

# MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY'RE AT

## How we can adapt our teaching for younger and older students

### Toolbox III

**Suggested Session Length:** 60 minutes

**PowerPoint Available:** "Toolbox III: Meeting Students Where They're At"

**Audience:** Experienced preschool and elementary DL Lead Teachers

**General Topic:** Practical ways to lead and teach both younger and older students.

*Note: We do not want to use specific ages in this training. We'll just refer to "older students" and "younger students" and churches can define that how they want.*

#### **Slide 1: Title**

#### **Slide 2: The Shoe**

**Training idea:** *Hold up a shoe and ask trainees to describe the shoe. This idea is written into the text.*

How can we proactively create the best learning experience for a student regardless of their age? Let me ask you a question. *Hold up the shoe.* Tell me everything you can about the shoe. *Encourage trainees to continue describing the shoe using every single detail they can think of.* We really know a lot about this shoe, don't we? But in its simplest form, it's a....what? A shoe! It's simply a shoe used to protect someone's foot.

When we teach, we need to remember the shoe. We can study the lesson, dig deep into commentaries, and learn everything we can about that passage of Scripture so that we have a list of very interesting details and thoughts a mile long. But we have to remember who we are teaching and how much our students can take in and actually apply. For students, it's a....shoe!

#### **Slide 3: Proactive measures**

What proactive measures can we take to ensure that we are not teaching too high or too low?

- 1) Select teachers wisely
- 2) Teach to students' specific age level
- 3) Evaluate if they are learning

We'll walk through each of these points for the rest of our training.

#### **Slide 4: Select teachers wisely**

Teaching appropriately to different ages begins with teacher selection. Some teachers are naturally better at teaching older or younger students. Let's think about some characteristics that might make someone more effective at teaching younger students and characteristics that might make someone more effective at teaching older students.

***Training idea:** Before going through the characteristics, break trainees into groups of 3-4 people. Give the groups a few minutes to brainstorm together what types of qualities might make someone successful at teaching younger students and what qualities might make someone more successful at teaching older students.*

#### **Slide 5: Teachers for younger students**

***Training idea:** As you share these characteristics, weave in examples of teachers who have exhibited these qualities and specific examples of things they did to demonstrate those qualities.*

1. **Communication** - Can they communicate ideas in simple ways?
2. **Stability** - Are they able to be there consistently and are they a steady person so students feel comfortable and safe with them? Do they enjoy repetition, and can they create a pattern in their class with a simple schedule and a steady routine?
3. **Engaging** - Do they have an upbeat personality that is engaging for younger students?
4. **Preference** - Have you ever observed them talking to younger children - do they enjoy them?
5. **Patience** - Do they have the patience to help children sit and learn? Can they show compassion to students who are struggling?
6. **Energy** - Are they energetic and flexible? It's a high energy environment!
7. **Preparation** - Are they organized and well prepared so they can focus on the students?

#### **Slide 6: Teachers for older students**

***Training idea:** As you share these characteristics, weave in examples of teachers who have exhibited these qualities and specific examples of things they did to demonstrate those qualities.*

1. **Vision** - Do they believe older students can learn and be Kingdom-movers? Do they have a passion to see students disciplined to follow Jesus?
2. **Preference** - Do they love talking with older students?
3. **Fun** - Do they use fun and lighthearted moments to laugh and connect with the students?
4. **Steady** - Are they patient with the students while holding high standards?
5. **Leadership** - Can they establish their leadership in the classroom, so the students do not take over? Are they a positive example of godly leadership for the students?
6. **Trustworthy** - Students at this age are just opening up and building relationships. Will the teacher be there on a regular basis, will they pray for the students, and will they be well prepared?
7. **Energetic** - Are they energetic? Will they teach with excitement and props?
8. **Spiritually Mature** - As the Lead Teacher, can they answer students' tougher theological questions?

### **Slide 7: Preparing to teach**

Now that we've identified characteristics of a strong Lead Teacher, let's think about the ways that we can get ready to teach younger and older students.

### **Slide 8: The On Track Map**

An excellent tool for understanding how to teach students well is the On Track Map. The On Track Map is a tool for DL leaders and parents that establishes spiritual goals for each age group. As teachers grow in experience and skill, we encourage them to incorporate more On Track Map skills into their teaching.

***Training idea:** Hand out a copy of the On Track Map to each leader and take time to look over the resource. Notice differences between younger and older students.*

### **Slide 9: Think through expectations for younger students**

Think through the lens of the younger students. What do they do during the week? What is expected of them at home? If they attend preschool, what is expected of them there? Knowing the answers to these questions will help you determine how you need to train your students in your classroom.

***Training idea:** Talk together as a group about how you can find the answers to these questions. What resources do you have?*

DL sets a high bar with our basic classroom expectations, and we know that our students can learn to meet these expectations. This will take time, repetition, and patience. Your investment of teaching younger students how to act/listen/learn will impact them for the rest of their years in DL.

### **Slide 10: Think through expectations for older students**

Think through the lens of the older students. What do they do during the week? What is expected of them at home? What is expected of them at school? What are they experiencing in their world? Knowing the answers to these questions will help you determine how you need to train your students in your classroom.

***Training idea:** Talk together as a group about how you can find the answers to these questions. What resources do you have?*

As students get older, they will be able to focus for longer periods of time and engage in deeper conversation. If we set the groundwork well when they were younger, we will be able to build on the foundations for classroom expectations that we set.

### **Slide 11: Think about what interests younger students**

Now let's think about what interests younger students. How would they choose to spend their time? What kinds of games do they play or shows do they watch? What do they enjoy doing?

#### ***Training ideas:***

- *Show a clip from a show that is currently popular with younger students, and/or talk briefly about the kinds of games/shows/apps that interest them.*
- *Many kids today spend a substantial amount of time on electronics, but there are many other things that children enjoy doing. Brainstorm together as a group a list of (non-electronic) things you enjoyed doing as kids that younger kids still like to do.*

### **Slide 12: Think about what interests older students**

Let's think about what interests older students. How would they choose to spend their time? What kinds of games do they play or activities do they enjoy? What kind of shows do they watch or apps do they use? What do they enjoy doing?

#### ***Training ideas:***

- *Show a video of a show that is currently popular with older students. Or look at apps/video games that are popular with that age group.*
- *Unfortunately, many kids today spend an unhealthy amount of time on electronics. Brainstorm together as a group a list of (non-electronic) things you enjoyed doing as kids that older kids still like to do.*

### **Slide 13: Teach for a realistic amount of time**

In addition to knowing what our students like, we can do some practical things to help them stay engaged. The first thing is to teach for a realistic amount of time.

We need to teach so the students remain engaged. The general rule is that children can pay attention for two to three minutes for each year of their age. So...

- A 2-year-old will typically pay attention for 4-6 minutes.
- A 4-year-old will typically pay attention for 8-12 minutes.
- A 6-year-old will typically pay attention for 12-18 minutes.
- An 8-year-old will typically pay attention for 16-24 minutes.
- A 10-year-old will typically pay attention for 20-30 minutes.

These timeframes are a great starting point, but we believe that children can *learn* to pay attention even longer. With a patient teacher who is engaging and gently reinforces expectations, students can build up their "sit and listen" muscles.

### **Slide 14: Keeping younger students engaged**

Here are some ways for teachers to help keep younger students engaged for the maximum amount of learning time possible:

- **Preparation** - Be extremely familiar with your lesson. Occasionally refer to your lesson outline and notes as needed, but you should maintain eye contact with the students most of the time as you teach.
- **Movement** - Incorporate movement into the lesson. Move to a different part of the room and finish the lesson there. Have the students occasionally clap, jump up, or walk in place when it fits with the Bible narrative.
- **Variety** - Change the tone and volume of your voice as it fits with the events in the Bible narrative.
- **Surprises** - Include surprise elements such as pulling props from a closed box, having pictures covered and revealing only parts of it as you teach, drawing the lesson and using bright colors to fill in the pictures, and having a guest come in during the lesson to help act it out.
- **Response** - Give students interactive, group ways to respond such as: asking them a question and having them give a thumbs up or down for the answer, have them fill in the blank, ask a multiple-choice question and let them shout out the answer.

***Training idea:** Give trainees the lesson at the end of this outline. Have them break up into five groups. Assign each group one of the strategies listed on Slide 14 and ask them to come up with specific ways to implement that strategy when teaching the lesson to kindergarten students.*

### **Slide 15: Keeping older students engaged**

Here are some ways to help keep older students engaged and excited to learn:

#### **Older students:**

- **Standards** - Set expectations. Expect students to be respectful and follow the standards. Provide positive reinforcement when they do. ***Training idea:** ask trainees to quickly list what the standards are for older students. If they can't, that is a good indication that they need to invest some time into defining the standards for their students.*
- **Visuals** - All students like visuals, including older students. Visual learners need to see information in order to effectively process it.
- **Dig deeper** - The older the student, the more you can challenge them to dig deeper. Add in things you learned from your own study of the passage - interesting facts, cultural context, and parts that might be hard to understand or more appropriate for older students to talk about.
- **Stories** - Tell short, child-appropriate stories and testimonies from your own life as it fits within the lesson.
- **Response** - Give students opportunities to respond such as: asking open-ended questions, taking polls, having them write down a response/verse/key point from the lesson, or having them answer a question by discussing with a friend.

**Training idea:** Give trainees the lesson at the end of this outline. Have them break up into five groups. Assign each group one of the strategies listed on Slide 15 and ask them to come up with specific ways to implement that strategy when teaching the lesson to 5th grade students.

### **Slide 16: Evaluate if students are learning**

Teachers should periodically spend time evaluating their effectiveness at teaching at age-appropriate levels.

### **Slide 17: Evaluating teaching to younger students**

Let's look at some questions we could ask to help us know if we're teaching in age-appropriate ways for younger students.

**Testimonies:** Have you heard any testimonies from the younger students' parents or leaders?

When we are teaching younger students effectively, things you might hear are:

- "I went to the dining room and saw all my young children praying together before they ate their lunch. I was amazed."
- "It was my child's birthday and I said, "you are 3 today!" My child immediately started saying Proverbs 3:5-6. I had no clue my child memorized verses in DL."
- "My child's public school teacher informed me that my child told her about Jesus using the Wordless Book colors during class. I was amazed by how bold my child was at school."
- "I saw three children raise their hands saying they wanted Jesus to be their Savior. I took them to the hallway to have a deeper discussion with them and I was amazed with how ready they were for salvation."

**Review:** Can the younger students answer simple and basic questions from previous lessons and On Track Map topics during the "Know Right" review time and pre-service review game?

**Engagement:** Are the students sitting upright, focused, and not requesting to go to the bathroom during class? Frequent bathroom requests are an indicator that students are bored and disengaged.

**Return:** Do they want to come back? A younger student who is learning in meaningful ways will often beg their parents to go to church.

## **Slide 18: Evaluating teaching to older students**

Let's look at some questions we could ask to help us know if we're teaching in age-appropriate ways for older students.

**Testimonies:** Have you heard any testimonies from the older students' parents or leaders?

When we are teaching older students effectively, things you might hear are:

- "My child wrote an essay about Jesus and then presented it to the class in the public school."
- "My granddaughter boldly told two of her friends about Jesus at school. To our surprise the entire family showed up at church the following Sunday"
- "I can see so much spiritual growth in my class this year. It started out rough...but I see God at work."
- "The kids in my class are asking some really insightful questions. We are having some great discussions."

**Engagement:** Are they focused, opening their Bibles, and asking and answering questions? Or are they chatting with friends and watching the clock?

**Review:** Can they answer more difficult questions from previous lessons and the On Track Map during the pre-service and end-of-class review games?

**Questions and Discussion:** Are they asking good questions? Do they want to discuss topics further with their leaders?

As you evaluate, if you find that students are not learning in age-appropriate ways, review whether the right leaders are in place. If the right leaders are in place, review the tips given in this training and commit to implementing them.

## **Slide 19: Any questions?**

Any questions? *Close with time for Q&A, then end with prayer.*

## ***Sample Lesson to be used with Slides 14 and 15***

# **LESSON 7**

**Matthew 8:5-13**

<b>Know Right:</b>	The centurion believes in Jesus.
<b>Think Right:</b>	"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Acts 16:31 (Top 12)
<b>Do Right:</b>	I will put my total faith in Jesus.
<b>Feel Right:</b>	I can feel confident when I put my faith in Jesus.

## **Lesson Introduction for the Classroom**

**Lead Teachers ~ Connecting the DT to the Lesson:** In our game today, the host kept asking, "Is this your final answer?" Often the question was answered with confidence, but at other times the contestant didn't answer with confidence. How confident are you in what you believe about Jesus? Do you truly believe in Jesus? Do you really believe His Word is truth? In our lesson today, we are going to hear about a man who not only knows who Jesus is, he believes in Him, and he has 100% faith in Him...and that was his final answer. Is Jesus your final answer? Let's discover what this means in our Bible lesson today.

**Pray:** *Invite a student to open your class in a time of prayer. Ask God to bless and really challenge every student in the room to confidently believe in Jesus today.*

**Find it:** *Write the verse reference on the whiteboard and have students open their Bibles. Teach that the reference is the verse's address in the Bible. Why is it important to actually look things up in the Bible for yourself? (So you can be confident that what we teach is actually true)*

**Timeline:** *Ask students in your class where you would find a lesson about the life of Jesus here on earth. Have students point to the NT portion of the timeline in your classroom.*

### **Introduction to the Bible Lesson:**

Today we are going to learn about a man who could confidently say, "Jesus is my final answer!" He totally believed in Jesus and His power. Let's open our Bibles to Matthew 8.



# Scripture Outline for the Classroom

## Matthew 8:5-13

### Faith in Jesus

#### **Read Matthew 8:5-7**

**Recap:** What is a Roman centurion? (The commander of the ancient Roman army) The Roman centurion's servant was paralyzed. What does "paralyzed" mean? (Unable to move) The centurion showed his faith in Jesus when he asked Jesus to heal his servant. What does "faith" mean? (Total belief and trust in Jesus) Because of his faith, Jesus told the centurion that He would come and heal his servant.

### Humility and faith

#### **Read Matthew 8:8-9**

**Recap:** The centurion showed great humility, as well as an understanding of Jesus' authority and power. He knew that Jesus could heal his servant at His will. This means Jesus can do anything He wants at any time. That takes a lot of faith and an understanding of who Jesus is.

How much faith do you have in Jesus on a scale of 1 to 10? Do you really trust Him when you are in a crisis? At home? At school? Is He your final answer in life?

*Lead Teacher's note: give a short personal example of how you've demonstrated faith in your life.*

### Remarkable faith

#### **Read Matthew 8:10**

**Recap:** Jesus pointed out the centurion's remarkable faith. He said that there was no one else in Israel - not even the Israelites, God's chosen people - who had that kind of faith.

This is amazing because the centurion was a Gentile. A Gentile is someone who is not Jewish. The Jews (Israelites) always looked down on the Gentiles. This statement that Jesus made about the Gentiles is very important, because it shows that Jesus loves and values both the Jews and Gentiles. He truly loves all people of the world, and He wants all people to understand and receive the gift of His salvation. Acts 16:31 is written for everyone! The centurion was a great example of what true faith in Jesus is all about.

## **Everyone needs to have faith in Jesus**

### **Read Matthew 8:11-12**

**Recap:** Jesus indicated that there will not only be Israelites that go to heaven, but there will also be Gentiles. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all Jewish leaders. These leaders will be part of heaven, where people from all countries will gather someday.

In contrast, those Israelites who didn't have faith in Jesus received their punishment.

When the Bible talks about darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, it refers to a place called hell. Hell is real, just as much as heaven is real. It is a place where people who choose not to believe in Jesus will go after they die. We can be thankful that God does not want anyone to go there, which is why He gave us the gift of Jesus. *Refer to Lessons 1-3.* We can choose to receive this gift and believe in Jesus, or we can choose to reject it. God loves us so much, He gives us a choice to believe or not (Acts 16:31). Our decision has an end result of heaven or a place where we will be separated from God forever. When we talk about the Wordless Book, we often talk about heaven and the importance of having our sin forgiven so we can go to heaven. The reality is, if you do not believe in Jesus, you cannot go to heaven. You need to be bold enough to say, "Jesus is my final answer."

*Lead Teacher's note: you should give time for students to receive further counseling for salvation if they are not confident of their salvation.*

## **The results of faith**

### **Read Matthew 8:13**

**Recap:** Can you imagine how pleased Jesus was to say "yes" to the centurion's request? The centurion made a statement about his belief, and Jesus demonstrated His power by healing the centurion's servant from a distance. Wow, isn't that amazing?

## **Conclusion:**

Jesus healed someone physically in this lesson, and He can also heal you spiritually. The question is, do you confidently believe in Him? Let's bow our heads. Think of the time when you personally told Jesus you believed in Him and needed Him to save you from your sin. Do you remember this time? If not, you can make this decision today by just praying and talking to Him. If you would like to talk to a leader, look at them right now, and they will take you to the hallway, so you can have some time to ask more questions.

*Give remaining students a moment to pray silently; then close by praying aloud and thanking God for sending His Son to be our Savior.*

### **Do Right and Feel Right:**

When we face challenges in life, whether in friendships, losing a game, sickness, parents fighting, or getting divorced – to whom do we turn? In whom do we have faith? Is it in ourselves? Someone else? Something else?

The Roman centurion knew that there is only One who can meet our needs, whatever they are. That One is Jesus. He is the only One in whom we can have total faith. Jesus was the centurion's "final answer."

Having Jesus as your final answer begins with believing in Him and Him alone to save us from our sin. When we do this, we can truly feel forgiven. Is Jesus your final answer?

### **Review Questions: What did you discover today?**

1. What kind of help did the centurion need? (He needed his servant to be healed)
2. Why was the servant healed? (Jesus healed the servant because of the centurion's great faith)
3. What does the word "faith" mean? (Total belief and trust in Jesus)
4. If a person has faith in Jesus, where will they be some day? (The kingdom of heaven)
5. What is the kingdom of heaven like? (It is a perfect place where there is no sin; many from all over the world will be there)
6. If a person does not have faith in Jesus, what will happen to them some day? (They will go to utter darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth)
7. Do you have total faith in Jesus? Is that your final answer?