



# THEIR GOD — is so — BIG

**Teaching  
Sunday School to  
young children**

*Stephanie Carmichael*

THEIR  
GOD  
— is so —  
BIG

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Sunday School to  
young children**

*by Stephanie Carmichael*



For  
Mum and Dad  
Ian, Lauren and Glen

*Their God is so Big*  
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# Introduction

## About this book

I hold Sunday School teachers in the highest regard. It is a wonderful and important ministry, and rarely an easy one. It is about serving children who are not always a pleasure to teach, who may have tantrums, conduct impromptu paper throwing competitions, or just be rude. On the other hand, it is about serving children who are fragile people in a sinful world and need more than anything to be well-taught in the holy Scriptures, which are able to make them wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15).

We can't wait until children grow up before we teach them about God. Children go to school to learn how to read, write and count; they also need to learn how to live, according to the intentions of our Creator. Many who have become Christians in adulthood are saddened by the fact that they didn't come into a relationship with God earlier, and so could have avoided years of uncertainty, insecurity and doubt.

I will not spend much time saying how worthwhile and important Sunday School teaching is. I assume that you already think this way if you are reading this book.

This book is aimed at teachers of young children. To have covered children of all ages I would have ended up writing an epic. Rather than presenting you with a paperweight, I thought it more valuable to address an age range that is often overlooked. Even if you are teaching older children, it's helpful for you to consider these early years and how children develop concepts of God.

The book is designed to be used in three ways:

- as a manual for the Sunday School teacher; Part 1 explains the basic practicalities of teaching a Sunday School class; Part 2 also contains valuable resources and suggestions for teachers.
- as a course-book for a teacher training course; there is an outline of a teacher training course in chapter 13 and there are training exercises/questions throughout the book for personal reflection or group discussion.
- as a resource for Sunday School co-ordinators/superintendents. Part 2 is especially for you!

Throughout the book, and especially in Part 1, there are various practical exercises. These are called 'think and pray' or 'challenge and change' or 'think and do', or some similar title. They are fairly straightforward and require little further explanation, except to note that the exercises entitled 'challenge and change' are especially aimed at those who are already teaching a Sunday School class.

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## A personal note...

I started writing this book years ago, and it has only been a publisher's deadline that has made me finish it. A constant thought—"but I still have more to learn"—has always kept me from thinking that the manuscript is finished. Only recently, I had a Sunday School teaching experience that was less than ideal, and I couldn't help saying to myself, "And you're writing a book about teaching Sunday School!" It was a humbling experience, reminding me that as teachers we are still learners; we can never know it all nor give the perfect lesson. And the fact that we teach children, who are the greatest variable of all, means that we can never predict exactly how things are going to go.

So it is with a humble heart that I bring this book to you. It contains what I have learnt thus far in my teaching journey, and I hope it can be of help to you. I don't look upon myself as having all the answers, but I hope that you will find help and encouragement in the pages that follow.

My prayer is that God will keep teaching us all about himself, about children and about teaching—and indeed that he will keep helping us to teach children about God.

Stephanie Carmichael

OCTOBER, 2000





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# Part 1

# Basic skills of Sunday School teaching



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# Chapter 1

## The Sunday School teacher

### In this chapter

1. Characteristics of a Sunday School teacher
2. The model of the Apostle Paul
3. Some words of advice for new teachers
4. For experienced teachers
5. For those teaching in a team



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# 1. Characteristics of a Sunday School teacher

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As Sunday School teachers, we must never lose sight of the fact that our role is very important. Teaching **anybody** the Word of God is an important ministry (1 Tim 5:17). Teaching children about God is just as significant—remember that Jesus rebuked his disciples when they made the mistake of regarding children as less important than adults in ministry terms (Matt 19:13-14).

Indeed, the seriousness of teaching children is probably greater in some respects because of the duty of care involved. Children are very trusting. Young children, in particular, believe what adults tell them. We need to be worthy of that trust by teaching the Bible carefully and not leading them into error or misunderstanding. We have both a privilege and a responsibility: a privilege to be able to tell them about God and his Word, and a responsibility to teach them faithfully.

James tells us that teachers will be judged more strictly (Jas 3:1), presumably because of the potential damage they can do to the spiritual lives of those they teach. I can only think that James would reserve the strongest warning for teachers of those who can be most easily led astray—young children.

▲ ● ■  
**THINK**

*The qualifications for elders, overseers and deacons which Scripture sets out in passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 tell us a great deal about the sort of people Sunday School teachers should be. Read through the qualities required of overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-13.*

*a. Which do you think would be important qualities to have as a Sunday School teacher?*

*b. Are there any which you consider inapplicable?*

At the end of this chapter, we will work through part of 1 Thessalonians, as an example of the characteristics of a godly ministry relationship. But let me give you a summary of what makes for a good Sunday School teacher.

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### **a. A godly model**

Sunday School teachers teach through their lives and not just their words.

- As a Sunday School teacher, you are a significant adult in the lives of the children in your class. Children look to significant adults as models, and learn appropriate behaviour from them.
- The children will look to you for a living example of what it means to be a Christian—whether you want that or not. So make sure that you set a godly example: “set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).
- An apt description of the example we should be setting is Galatians 5:22-23: “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”.

### **b. Committed**

- One of the key aspects of the role of Sunday School teaching is commitment. You need to be committed to the ministry, the children and the team of teachers you are working with. Children quickly pick up an idea of how much you care for them by seeing how committed you are to teaching them well every week.
- The ministry of Sunday School is worth being committed to—it can be the beginning of a life of faith, and as such is a precious and valuable opportunity.
- Show this commitment by being punctual, by watching how late you stay up on Saturday night, and by avoiding any other commitments which may mean missing a week of Sunday School.
- It is best if you can view teaching as a long-term commitment rather than short-term. In one year you get to know your class and the children build a relationship with you. You will be much more effective in your teaching in your second and third years of teaching the same children.

### **c. Caring**

- We’re telling the children about God’s love and the importance of loving others; thus we must show this love to them.
- Children can sense whether you are showing genuine care and interest.
- Here are some practical ways of showing you care:
  - Take an interest in the children’s interests (remember who loves cricket and who likes soccer). Initiate conversations about their interests.
  - Remember events that are important to children (e.g. birthdays). If a child tells you about a forthcoming event, then remember to ask them about it. They will be delighted that you remembered.
  - If possible, visit them at home (after arranging it with their parents of course).

- 
- Remember that some children may have emotional problems, e.g. a family break-up, being bullied at school, failing at school, and so on. Children are very sensitive emotionally, and we need to provide them with a positive, caring environment.

**d. Prepared**

- Preparation is very important for the effectiveness of a lesson.
- Set aside adequate time during the week to do preparation.
- Ensure that you are ready for the children when they arrive. Don't be caught out—children know when you are not prepared. It is important to them to know that they are important to you and worth preparing for.

**e. Enthusiastic**

- Enthusiasm is contagious.
- We should be enthusiastic about God's Word and the ministry of Sunday School teaching: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord" (Rom 12:11).

**f. Prayerful**

- All Christian ministry should be surrounded with prayer.
- It is God who helps us in our teaching and we should be relying on him.
- Pray for your own faithfulness and teaching, and pray for your children and their understanding. In the end, it is only the work of the Holy Spirit which can make God's light shine in the hearts of the children you teach (2 Cor 4:6).

**▲ ● ■  
THINK AND PRAY**

*Read back over this section describing the qualities of a Sunday School teacher. Write down any areas of your life that you have been challenged about. Pray for God's help to change and continue to be challenged.*

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## **2. The model of the Apostle Paul**

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Just as we need to be a model to the children, so we can learn from the good example of other ministers of the gospel. Let's take a look at one such model now.

<sup>1</sup> Thessalonians gives us an insight into the relationship between the Apostle Paul and the Christians he is committed to caring for at Thessalonica. Paul regards the Thessalonians as his spiritual children—he suggests that he is like a mother and a father to them (2:7,11).

What can we learn from Paul about caring for 'young' Christians?

---

What are some of the characteristics we see in Paul that we should aim for as teachers of children? Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13.

<sup>17</sup> But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. <sup>19</sup> For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

**3**<sup>1</sup> So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. <sup>2</sup> We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow-worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, <sup>3</sup> so that no-one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. <sup>4</sup> In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. <sup>5</sup> For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

<sup>6</sup> But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>8</sup> For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? <sup>10</sup> Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. <sup>13</sup> May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Let's note a few points from this.

Firstly, look at the end of the quoted passage to see the **goal** towards which Paul is striving. That's what we're working towards in Sunday School as well. We're not just a childminding service; we want to see children grow in the Lord so that they will be "blameless and holy in the presence of God our Father" on the last day when Jesus returns. We must never lose sight of this big picture. We're working towards a heavenly goal.

Secondly, Paul **loves** being with them, because he **loves to minister** to them (2:17, 3:10). He hates to be separated from them. He does everything he can to see them again—and when he can't, he sacrifices some of his own comforts by sending Timothy (3:1,2).

Will you hate to be apart from your kids—to miss Sunday School?



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Will you look forward every week to seeing the kids again in order to minister to them? Will you be truly concerned about them (3:5) and pray for them between seeing them (3:10)? If, despite your longing to be there, you can't get to Sunday School, will you make sure you send a trusted replacement (3:2)?

In other words, will you love the kids with an increasing love that overflows (3:12)? Will you love them so much that they experience your love and they look forward to seeing you again each week (3:6) and many years from now will have "pleasant memories" of you?

It's a daunting example to follow. How do you get that sort of love and that sort of commitment? When Sunday School is tiring, frustrating, or discouraging, and a seemingly relentless grind week-by-week, how do you muster the love of which Paul speaks?

Two answers flow from the passage.

Firstly, since God is the one who makes people abound in love, we should pray for it (3:12). This type of love and commitment is not natural; it is a fruit of God's Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—these are the things you need to keep going week by week. But remember, they come from the grace of God. So pray.

Secondly, we need to lift our eyes to heaven. For how does Paul view these people? As a burden? As a heavy responsibility? No. As his glory and joy, because on the last day, when they are all together in the presence of God, they will be like crowns of glory to him (2:19-20). Because Paul's perspective is heavenly and eternal, he can hardly find the words to thank God enough for the joy they give him (3:9).

Will some of the children in your Sunday School class persevere to the last day, partly because of your ministry to them? Will they be your crown in which you glory in the very presence of the Lord Jesus? Having this mindset will change forever your attitude to the weekly routine of teaching.

**▲ ● ■**  
**THINK AND PRAY**

*Look back over the passage from 1 Thessalonians.*

*a. What does Paul say about Satan (or 'the tempter')?*



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b. *How should this motivate us in our care for children, and our prayers?*

c. *Is your thinking about life and Christian ministry dominated by God's kingdom and the return of Jesus (as Paul's seems to be)? What things do dominate your thinking? Pray that God would transform your mind.*

d. *Paul overflows with thankfulness. Spend some time thanking God for each of the children in your care, and for the opportunity to teach them.*

### **3. Some words of advice for new teachers**

---

Let me give a few special words of advice for new teachers who may feel particularly daunted by the task they are taking on.

- Teachers are learners—there's always something for us all to learn. Every teacher, at some point, is at the beginning of the learning curve. So don't get discouraged; remember that mistakes happen to everyone.
- Be prepared to be flexible—when teaching children there are so many variables that are out of our control; e.g. the weather, the mood of the children, or a child arriving in tears. You need to be flexible and bounce back, remembering that you usually can't predict or control what 'variables' you will be faced with. Don't take it as a personal failure if your lesson doesn't go perfectly to plan.
- Confidence takes time to develop—don't expect too much too soon.
- Willingness is a key element of good teaching. You can't begin teaching as an experienced expert, but if you're willing to have a go and learn then you're more than half-way there. Enthusiasm, eagerness and commitment to both God and the children are more important than experience.

- 
- Be realistic—begin with well thought out lesson plans. The more prepared you are, especially in your first few lessons, the better you will cope with the unexpected. In your early lessons use simple, easy-to-use visual aids and hassle-free activities.
  - Expect respect—don't let the children walk all over you. You are the teacher, and what you say goes! So look and act like you are in control, even if you are shaking in your boots.
  - Ask for God's help and wisdom. The marvellous thing about any ministry is that God uses our often weak and faltering efforts to do his work.

## 4. For experienced teachers

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*All* teachers are learners. Regardless of how long we've been teaching for, we still have things to learn. This means that we need to have a teachable spirit, to be willing to change and to try new ideas.

Experienced teachers are a great asset to any Sunday School because they add stability. You can be an encouragement and example to new teachers. You are also in a position to develop close relationships with the children in your class.

## 5. For those teaching in a team

---

Many of us have the opportunity of teaching in a team. It is wonderful to have the support and help that can come from two or more teachers working together. Here are some considerations:

- Don't slacken in your commitment to Sunday School because there is more than one teacher.
- Spend time together establishing guidelines for the class routine, discipline, the syllabus and individual teacher's responsibilities. This is important for consistency.
- Aim to encourage and support each other (in both words and actions). Be committed to helping each other and supporting each other through prayer.
- You can divide the workload among a team of teachers in a number of ways. Choose which one (or combination) suits your situation best:
  - i. Each week one member of the team is responsible for preparing and presenting the entire lesson, with the other teachers giving assistance when appropriate. This means that the main message of the lesson is clearly presented and reinforced throughout the lesson.
  - ii. A different teacher is responsible for the story each week and that teacher assigns other team members to do other parts of the

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lesson. This means that the teacher responsible for the story is the one in charge that week.

- iii. One teacher takes on the role of leader for the whole year. He/she is the overall coordinator of the lesson every week, i.e. introduces each part of the lesson and the teacher responsible for it; is the main disciplinarian; remembers any announcements that need to be made, and so on. This way of running a class means that the children know who is in control and they develop a rapport with the 'leader'.
- iv. The teachers are assigned responsibility each week for one part of the lesson. So one week a teacher might prepare the craft and the next week he/she prepares the story. There needs to be close communication between team members so that the main message is the same in each part of the lesson that day. There also needs to be effective coordination so that each part of the lesson is prepared each week.
- v. Similar to above, the teachers assume responsibility each week for the same part of the lesson (i.e. story, craft, memory verse/ action rhyme, prayer). This is good for consistency and ensuring that there is sufficient variety each week (knowing what they prepared the week before). It does mean that some might have a greater workload than others.

In summary, when teaching in a team, there needs to be:

- communication—between teachers
- commitment—to each other and the class
- control—one teacher needs to be clearly in control each week
- consistency—in routines and class management
- coordination—so that the 'team' works as a team

*a. If you are a new teacher, pray about the points listed above, especially for God's help in developing confidence and wisdom.*

▲ ● ■  
**PRAY**

*b. If you have taught Sunday School before, pray that you might be a godly model (modelling how to teach Sunday School to new teachers, and modelling a godly way of life to your class). Pray for the humility to keep learning and growing in your teaching skills.*

*c. If you are teaching in a team, pray for your fellow teachers. Pray that you will be able to work as a team, supporting each other. Pray for wisdom in organization and class management.*



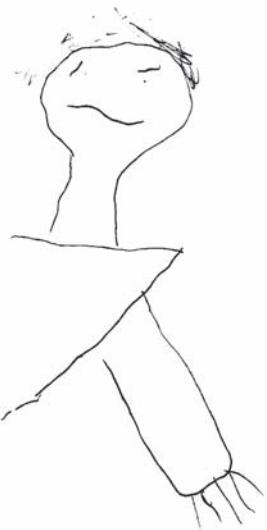
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# Chapter 2

## Understanding children

### In this chapter

1. Children as individuals
2. Ages and stages
3. Two-year-olds
4. Pre-school children (3-4 years)
5. Infants children (5-7 years)



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Children are not miniature adults. It is sometimes easy to view them as such, but we are mistaken when we do. Children are children. It takes time to get to know what children are like—how they live and learn, and how they view the world. If you have had little contact with children it can be difficult to make the adjustment from an adult’s perspective to that of a child.

If we want to teach children about God, then we certainly need to spend time getting to know about children and especially the age group we are going to teach.

## 1. Children as individuals

---

Children are all different. It sounds obvious, and in many ways it is; yet it is easy to forget. We know that children look different—that’s the obvious part. And yet we can too easily overlook the fact that their personalities, abilities, likes and dislikes vary enormously.

Later in this chapter I have described the characteristics of each age group. This will be a helpful guide, and you will be wise to keep your expectations in line with the general characteristics of the age group that you are teaching. At the same time, we need to remember that there may be widely differing abilities within each class. Some of the differences that may be apparent include:

- self-image and level of confidence
- physical abilities
- ability to listen, concentrate, understand and remember
- speed in doing tasks
- accuracy and desire to be accurate
- in younger children, their ability to use paste, scissors, pencils
- in older children, their reading, writing and spelling skills

And the list could go on.

We will also encounter a variety of personalities in any one age group of children. Their likes and dislikes will differ, sometimes greatly. One child’s idea of fun may be running around outside kicking a ball, while for another child it may be sitting in a corner with a book or a puzzle. We cannot assume that all children will get the same level of enjoyment from an activity.

So a group of children should be viewed as a group of individuals, each with their own personalities, abilities, likes and dislikes. Aim to get to know each child well, discovering their uniqueness and learning how to love them. It takes time, and in some cases effort, but it is a fundamental part of caring for our children and being able to teach them God’s Word effectively. The following information could be recorded for each child to assist you in getting to know them.

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parents names: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Birth date:     /     /     \_\_\_\_\_

Special interests or hobbies: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Preferred topics of conversation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Any special problems: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Any special needs: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Ages and stages

---

**a. A reference guide to ages covered in this book**

**Two-year-olds:** don't go to pre-school but may go to long day care centres.

**Three-year-olds:** children must have turned three before they are accepted at pre-school. If children commence pre-school while they are three they usually spend two years there.

**Four-year-olds:** many four-year-olds go to pre-school. Children need to be at least four and a half before they can commence school.

**Five-year-olds:** the majority of children are either five or nearly five when they begin school.

**Five to seven years old:** these children are at infants school. The three years spent at infants school are—

- Kindergarten
- Year 1 (or 1st class)
- Year 2 (or 2nd class)

(I realise that many children are turning eight in Year 2, but for the purposes of this book I have called infants children five to seven years.)

---

## **b. Characteristics of each age group**

The following general characteristics of different age groups should help you to get a rough feel for the children in your care. These characteristics are listed with implications for us as teachers. You may only want to read the section relevant to your class's age range. However, it would be helpful for you to read the characteristics of each age group so that you know where they have come from and where they are heading. Also, within one age range, you will have a variety of differences and some children may well fit into the age bracket above or below their class.

## **3. Two-year-olds**

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### *Physically active*

They need 'active' activities and cannot sit still for long.

### *Very short attention span*

You will need to alternate between active and passive activities. Their concentration span is so short that you may need to capture their attention or give them a little break with such things as making their fingers move in different ways (march, walk, dance), or putting their hands on their knees or shoulders. Have a few finger games, songs and activities up your sleeve in case you need them.

### *Tire easily*

Another reason to alternate active and passive activities.

### *Self-centred*

They are at the centre of their own little worlds, and tend to think that they should have you to themselves. In the event of the birth of a baby brother or sister, be extra sensitive to that child. They are suddenly not the centre of attention at home and may react in some way. Make them feel loved and special.

### *Enjoy and need repetition*

For instance, they enjoy hearing nursery rhymes and their favourite books over and over again. Repeat the main message of the story often while talking to them, doing the activity, or playing with them.

### *Prefer routine*

The children need the security of a familiar routine (this has a calming effect).

### *Need your attention and help*

Learn to work with the children, helping them in their tasks rather than expecting them to do an activity alone. Be well prepared so that you can give your full attention to the children.



---

### *Should not be hurried*

Be flexible and don't pressurise them. Be well organised so that there is a calm, ordered environment.

### *Need clear directions*

When giving instructions, ensure that you have their full attention and give clear instructions, one step at a time. However, you can't give children in this age group a list of instructions and expect them to remember—it is preferable to give the children one instruction at a time, and then have them follow your instruction before giving them the next one.

### *Need a controlled environment*

When doing an activity, give the children only one thing to do at a time (i.e. just colouring or pasting) so that you can keep control. If an activity requires a few different tasks, then have everyone doing one thing at a time together (e.g. everyone pasting, then put the glue away, then bring the crayons out and everyone 'colouring', i.e. scribbling).

### *Curious*

They are very curious and love asking "What's that?"

### *Like talking about themselves*

Be warned: children will often interrupt you while you are telling the story. It may be more satisfactory to tell the story to children in groups of two or three at a time rather than trying to speak to them as a large group.

### *Limited in small muscle tasks*

Two-year-olds will vary in their abilities, but most are not yet past scribbling.

### *Independent*

They like to do things themselves even though they may not be able to.

### *A limited vocabulary*

Some are very vocal while others (especially boys) may not talk much. They can usually understand more than they can express.

### *Play by themselves and are not friendly sharers*

Even in a group they tend to play beside each other rather than together.

### *Tantrums*

Tantrums are quite common (and normal) as an attempt to exert independence. Don't let the children manipulate you through their behaviour. You need to be firm and loving. In the case of attention-seeking tantrums, it may be best to minimise the attention which they receive at that time.

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### *Sometimes aggressive*

Two-year-olds may hit or bite other children. Try to avoid situations that bring about frustration and anti-social behaviour. Patiently and consistently teach the children to share and be kind to each other.

### *Need security*

They may have a security blanket and may feel afraid or insecure easily. Some will find it difficult to leave their parents. Don't bring attention to the shy, insecure child or force them into doing things. Try to make them feel loved and secure. Gradually encourage them to be more involved.

### *Often say 'no'*

It is preferable to give two-year-olds a choice rather than asking a yes/no question, unless you are happy to get the answer 'no'.

### *Unaware of dangers*

Two-year-olds often do not understand the consequences of their actions. Always be aware of the safety of the children. Keep scissors and other dangerous implements out of their reach at all times (unless in your hands). Never let the children out of the cubicle/class space unless accompanied by a teacher. Remember that many two-year-olds are proficient climbers (and acrobats).

### *Toilet training*

Some of the children will not be toilet-trained, or are learning to be trained. Get to know where each child is at, so that you can be prepared! Notice the bags which accompany each child so that you know who has what provisions.

### *Love to explore*

They are active learners and spend their days exploring their world, making new discoveries and learning about the world they live in. They are not born with knowledge and experience—it is learned, and two-year-olds are busily learning all they can.

### *Imitate adults*

They enjoy doing things alongside adults and feeling as if they are helping (e.g. helping Mum or Dad with some household chore). If they want to help, try to encourage this, but you will need to be patient as their help can sometimes be unhelpful!

### *Play imaginatively*

Their lives are full of imagination. Their soft toys are real to them and often the distinction between reality and fantasy is blurred.

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### *Emotionally fragile*

Think of how easily a child can cry or laugh or giggle. Just as they are developing physically and mentally, so they are developing emotionally. Thus it's important to be loving, have a calm atmosphere, provide them with routine, and keep their lives as stress-free as possible.

### *Physically...*

- they can scribble, plonk paper on paste
- they can climb (some are quite proficient) and run
- they are learning to jump
- they can't do things like skipping or hopping

## **4. Pre-school children (3-4 years)**

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### *Love listening to stories*

They love stories and being read to. They also enjoy watching puppets. Many stories they listen to at this age are fairy tales, so it's important to emphasise that the Bible is true and really happened.

### *Creative and imaginative*

They have a rich fantasy world complete with monsters, dinosaurs, fairies, and all manner of creatures and characters.

### *Self-centred*

Their world is gradually expanding (e.g. attending pre-school) and they are becoming more aware of other people. However, they still are quite self-centred. Try to encourage an awareness of others and how others feel. Individual craft activities are preferable to group activities.

They will often interrupt the story with their own stories about themselves and their families. Give them an opportunity to share in a structured environment (so they don't all talk at once), e.g. news time, discussion after story, and so on. Even so, some will find it difficult to listen and be interested in others without talking themselves.

### *Limited experience and vocabulary*

Use their vocabulary, i.e. the words that they use and understand. Use the known to describe the unknown (e.g. a desert is a place like a beach with lots of sand but no water).

### *Limited ability to understand*

It is important to teach stories within their ability to understand, and to keep stories and concepts simple. In simplifying a Bible story, never distort it and don't teach them anything that will have to be unlearned at a later date.

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### *Think in concrete terms*

Their thinking is very much at a concrete stage, so try to avoid abstract concepts. It is helpful to accompany stories with something visual (i.e. visual aids).

### *Short attention span*

Don't expect them to sit and listen for too long. They need a variety of activities requiring different levels of concentration (i.e. vary active and passive activities). Order your activities carefully so that children are prepared for key concentration times (e.g. the story) and are able to listen effectively when you want them to. They are easily distracted, so be aware of potential distractions, and minimise them. Remember to be brief and to the point.

### *Enjoy and need repetition*

Repetition is important for this age group so don't be afraid to be repetitive. Reinforce the main message in as many ways as possible, e.g. story, craft, discussion. Remember that young children don't equate repetition with boredom.

### *Need to feel secure*

These children can have a range of fears and insecurities beyond themselves, e.g. many children will be scared of the dark, dogs or thunder. Be sensitive to their insecurities, and aim to create a loving environment and a calm atmosphere. Don't bring attention to the shy or insecure child, nor force them to do things.

The security of a familiar routine is important. Be organised so as to avoid confusion and be seen to be firmly in control.

### *Enthusiastic about things they enjoy*

Present things in a fun, enjoyable way and they will be 'all ears'.

### *Learn by seeing and doing, not just hearing*

We need to use as many of their senses as possible when teaching them. They learn through all their senses, and they will learn best if they are seeing as well as hearing. This is one reason why visual aids are important.

### *Very active*

They will wriggle and squirm, and need active times to release energy. Don't get angry with them for being active, i.e. for being typical pre-schoolers. Rather, cater for their needs. Also remember that they tire easily.

### *Need clear directions*

Don't expect them to remember a list of instructions. They need to be given clear directions, one step at a time (and then they follow those instructions before moving on). Make sure that you have their full attention!

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### *Need consistent discipline and control*

Give the children only one thing to do at a time, thus making it easier to keep control (i.e. if an activity requires a few different tasks, have everyone doing one thing at a time together). Set clear limits within which they must behave—be consistent and fair.

### *Limited in small muscle tasks*

Be prepared for a range of drawing, pasting and cutting abilities. Think carefully about the suitability of activities, the time they will take and the amount of teacher involvement required. Don't give the children an activity involving small muscle tasks assuming that all the children will be able to cope. Limit the use of scissors, as they can be dangerous even in the hands of those who can use them.

### *Physically...*

- they can do the following small muscle tasks with varying ability: drawing, colouring in, pasting
- their ability to use scissors varies
- some are learning how to write their name (some can write more)
- they love making things with junk and tape or paste
- their gross motor skills include running, jumping and dancing
- they are learning to hop and skip

## **5. Infants children (5-7 years)**

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### *Learning to read*

Their ability will vary, as they all learn at different rates. Don't assume that they can all read. Get to know the ability levels in your class and keep any reading material simple.

### *Learning to write*

Again, their ability will vary. The older children will be able to copy or trace large print. It is important to get to know the ability levels in your class so that you are only expecting them to do what they are capable of. Keep writing to a minimum, as it is slow and spelling will be poor. Remember to only use lower case (i.e. girl not GIRL).

### *Developing skills in small muscle tasks*

Skills will vary; e.g. ability to use scissors and colour in. Some will have a reasonable degree of accuracy while others may appear clumsy. Simplify tasks for children who are weaker in these skills to avoid frustration and feelings of inadequacy.

### *Short attention span*

It is often surprising how short their attention span can be. Just

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because they sit at desks at school doesn't mean that they can sit for long periods. So make the most of key concentration times. Children in this age group are active and need opportunities to wriggle and squirm—that is, provide them with opportunities when you want them to wriggle!

*Experience and environment widening*

Being at school means that their world has expanded somewhat. They are meeting a range of new people from backgrounds different from their own. They are learning new things, experiencing new things and going to new places. They are becoming more aware of others and less self-centred.

*Need variety*

Variety is important, especially between active and passive activities. Also aim for variety in craft activities (don't have the same type of activity each week—try 3D craft sometimes), and variety in presentation (e.g. visual aids—try puppets and models).

*Limited vocabulary*

Even though many of these children are reading and writing, their vocabulary is still limited. Try to use simple vocabulary, particularly when explaining difficult concepts.

*Think in concrete terms*

They are still thinking on a concrete level, so you need to explain things on a concrete level. Limit abstract concepts, use visual aids. Remember to keep within their realm of experience.

*Little understanding of time and space*

They live in the present and their concepts of time, space and distance are limited. Take care in using maps and dates, as they are often not appropriate. Simple maps, particularly 3-dimensional maps, and simple family trees can be helpful.

*Gradually gaining independence*

Don't treat them as babies; they want to be 'grown-up'. Give them opportunities to be creative and work independently. Perhaps you could give them jobs to do or somehow involve them in helping you. Remember that they still need clear guidelines for behaviour and close supervision because they are not always aware of the dangers and consequences of their behaviour.

*Curious*

They are full of questions about everything (e.g. how things work, or why things happen the way they do). Try to encourage this, because this

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is how they learn. However, some of their questions may be difficult to answer, so try to be prepared; think of questions that they may ask in a given lesson in order to be prepared for answering them.

*Imaginative*

They have great imaginations. Make the most of this in creative work.

*Easily excited*

Don't over-stimulate them. They can quite easily become over-excited and difficult to control. Aim to provide a calm atmosphere. All the same, harness their natural enthusiasm by doing activities that they enjoy.

*Desire to please and be recognised by adults*

They need and want adult approval. Encourage them as much as possible and respond positively to their work. Show love and care in your treatment of them. Allow them to help you by delegating small tasks to them. Be worthy of respect by being a godly model. Remember important events (e.g. birthdays) as this will mean a lot to them.

a. List three important characteristics of the age group of your class:



**THINK AND PRAY**

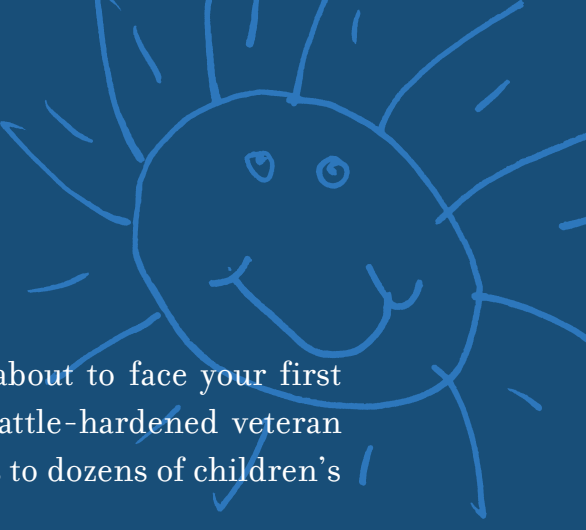
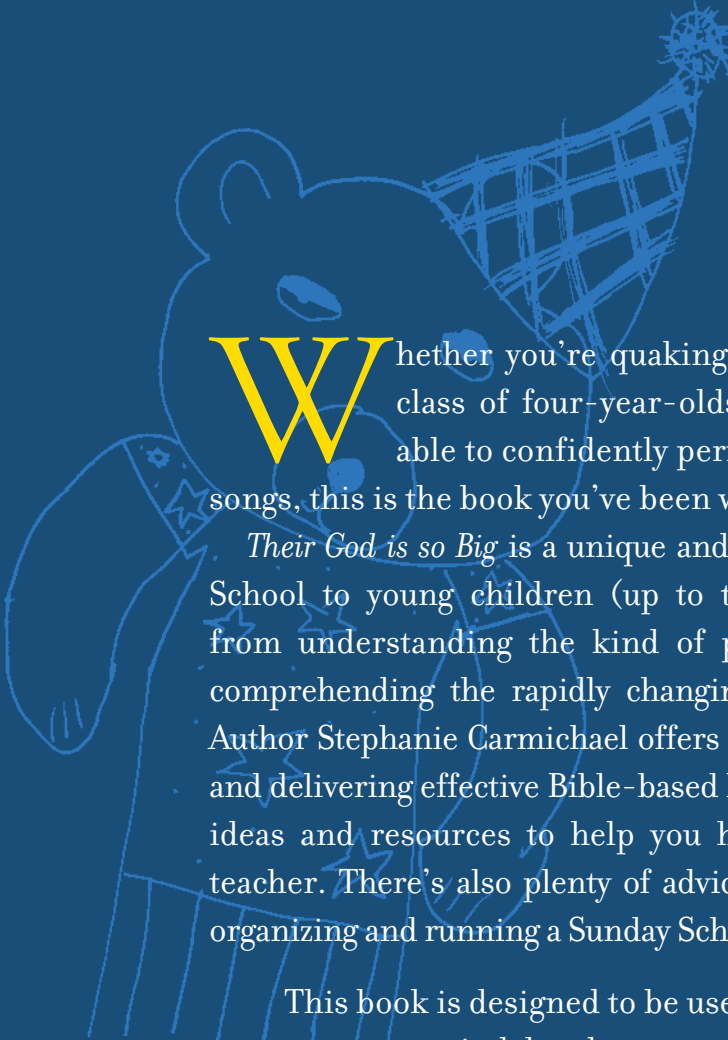
b. List three important things to remember when teaching them about God:

c. Pray for the children of your class by name, thanking God for how he has made them, and asking him to help you teach each one of them well.









**W**hether you're quaking in your boots about to face your first class of four-year-olds, or you're a battle-hardened veteran able to confidently perform the actions to dozens of children's songs, this is the book you've been waiting for.

*Their God is so Big* is a unique and indispensable guide to teaching Sunday School to young children (up to the age of eight). It covers everything from understanding the kind of person you should be as a teacher to comprehending the rapidly changing stages through which children pass. Author Stephanie Carmichael offers a simple, practical method for preparing and delivering effective Bible-based lessons, as well as reams of suggestions, ideas and resources to help you handle everything you might face as a teacher. There's also plenty of advice and information on the mechanics of organizing and running a Sunday School.

This book is designed to be used in three ways:

- ★ as a practical, hands-on manual for Sunday School teachers
- ★ as a course book for Sunday School teacher training
- ★ as a resource book for Sunday School superintendents.



### *About the author*

Stephanie Carmichael is a trained teacher with a long experience of Sunday Schools. Her seminars on Sunday School teaching and ministry to children have been enthusiastically received in venues across Sydney.

She is married to Ian, and they live in Sydney with their children Lauren and Glen.