



Themes for Lionhearts

The following verses taken from Psalm 78:1-7 should form the basis of our work with the children:-

O my people, listen to my teaching. Open your ears to what I am saying, for I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past – stories we have heard and know, stories our ancestors handed down to us. We will not hide these truths from our children but will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the LORD. We will tell of his power and the mighty miracles he did. For he issued his decree to Jacob; he gave his law to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, so the next generation might know them – even the children not yet born – that they in turn might teach their children. So each generation can set its hope anew on God, remembering his glorious miracles and obeying his commands. Then they will not be like their ancestors – stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful, refusing to give their hearts to God.

The following areas need to be covered with the children during their time in Lionhearts. The way in which they are covered will vary, depending upon age, the makeup of the groups and the leaders and helpers involved. Some things will be represented in stories and Bible readings, some in talks, some in games and play and some in worship and songs.

The format of Lionhearts is deliberately flexible – allowing for responsiveness to the Holy Spirit – and interaction with what God is saying in the rest of the church. However a degree of planning is desirable to ensure that children receive a good grounding in the basics of the Christian life. As with all our children's work it is intended to supplement the teaching and encouragement of parents, not to replace it.

It is anticipated that children who grow up in Lionhearts will cover topics several times from different angles and in different depths as their understanding and experience grows. Leaders and helpers are there to encourage and nurture the children's growing faith not to patronise them. Children can often be extremely sensitive to the Holy Spirit and can relate real experience of God – or even communicate messages from God that the rest of the church family needs to hear. Leaders and helpers should liaise with the Fellowship leadership to ensure this is able to happen.

The following themes should be covered:-

Who is God?

Children who have grown up in Christian families should already have a basic understanding of God – and even a simple relationship with Him. Children who join us with little or no Christian background will have very little idea. Basically nothing should be taken for granted. The emphasis should always be on relationship with God, explained in ways the children can understand.

In recognising the development of children's understanding and experience of relationships as they grow older, different aspects of Gods character can be emphasised for different ages. For this we can use Father, Friend, Saviour, Lord, while at all times emphasising the person and work of the Holy Spirit in helping us to know and experience God.

Father

The very youngest child will usually be introduced to the Father through the loving actions and words of older Christians –generally within a family setting or through Christian activities. Here the child will begin to experience something of the fantastic loving, caring and protecting nature of Father God – the maker of all things including us. Lionhearts can assist in reinforcing the children's security in their heavenly Father's love.

Friend

As the children grow and they develop an understanding of friendship and the values linked to being a good friend then they can begin to relate to Jesus as their very 'best friend' who they can always talk to and who will never reject them.

Saviour

Gradually through the years of Lionhearts the children can be introduced to Jesus as saviour, as part of this they will grapple with the concepts of sin, judgement, repentance and forgiveness.

Lord

By the time the children leave Lionhearts we would hope that they will have an understanding of Jesus as Lord – and that in fact they will have already begun to look at their daily lives in terms of what Jesus would like them to do in each situation.

How can you get to know God?

It is good that children learn about God – but it is far more important that they get to know Him personally. Through their time in Lionhearts children should be introduced to a vibrant relationship with God through understanding and responding to the Good News that Jesus came to save them, and through Prayer, reading the Bible and Worship.

Salvation

This is linked to knowing Jesus as saviour as mentioned above. It should look at why we needed/need a saviour, talking about how people instead of following God chose to follow their own selfish desires leading them to do things not pleasing to God (sin). It should look at Jesus coming into the world possibly using the season of Christmas to explore this in greater depth. It should look at Jesus death on the cross and his resurrection – explaining not just what happened but what was achieved. It should explore the need of all people to respond to what Jesus has done through faith, repentance, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Children's Leaders should be aware of the desire children have to please their teachers and to copy other children. It would not normally be appropriate, therefore, to give a general appeal for children to respond to salvation. Leaders should, however, be alert for the 'Holy Spirit moments' when suddenly things become clear to a child and they ask to give their lives to Jesus. Normally the best way to do this would be 'one to one' rather than in the group – i.e. if a child is asking then take them aside and talk to them quietly, check whether they really understand what they are doing and whether they are really ready to respond. If so lead them in a prayer of repentance and faith (see Appendix) – encourage them, tell them to tell their parents/friends – speak to the parents yourself immediately and let a Fellowship leader know.

Prayer

Children should be encouraged to develop healthy prayer lives, recognising prayer as a conversation with God, not just set phrases that they repeat. Even the youngest can be taught conversational prayer. We should particularly emphasise prayer as a two way conversation and therefore encourage children to listen for God and recognise His voice.

Bible

The children should be introduced to the Bible, first through Bible stories, but then to the Bible itself. The Bible should be presented as an exciting story about God and His people that contains many treasures that they will enjoy as they grow. Encouragement should be given for children to read the Bible outside of Lionhearts. The younger ones with the help of parents – but the older ones should begin to be reading for themselves from simple translations.

Worship

Children should be encouraged to understand what worship is and to experience it. They should be helped to understand worship in a corporate context, in Lionhearts and the main church meeting – as well as exploring worship on their own or with their family. The idea of worship as a lifestyle could also be explored in a simple way.

Who am I?

Children should be encouraged to explore who they are as children of God, including:-

- That they are unique, created lovingly by God.
- That they have a destiny to discover – they are not here by accident but have been created for ‘such a time as this’.
- They have gifts that God has given them that will enable them to fulfil their destiny.
- That they are secure in Gods love for them.

Growing Up In God

Looking at the fruit of the Spirit and the idea of discipleship and growing in maturity.

Together with God

Looking at relationships with others including:-

- Parents
- Siblings
- Friends
- Church family

God in creation

Looking at Gods Glory displayed in the World around us – using the creation story as well as the children’s own experience of the world to show that God is the creator and sustainer of everything. Looking at the earth and stars and planets, at trees and plants and animals, at angels and demons (in an appropriate, careful way) and at people. Emphasising that people are different from the rest of creation because they are made ‘in the image of God’.

