



THROUGH-LINES

Helping Kids Find Their Roles in God's Story

Written by Ron VandenBurg

A free resource from:

KIDS CORNER

THROUGH-LINES

Defining What a Christian Is

Let's pretend that together we are taking a photography class. Our assignment is to take a picture of a Christian. The photo must be distinct with ample evidence that the person in the photo is indeed a Christian. Waiting for Sunday morning, we can run to a church, but how do we find Christians 24/7?

Researchers Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton have asked teens what they think it means to be Christian. Some answered, "God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions" and "The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself."* These descriptions of moral, nice, and happy people, however, don't really tell us what a Christian is.

As Christians, we want to tell a bigger story. We want our children to know that they are a part of God's big story—where God is the main character of the story. He's got a restoration project in place to save every square inch of His creation from the sin in it. God sent His son to save creation, and now we (and our children) are called by God to restore creation. God is fixing it, and we can help.

That puts us all in God's story. God has gifted us with particular skills and talents so that we Christians can play our part in that restoration project. The Prairie Center for Christian Education has developed a set of ten Biblical characteristics called "through-lines" that can help us all, parents, teachers, ministry leaders, and children, to understand what our roles are. These characteristics weave through the Bible, and describe a calling to "be," not simply to "do." And what does God call us to "be?" He calls us to be Servant Workers, to be Justice Seekers, to be Earth Keepers, to be Community Builders. He calls us to be Creation Enjoyers, Idolatry Discerners, Order Discoverers, and Beauty Creators. And in all of these, He calls every disciple to be God Worshipers and Image Reflectors.

Here we get a wider picture of the roles that God has called us to be as Christians. Are these descriptors the only ones? That's a good discussion. In the following blogs, I'll discuss each through-line and give some suggestions of how ministry leaders can intentionally shape their curriculum and leadership styles. I'll also give suggestions of how families can create faith-formative activities that help children learn what a Christian can be.

Through-lines are ideas originated and developed by [The Prairie Centre for Christian Education](#).

*Reference: Smith, C. and Denton, M. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. 162-163.

CREATION ENJOYER



Psalm 65:8: The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy. (NIV)

BE A TOUR GUIDE

Regardless of the season, how awesome is it that as adults we get to be tour guides who show our children God's wonderful creation? When we view the whole world as God's classroom, we get to encourage wonder in children. Using our creation-enjoyer senses, we see the eagle soar, touch a baby's tiny hand, and feel the warmth of the sun on our faces. Children's experiences point to the presence of our active Creator God. Creation-Enjoying helps kids understand also our responsibilities to creation and how people before us and right now are using, and maybe abusing, this beautiful world.

Psalm 19 shows that there is nothing ordinary, usual, or boring about God's natural world. We get to draw attention to all things made by God--including cuddly kittens, soft downy ducklings, and pesky mosquitoes. David the Creation-Enjoyer's Psalm 65:8's "songs of joy" is a great exemplar of how we should respond to God's creation. Encourage families to get out into nature and explore it, study it, and talk about it. God makes good stuff, including us.

What activities have you designed that will create wonder in children? One idea that has been popular in schools is the Roots of Empathy program where a parent brings in a small baby for the children to meet. Another idea for a Sunday morning is to do some "wonder" activities outside your church building.

Encourage parents to spend some time with their children looking at a sunset or a mountain range. Invite them to explore a state park or conservation area on a hike. Find maps or checklists for families to hike in their favorite forest, desert terrain, mountain area, or prairie plateau. Suggest they canoe or kayak through a lake or along a river. Show them places in your local area that might be new for them. Encourage family "acts of service" and suggest as a church family or small group to get some gardening gloves and go clean up a local park. Do some service work together outside!

Let's be active creation-enjoyers! It's time for a road trip (by car or by bicycle)!

Enjoying God's Creation Kids Corner Devotion



WOW! CREATION!

SERVANT WORKER



1 John 3:16: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (NIV)

MAKING SMILES

We are called as servant workers to give a “cup of cold water” (Matthew 10:42) in service to our neighbor and to our God. Taking kids into the community lets them do valuable service for others. And this kind of learning shows the community that young people can make a difference. When children do work outside of their homes, their churches, and their schools, they can bless their communities in so many ways. As ministry leaders, we lead by doing and by sharing the importance of service.

Children can learn a lot from doing service. Being involved in an activity lets kids learn from the work instead of merely learning about the work. As educator W. E. B. DuBois said, “Only responsibility teaches responsibility.”

When we provide projects that tap into a young person’s passion, big things happen. As one tween exclaimed after returning from a week long service project helping physically handicapped adults, “I finally found the reason I was born!”

Afterward, record reflections with your pre-teens so that they can discuss the experience and share with others in your church community. I have collected some comments from pre-teens after they’ve participated in genuine service:

- “It is fun meeting new people and working in different places.”
- “It is hard when you see something sad happening in the community.”
- “I really liked getting the opportunity to go and serve in the community.”
- “It was fun getting a chance to bless others.”
- “We got to experience new things. We got to learn new skills.”
- “It was fun when you were helping because you get to see someone smile.”

Here are some activities for families to inspire servant-workers:

- Help your children offer popsicles or cold drinks to the postal carrier or the neighborhood garbage truck workers.
- As a family or with a group of kids, develop a show to present at a nearby library, day care, or community center. It might be a puppet show, play, or craft project. Get your dance class, choir, or martial arts school to give a demonstration at a daycare, nursing home, or community center.
- Walk dogs, collect mail, shovel snow, or rake leaves for someone in your neighborhood who needs the help.
- Greet your neighbors with a small gift such as a houseplant or plate of cookies.

Serving Others Kids Corner Devotion:



WE SERVE OTHERS.

IMAGE REFLECTOR



Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (NIV)

BE INTENTIONAL

An educator that I respect once told me that when I am in the presence of another person, I am on holy ground. There’s an image-reflector right in front of me, so what am I going to do and how am I going to treat that other person? If my belief is real for me, then I ought to show respect, trust, care, and hope intentionally to children (See Matthew 25:31-43). I need to shape my time with them around how those kids are feeling that day. For example, when a child tells me a story, I need to tune in and really listen.

Okay, so let’s talk about those kids. We have to model for children what it means to respect and care for image-reflectors. It gets hard when you have to show care to the disruptive child. When there’s frustration over an incident, I need to go back and start again. When a child wants a second chance, a third chance, a fourth chance, I need to recognize that perseverance and support that child. Why? Because she’s an image-reflector. He’s a child of God. That child deserves the same respect as a person that I do, that anyone does. We need to listen to each other’s stories and work for positive restoration instead of exclusion. When children see us doing that, they will learn to do the same.

So much of Christian living can be in the moment. You can plan and predict how your lesson or session is going to go, but then all the other people--the children--have to come into the room, and that’s when things become unpredictable. When you think about other people, what makes you value them? For me, it has been the belief that each person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). I’m an image-reflector, and so is everyone else around me.

Some ways to teach care, respect, trust and optimism:

- Create affirming artwork. Have children surprise their coach, their pastor, their teacher, their parent, or their sibling with a piece of artwork that tells them about something special that everyone can see in them. The artwork could be a bookmark or a great picture that they can hang on their refrigerator.
- Have your small children draw special pictures along with a note like “thanks for being so nice” or “thank you for your good work.” Explain to parents that these gifts can be shared with a polite cashier, a kind librarian, or wonderful friend when parents and children are out together. The opportunities for sharing can be spontaneous. It shows children that everyone should be valued and that kindness is everywhere.
- “Pay it forward”. If someone does something nice to you, find another person and show some kindness to them. Be intentional with your blessing.

Reflecting God Kids Corner devotion:



BEING GOD'S COPYCAT.

GOD WORSHIPPER



Deuteronomy 6:4-9: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children...(NIV)

HUMBLE AS A CHILD

The ancient Hebrews understood that part of the task of a God-worshipper was to teach children that faith shaped every domain in life. How do we impress these commandments onto our children?

I would like to suggest that an adult's faith development is equal to that of the child in your care. Sure, an adult's knowledge of God's world and God's word is more detailed, but an adult's faith isn't measured in the same way as cognitive growth. Unfortunately, most churches are adult-centric and see children's views of spirituality as limited. I think we need to go back to [Matthew 18](#) and see how Jesus talked about viewing the child.

First, the context: the disciples have come to Jesus asking who will be the greatest in kingdom. They are looking for power, glory and importance. Jesus calls over a child (How great it would be to hear Jesus call your name!) and he has the child stand before them as an exemplar. Jesus responds to their question saying, "I promise you this. If you don't change and become like a child, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. But if you are as humble as this child, you are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And when you welcome one of these children because of me, you welcome me."

The lesson here is about humility. When I talk to children about faith, how much of that conversation is listening? When children ask the big questions like "Why are we here?" or "What does God do?", adults need to create a mutually respectful dialogue. Instead of giving answers, I try to listen more by affirming the child's question by saying that I too have had the same question. It's tempting to give all my adult insights, but it may be better to ask probing questions and encourage the child to speak some more. The conversation can go deeper. When exchanges are not adult-centric, unexpected opportunities allow for joy, wonder, and discovery for both the adult and child. According to Caroline Fairless in her book *Children in Worship: Congregations in Bloom*, "When a child tells you that a flower is going to die whether or not it is connected to the vine, that child has not ruined your sermon; that child has opened up a conversational opportunity about the quality of life lived in God."

Listening to questions and stories can be some of the best faith formative opportunities. Reflect with children about their week. Let kids voice the times they praised, prayed, confessed, and cried out to God and how they did it. Show them that all those times were times of worship. Have a time if appropriate where you as a mentor share your week as a God-worshipper, too.

Worshiping God Kids Corner Devotion:



THE ACTS PRAYER.

JUSTICE SEEKER



Micah 6:8. What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (NIV)

GOOD SAMARITAN TIME

Our culture understands that a “Good Samaritan” does good deeds and seeks justice for those who are hurting. Have you ever looked at the reason Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan? An expert in the law quizzes Jesus on the requirement for eternal life. Jesus responds with a question back asking about what the scriptures say. The expert quotes from the books of Moses and Jesus affirms him. Then the man asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Let’s stop there for a moment.

Our world is broken, and people hurt. Sin is anything that separates us from relationship with God and with other people, so the focus of justice-seeking becomes restoration. We can’t just let injustice happen! We need to teach our children to see injustice and then to act against it. The Bible leaves no doubt that Christian lives must be lives of justice-seeking. It is the first requirement listed in answer to Micah’s question, “What does the Lord require of you? “

So how do we teach justice? A big part of justice-seeking is intentionally showing care, building trust, showing respect and openly expressing faith. Model those actions by honoring and listening to the voices of children and tweens by creating circle conversation where each person can talk and hear the voices of others. When something bad happens, model restorative practices by asking “What happened?” instead of why it happened, and instead of punishment, ask and look for a solution to “What can be done now to make it better?”

Another step in loving comes by valuing the stories of all people--neighbors next door, neighbors around the world, those who have been harmed and those who have harmed. Teach children stories of other cultures and show them maps of countries around the world. How can children pray for the global community if they don’t know the who and the where?

At the end of the Samaritan story, Jesus asked who the real neighbor was. The expert of the law defined the real neighbor as the one who showed pity. Jesus then told him (and us) to go and do the same, so then justice-seeking works together with servant-working and community-building. Find ways to connect children with others that create relationship. Does your church have a mentorship program? Do you have family service opportunities that gives children a chance to service? If we expect our children to be justice-seekers as adults, we need to find opportunities now for learning care, trust, respect and service.

Doing What's Right Kids Corner Devotion:



A SMALL SIN IS A BIG DEAL.

COMMUNITY BUILDER



1 Corinthians 12:12: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.” (NIV)

INTERCONNECTED

When my children used to play with building blocks they would take a long time to craft a castle, a race car, or a sailing ship. Despite their pride for their masterpieces, it took them only a few seconds to break them apart. As adults, we need to teach our children how to be positive community-builders. They already can see that people work hard to build communities up, and then they also see that people can say something mean or do something hurtful and the community is torn down. Restoration and renewal is then required for those relationships to continue.

The most famous Biblical description of a Christian community is the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul shows us that each part of that body had a different function, and the body could not function without each part. Each part of the body also needed to honor the other parts by seeing the diversity of gifts. I like what verse five says, “Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.” Read through the chapter and see how many times the name of God is mentioned, and remember that God is active in your community too. God set your community up to do good things and to serve others. Let’s remember God’s calling for our community.

How do we teach community-building to kids? God had a wonderful plan when he designed us to be interconnected with one another and living in community. As followers of Christ we are called to build, protect, challenge, and love the communities in which we belong. And building these communities takes time and intentional effort. Try these three things: sharing, inviting, and honoring. Sharing is something adults try and teach children from infancy, but sharing is the key to any form of empathy. Being invitational and giving children choices shows that their voices and their choices matter in the church community. Finally, honoring those voices and choices with respect, encouragement, and praise show that the community sees each child as an image-reflector and as a vital member of that community.

Loving My Neighbor Kids Corner Devotion:



**WELCOME THE NEW
KID.**

BEAUTY CREATOR



Colossians 1:16: For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. (NIV)

MAKE SOMETHING INTERESTING

My favorite story about beauty-creating is hearing about a young kindergarten boy working diligently on a painting. He showed it off by yelling to his teacher, “Look! I’m a beauty-creator!” He understood that as a child he could celebrate God by creating something.

As adults, we make a huge mistake when we don’t play, or draw, or sing, or dance. We also err when we assume that what we do in the day-to-day is not creative. We multiply these mistakes if we discourage children in their play, or their art, because it’s “childish.” When we deny creativity, we sin, because doing creative work is who we are, because we are the image of the Creator.

I picked the right Sunday to visit a church one time. They were focusing on “Christians and the Arts” with a panel discussion including visual artists, actors, and dancers. Everyone praised God for His generous gift of creativity to each of these performers. They were beauty-creators. Then the pastor stood up and confessed his envy of the artists; he said, “I don’t have a creative bone in my body!”

But then he broke into a neatly crafted sermon without the benefit of any notes. In spite of himself, he too was a beauty-creator.

As ministry leaders, encourage play and games. In church, push for all of the arts, not just music (and all kinds of music). Equip families and church members to attend a play, a concert, an art gallery, and a film premiere and discuss these things often. Encourage music in the house, in the church, and in the car (In the car, make sure the family listens together!). Take an interest in children’s music choices and share with them what you like. Look at and listen to art that expresses joy, sorrow, and every part of the human condition, and share. Encourage the viewing of art that proclaims God’s word and artists who use talents to respond to God’s word. Get your children involved in your church’s drama presentations, music teams, banner making, flower arranging, etc.

Make something interesting.

Creating Beauty Kids Corner Devotion:



CREATED TO CREATE.

IDOLATRY DISCERNER



Romans 12:2: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”(NIV)

BE DIFFERENT

The Great Pyramid at Giza, the Temple of Artemis, and Statue of Zeus. Archeologists know what’s important to a culture by studying how the people spent their resources and time. They’re able to point out the objects of worship pretty quickly, because they can tell where the most time, the most money, and the most effort went. I wonder what future archaeologists looking at our North American societies will say about what we value. Well, I think they’d find just what they found in the ancient cultures: the idols of our day are the things and people on which we spend our time and money. Except for some huge church buildings, and a whole lot of “Jesus junk,” they might have a hard time understanding how we worship God in our day.

Kids can learn to discern their own idols by reflecting on what they spend their time and money doing and buying. They can see what we adults worship too. But it’s not enough to discern for ourselves. We need also to be prophetic-speakers who, like the Old Testament prophets, call it like it is, and point others to the One who alone is worthy of worship. Churches are supposed to be communities that are counter-cultural, and because of that, sometimes uncomfortable, with calls-to-action. How are we teaching our children that when they serve God it makes them different?

Think about training parents about culture and media consumption and encourage them to talk about what they and their children watched, use and participate in. Teach parents to share about what they liked, disliked, or found interesting about the culture around them.

In today’s church culture, it seems that many parents leave the nurturing of spirituality to “professionals” (church ministry leaders). For example, one research study stated that most American children, including those who support a Christian religious preference, do not read or listen to the Bible regularly. It was reported that even among children who identify as born-again Christians, typically a group with the highest rates of Bible engagement, one-quarter to one-third do not read or listen to the Bible at all in a given week. If that is the case in your church, then it’s only ministry leaders who might be reading the Bible to kids, or teaching them how to pray, or singing with them often and loudly. Here too you as leaders need to call out what’s wrong with that picture, and work to change the culture.

You can help equip and encourage parents with resources to teach Bible literacy, guide prayer, and to sing with their kids. Family dinner table or bedtime Bible reading and discussions are vitally important to do. We should encourage prayer at meals whether at home or in a restaurant, and before important family moments. Singing is a great way as a family to praise God, and a little in-the-car songfest can be lots of fun.

Discovering Wisdom Kids Corner Devotion:



**I'M PART OF
GOD'S STORY.**

ORDER DISCOVERER



Psalm 19:1-4: The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (NIV)

WONDER

Why is the sky blue? How do caterpillars become butterflies? How is electricity made? Why is the sea salty? Where do babies come from? Most kids are natural Order-Discoverers.

As ministry leaders and as adult mentors, what if we encouraged these questions and the wonder that inspired them? Let's find ways to pause, ponder, investigate, and reflect together about the order that God has woven into creation.

When a child asks a question, take some time together to ponder and think about how God made that "great thing" work. Today's world allows us to "google-search" and quickly learn new things. At the same time, while Google might give us a fast answer, it's also okay for questions to sit for awhile.

We need encourage children's curiosity to discover God's created order. Inquiry is to ask a question, and to encourage further study. The adult does not have to be an expert in front of the classroom, but a fellow learner who says, "You know, I have wondered about that same question. Here's what I know, but let's find out some things together." You can also choose to say, "Let's open this up, see what's inside, and figure out together how it works." Exploring a "great thing" teaches kids that you might not find all the answers you wanted, but you might also find better questions.

The church community can also lead in discovery by sharing our gifts and our interests with children. If we have the gift of car repair, baking, gardening, or carpentry, have children at an early age be your assistants. Let them see the car's oil. Bake some cookies together. Start a community garden at the church. If the ministry leaders don't have those skills, introduce children to other church mentors who can help build curiosity, teach problem-solving skills, and create wonder. As adults, we too will discover God's mighty works. Let's praise His holy name.

Exploring God's Design Kids Corner Devotion:



HOW DOES IT WORK?



EARTH KEEPER



Psalm 24:1: The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (NIV)

SERVING GOD

Most people understand the idea of earth-keeping. We have been taught to recycle and have heard about our carbon footprint. To illustrate, last year, I did a through-lines presentation for a Masters-level teaching course. Instead of assigning to learners a through-line about which to write, I let them choose. Most of the class chose to write about earth-keeping, because they already knew that we all have a responsibility to take care of the earth.

For Christians, the earth-keeping responsibility is a command. The writer of Genesis says “And God saw everything that he had made, and it was very good” (1:31). Then God gives to people a daunting task when He calls us to be stewards, caretakers, or gardeners of all of creation (Genesis 1:28). God created the world and he gives us the opportunity to “manage” it on his behalf. Old Testament and New Testament people lived in agricultural communities and knew all of God’s laws for taking care of the land including the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) that required times of rest and renewal for the land.

The church and our children need to think back to Eden and learn how to care for all things with respect: the environment, water, animals, plants, farmland, and all resources. During church meetings and events, children need to see that the church sorts its garbage and recycles. Some churches have become strong advocates of solar energy by installing solar panels on their roofs thereby reducing costs and engaging in action and conversation about energy use.

Earth-keeping also calls for us to teach our children to sort out our wants from our needs, so that we can share God’s created planet with other people living in other areas of the world and share it with those yet to be born. By doing this, we respond to God’s command to be his servants.

Teaching Moments:

- Ask children to watch out for ways to save water and electricity.
- Find ways to drive less. Does your church have a bike rack? Encourage everyone to walk, ride your bike, or take the bus to church! Explore carpooling as a choice. You will have extra time to spend with your friends and family.
- Ask your church family to use less heat and air conditioning. Dress for the weather.
- Start a compost system for all the fruits and vegetable peelings and scraps.
- Spend time in nature. Teach a class outside in the fresh air.
- Keep the church and neighborhood free of garbage. Put it in the recycling or garbage where it belongs.

Caring for God's World Kids Corner Devotion:



**CARING FOR GOD'S
WORLD**

ABOUT US



RON VANDENBURG

Senior Producer of Children's Ministry
ronvandenburg@reframemedia.com

Ron joined the ReFrame team in 2014 to plan and develop projects for the spiritual formation of children. His main focus is the weekly audio show, Kids Corner. A former school teacher, Ron brings creative storytelling gifts, love of theater, and production skills to create fun, wacky stories that help children learn important faith lessons. A graduate of Calvin College, he recently completed a Master of Education Degree in Teaching, Learning and Development at Brock University, in St. Catharines, ON. In his free time he enjoys theater experiences—watching, writing, performing, and directing. Ron and his wife, Rachel, have three children.



KIDS CORNER

Kidscorner.net

Our mission is to present the Christian message to kids and their families in an entertaining way that promotes biblical literacy and understanding of the gospel, and calls for a response of faith and obedience. We offer free Bible stories, discussion guides, family devotionals, audio adventure stories, and more.

© Copyright ReFrame Ministries/Kids Corner 2015. All right reserved.

We encourage you to share this resource with family, friends and co-workers. Please know it is against our reuse policy for this document to be modified, copied, bound or used for any commercial purpose. Full attribution, including a link to www.kidscorner.net is required if sharing. Our full reuse policy is available at <http://reframemedia.com/about/terms-of-use-privacy-policy>

KIDS CORNER

KidsCorner.net



ReFrame Ministries

ReFrameMinistries.org

1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407

3475 Mainway
PO Box 5070 STN LCD 1 Burlington, ON
L7R 3Y8 Canada

