

WHAT TO TEACH?

Why write your own? Why not?

A very common question we get asked is, "What curriculum do you use?" And when we answer that we write our own, the next question is, "How do we do that?"

When we say curriculum or series, we mean the document (or detailed plan) which has each lesson you will teach to explain the Bible to children, help them remember what it says, apply it to their lives, and even teach it to someone else. It is not rewriting the Bible or making the Bible fit what we want to teach the kids!

I remember going to a kids' ministry training conference, and one breakout session was on "Write Your Own Curriculum." Her opening line was, "Don't do it!" So yes, there are some cons to writing your own:

- Very time-consuming
- It requires a certain skill set which develops over years. We sometimes read stuff we wrote years ago and go, "Eish, who wrote that?"
- You need access to a lot of resources like artists and media, and you have to navigate copyright restrictions
- You can burn out leaders who are already carrying a full load
- Sometimes your creativity runs out

BUT there are also some huge benefits to writing your own curriculum, or at least adapting someone else's lessons and making them your own:

- Kids' church and adult church are ONE church, so teach what is in line with what the adults are learning. You can adapt preaching notes and training manuals.
- You can write a curriculum aimed directly at your kids, for the season they are in, and not something random and unrelated.
- Not much local content is available (most curricula out there are American or British), so writing your own can make it more relatable and familiar.
- Once you've written or adapted a curriculum to be your own, the resource is now yours to teach and share.

For me personally, the best part of being part of the team that writes curriculum is the massive “A-ha” moments I have, when I feel God speaking directly to me through my deep dives into the Word. Those personal revelations sometimes don’t even go into the actual lesson but were just for me from my Jesus.

Having said that, there are a lot of excellent curricula out there that are good and ready to use. Just remember, no matter whose you use, still study the Scriptures for yourselves and then adapt the lessons for the children you are teaching, considering their age, language abilities, and other factors.

So while we are now going to focus on what writing a curriculum looks like, most of this applies to adapting one too. A common mistake is to just sit down and write, but the steps before this are super important.

How to Write a Curriculum

Pray, pray, and pray: before, during, during again, and after. The Holy Spirit has been given to us for a reason. He teaches, He brings what Jesus has said to remembrance, He helps us understand, and He gives us the gifts of creativity and teaching. This is not our message we are passing on; it is God’s, so we need to rely on Him.

Brainstorm together: I would not recommend trying to write a curriculum on your own. Our team is a mix of young adults, middle-aged, and retired people. We meet together to discuss the overall main theme of the curriculum and specific lesson topics. This is not cast in stone because you have not studied yet.

Study: Believers should be continually studying the Word. Whether you are writing your own or using someone else’s, this is a very important step. You need to be teaching children from a place of understanding and revelation. Remember to read the Bible for yourself before someone else’s opinions or commentaries. AI is not Spirit-led and is such an easy and dangerous trap to fall into. It can be helpful to find game ideas or where a verse is found, but asking ChatGPT to “write a lesson on the trial of Jesus” is not honouring God.

Studying the Word is often where our theme will come from and is the foundation needed for brainstorming. While studying the Word, ask yourself questions such as: Who wrote it? What is the context? Who is speaking? Who are they speaking to?

All of these are important because, for example, James is speaking to believers when he says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2). An unbeliever could not realistically be told to rejoice in trials without first knowing Christ.

Context is important: “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1) but the full verse is, “Only fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’”. A totally different meaning if not read in the fullness of what it was written.

Example of Our Writing Process

Our team was asked to write a lesson on the trial of Jesus, and our starting point was to get a full view of the story. We printed out and sat around a table to read through all the Gospels where the trial is found. We kept noticing the word “innocent” coming up again and again. We made note of everyone who said Jesus was innocent, and we saw that even those who wanted Him killed found no fault with Him. Throughout the whole trial, Jesus allowed them to accuse, convict, and eventually kill Him.

When we read Jesus’ own words in John 10:18:

“No one can take My life from Me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again.”

We knew we had our main focus. With this, we were ready to write.

Write: Having a structure helps your leaders to understand and follow the flow of the lesson. This does not mean they are taught in this order. It is key that every section within your lesson must link back to your main idea, the truth you want your child to walk away knowing.

1. Main Idea: What you want the children to walk away with.

Our main idea was: “Jesus was innocent. No one took His life. He gave it.”

2. Memory Verse: A Bible verse that links to the main idea, and a way to understand and learn it.

We made cards for the kids to play a game with and put in the correct order.

3. Hands-on: An activity, object lesson, or game where children use their senses to understand a concept that links back to your main idea.

When studying the trial, we saw the religious leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy because He said He would destroy and rebuild the temple in three days. We used boxes to explain how Jesus had actually done this. (Jesus was speaking about Himself. He would be killed and raised. He would give His life and take it back again so that God’s presence in the temple is now replaced with God’s presence in us.)

4. Bible Story & Lesson: Biblical truths and how you will teach them so the children understand and can apply them.

We wrote a script for the leader and used children in the class to tell the story. Each child was given a speech bubble to hold up and everyone read them out loud together.

Tip: Picture actually teaching a child what you have written. Often doing this changes your approach totally. (Older kids had actual verses, middle children had “He is innocent,” and little ones had pictures.)

5. Craft: A take-home activity that reteaches the main idea.

This helps children remember what they learnt and gives them a way to tell someone else.

6. Review Questions: Help children recap and apply what they learnt.

We add 3 or 4 simple review questions at the end. These can be done during craft or snack time for younger kids and can lead to good discussions with older children.

While writing, you need to keep praying, keep studying, and be ready to scrap your whole idea and start again. Teaching children is a serious ministry that we will be held accountable for, and we need to make sure it is truth and not just opinion. The same applies to leaders teaching lessons prepared by others.

Be accountable:

We get our elders to look over our lessons to make sure we are not being misunderstood and that our doctrine is correct.

Our advice is: Just start!

A great starting point is to listen to the preach on Sunday and ask yourself, "How would I teach this to a child?"

You can check out some of the curricula that we have written and are free to download and use it at your church for no cost.

And when you write yours please share it with us and with other churches too!

<https://kids.cornerstonechurch.co.za>

Cornerstone Kids Curricula