“Sing Praise” lesson 8 Live It Out

Tips for Teachers: **Making Holidays Accessible**



Spring quarter usually presents some unique challenges for families affected by special needs or disabilities. Vacations away from home and routines or an influx of visitors at worship services during the Easter season can be more than some children can handle. The end to a long winter can also introduce a flurry of new springtime activities at church, school, and neighborhood. All of these factors can over-stimulate many special needs children.

Here are a few ideas that can make changes in routine easier for these families:

- If your congregation changes worship schedules for holidays, call ahead and speak with the family about what their needs are. Ask which service they are considering attending. Let them know what you are offering for their child's age level at each worship opportunity.
- If you expect increased attendance on holidays, consider reserving parking spots close to your building's entrance for families with special needs.
- When your congregation has a special meal together, ask the parents what dietary restrictions you need to address so that their family could participate fully. Consider what reserved seating you need to set aside for this family so the mealtime will be enjoyable. Be sure to ask another family to join them so they aren't enjoying your hospitality alone.
- If you are adding volunteers and personnel with whom a child may not be familiar, consider introducing them to the child ahead of time. Or take pictures of the volunteers and e-mail them to the family so parents can show their child whom he can expect to see in class.
- As much as possible, keep the children with special needs in a space with which they are familiar. However, if overcrowding necessitates a change of venue, visit the room prior to service or take pictures of the room and show them to the child ahead of time.
- Provide a picture schedule (even for older children who may not routinely need this support) to show all the fun ways you are going to be learning about Jesus' resurrection.
- Think ahead about any multisensory items that will be added to the day's experience. (Examples: candles, food or snack items, special lighting, etc.) Let the child know ahead of time what will happen differently.
- Ask parents and caregivers what ways you think their child will best experience God's love on overcrowded Sundays. It may mean that you keep one small valuable part of the routine—or even start something new you hadn't even thought of.
- During and after the worship service, text (or e-mail) to parents happy messages and pictures of their child experiencing with their church friends. A picture is worth a thousand words!!

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