

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Age Two

The ability of a child between ages 2 and 3 to comprehend things of a spiritual nature depends on his ability to talk and comprehend language. Much more is caught than taught. From the adults in his world, he catches attitudes of reverence toward God and His Word, quietness in prayer, and respect for God's house.

A two-year-old who can talk can learn simple prayers for mealtime and bedtime. Even at this early age a child can begin to establish concepts of thankfulness for blessings and trust in God.

Age Three

The three-year-old's many questions present tremendous opportunity to teach spiritual truth. He can begin to understand who God is, where He is, and why we can't see Him. He can begin to comprehend that the Bible is God's Book that tells us what He wants us to do.

The death of someone he knows presents a challenge to answer his questions about what happens at death; why people die; and why we put their bodies into the ground, but say they are in heaven with Jesus. He will have many questions about heaven, but we must take care that we don't cause undue fear with our explanation. To him any place without Mother is unsafe. One child began to fight sleep every night after he was told that death is like going to sleep and not waking up.

This child needs to develop the concept of God as a loving heavenly Father. This can be a tremendous blessing to him as he works through his fears at this stage. After one child prayed at bedtime he said, "Now I don't need to be afraid something will hurt me tonight because I asked Jesus to take care of me."

A three-year-old may still be praying memorized prayers, but he can be encour-

aged to pray spontaneous prayers. However, he may need adult help for some time. He can pray for a sick friend, grandparents on a trip, rain for the family garden, etc. Now is the time to establish the fact that God is interested in every detail of his life.

A three-year-old enjoys Bible story books and tapes. Certain characters may become favorites with him. After hearing the story of Ruth, one three-year-old was observed "reaping a field."

A three-year-old enjoys singing. He can begin learning words to songs, although he may not be able to carry a tune. He may even be able to remember words to songs he hears frequently in church, although his



rendition may be a bit garbled.

Most three-year-olds find a 2½ hour Sunday morning service quite tedious. It will be some time before he can sit without squirming. Some parents provide pencil and paper or a small book to help him through a service where little is said on his level of understanding. Others have found that even children this age can sit quietly with no toys or books to amuse them. He should be taught reverence for God's house before, during, and after the worship service.

Age Four

A four-year-old continues to ask questions. In his exuberance he may ask a second question before Dad is finished answering the first one. His mind is racing much like his body and he wants fast answers. As this child matures in his understanding of spiritual things, his questions display more depth. He will be interested not only in what happened in a Bible story, but why it happened. Family worship becomes a valuable time of discussion about what has been read. He should be encouraged to respond to what he hears.

He begins to find church more interesting because he attends classes for young children. He loves Sunday school, Bible school and Wednesday evening classes and considers his teacher a very special person. Although he squirms and needs firm guidance to keep from interrupting in class, he truly wants to please. He needs teachers who are patient, firm, and loving to help him channel his energy in acceptable ways in class.

Motion songs like "Building Up the Temple," "Running Over," "The Wise Men Built His House Upon the Rock" must have been conceived with the four-year-old in mind. He loves singing, and action songs fill his need for releasing his pent-up energy. He can't comprehend the symbolism of some of these songs by himself; parents and teachers must explain them as simply as possible.

A four-year-old is more ready to pray spontaneously. Again, he takes his cues

about prayer from the adults in his world. If Father prays a rapid routine prayer at mealtime, so will he. If Mother prays as a natural response of thanksgiving for either ordinary or extraordinary blessings, so will he. He can also begin to ask Jesus to help him obey and be kind, although he is far too young to understand accountability to God for his actions.

Age Five

This is a golden age for teaching because the five-year-old admires the adults in his world. He wants to please them. He wants to be like them. What a great responsibility rests on parents (and teachers) to model Christian character to their children and to give them proper concepts of God—not only at five, but all through the preschool years.

A five-year-old is capable of a repertoire of many Christian songs: action songs, worship songs, and hymns. He may not understand all the concepts in the songs, but the seeds will be planted in his mind to bear fruit when he is older. He should be encouraged to sing; whether he can sing in tune perfectly is unimportant.

With his longer attention span, a five-year-old is ready for Bible stories that include more detail. He continues to ask questions that show more thoughtfulness and complexity as he matures. In his play he may be overheard retelling the stories to dolls, stuffed toys, or an imaginary class.

Classes on his age level are important to a five-year-old, but it is often amazing how much he catches in the regular worship service, as well. He should be encouraged to talk about his observations. This provides an opportunity to clear up any misconceptions because he didn't quite understand what was said or done.

If a five-year-old has grown up in a home where prayer is a natural response to life's circumstances, he will pray with trust in a loving God. He will pray in faith believing that God hears and cares about him. He is secure in the knowledge that Jesus is a personal friend who is always near him.

Lesson 9



You are asked to teach the nursery class of four-year-olds in summer Bible school. Read the following statements and mark the ones which would be true of this age group.

- 1. ____ They will like motion songs.
- 2. ____ They will be capable of long periods of coloring.
- 3. ____ They will enjoy long, detailed explanations about God.
- 4. ____ They will have many questions.
- 5. ____ They need periods of physical exercise to work off their energy.
- 6. ____ They may tend to be noisy.
- 7. ____ They will enjoy Bible stories with colorful characters and much action.
- 8. ____ They will need help going to the bathroom.
- 9. ____ A calm and firm teacher can help them be reverent and self-controlled.



Write two sentences to describe the spiritual development of —

- 10. **a two-year-old:** _____

- 11. **a three-year-old:** _____

- 12. **a four-year-old:** _____

- 13. **a five-year-old:** _____



Do this activity.

- 14. Ask the preschool Sunday school teacher in your church if you may join the class for a Sunday or two to observe the children. Again position yourself so you are as unnoticed as possible. Make notes about what you observe about the children, their behavior, how they respond to the teacher and the Bible story, how they sing, etc. Write a report of at least 300 words about your experience.

LOOKING BACK . . .



Explain what is meant by the following statements.

- 15. **Gary is in the Terrible Twos.**
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16. Age three is an age of fears.

17. Age four is a frustrating time.



Suppose you are caring for a two-year-old, a three-year-old, a four-year-old, and a five-year-old while their mothers knot comforters at the church sewing for relief. Write 2, 3, 4, or 5.

18. ____ Which child will ask the most *why* and *what if* questions?
19. ____ Which child will try the hardest to please you?
20. ____ Which child will resist obeying you most?
21. ____ Which child will most likely want to play by himself?
22. ____ Which child will spend the most time with a coloring book?
23. ____ Which child may seem most fearful if he loses sight of Mother?
24. ____ Which child will probably be the noisiest?
25. ____ Which child will be most likely to venture outside and get lost?
26. ____, ____ Which children will still need help with buttons, snaps, and zippers?
27. ____ Which child will want to act out a Bible story you may tell him?



The Primary Years—Ages 6-8

Wilma sighed in dismay as she viewed the cluttered kitchen table. Her younger brothers, Jerry (6) and Tyler (7½) had gotten out their rubber stamp set, some old seed catalogs, and their Spirograph to make cards for Great-grandma. Now they were nowhere to be seen, but she guessed they were likely riding their bikes up and down the lane behind the barn. The table was strewn with unscrewed glue bottles, paper scraps, scissors, pencils, pens, and almost-finished cards. Now it was time to get ready for

supper. Should she call Jerry and Tyler back inside and have them clean up the mess? She knew that's what Mother would do, but it would be far less hassle to clean it up herself.

Wilma's younger brothers are typical of primary children. In this section, you will learn about the characteristics of these children who are typically in grades one through three. You will learn what can be expected of them and what activities are appropriate for them.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRIMARY CHILD

His growth is uneven. One place where uneven growth is obvious is the primary child's teeth. Some children in this age group have grins with toothless gaps! Others show adult-size front teeth with baby teeth on each side.

His growth is in his arms and legs, which results in some awkwardness in his movements as he adjusts to the changes in his body. He also becomes taller and thinner. Mother buys clothes a bit big in the hope that they'll last awhile, then despairs when the process must be repeated in six or eight months.



His finer muscles are beginning to develop. The emphasis here should be on the word *beginning*, especially for the six-year-old. He has better eye-hand coordination than he did as a preschooler. For short periods he can do well with smaller crayons and he can control a pair of scissors to follow lines quite well. Obviously the eight-year-old will be more coordinated and can be expected to do more detailed seat work for longer periods of time.

His muscle development demands activity. A primary child's large muscles are developing rapidly. Coupled with his excess energy, this makes him restless, and he wants to be on the move. He likes running games. The many forms of tag are his favorites, especially if all the children in the class can be active. He likes to be "it" as much as he likes to be chased. Primary girls like to jump rope.

A primary child works hard when he works and plays hard when he plays, and he doesn't really separate the two. If it is active, he enjoys it. Raking leaves, walking a dog, or vacuuming the floor can be just as enjoyable as jumping rope or riding a bike.

He cannot sit still for very long. He wants to do things rather than watch others do them or listen to a teacher explain them. He likes to pretend he is the characters in the stories he hears or reads and enjoys doing and saying the things they said and did.

He likes to cut and paste. He likes to fold and cut paper into interesting shapes—hats, boats, airplanes, etc. He likes to construct things out of cardboard and wood. He enjoys making a store or zoo out of cardboard boxes.

He tires easily. A primary child wants to be active, but this tempts him to try more than he can accomplish. Because he admires older children, he may attempt projects that are too long and complicated for his abilities. He needs help to choose activities that he can finish in a short time, usually less than a day. He needs guidance to finish what he starts, since his tendency is to rush into a new, more exciting activity before he has completed the first one.

Though he tires easily, he doesn't want to admit it. He does well if a time of physical activity is followed by a time of quiet listening or book work.

Since he is interacting more with other

children, he is also more susceptible to communicable diseases, especially colds. Caregivers need to be sure this child has good nutrition and plenty of rest to help him resist communicable disease. Many six- and seven-year-olds need to go to bed earlier at night than they did at four or five.

He can care for most of his physical needs. He can take care of his needs at the table, including buttering his bread and cutting all but the most difficult meat. He can better judge how much he can eat and should be expected to clean up his plate, especially if he serves himself.

He can dress himself with little or no help. He can bathe himself with only a little supervision and inspection to be sure that body parts he can't see are washed. Both boys and girls need help with their hair to be presentable in public. Girls with long hair need special help with washing it.

A young primary child is quite conscious of his clothes and likes for others to notice when he has something new. The older primary boy may be careless in taking care of clothes. He may leave them in a heap or he may be traced by the cap, jacket, and shoes that he shed as he raced through the house.



Complete these sentences about the primary child's physical development.

1. His growth is _____. This is evidenced in the mix of _____ and _____ teeth. He may be awkward due to fast-growing _____ and _____.
2. His _____ are beginning to develop. His _____ is developing.
3. He needs _____. He finds it hard to _____ for long periods.
4. He _____ easily. He should choose projects that he can _____ . He also is more apt to pick up _____ since he is interacting with others more.
5. He can take care of most of his _____ .



Watch a group of primary children at a park or playground.

- 6. a. How many boys? _____
- b. How many girls? _____
- c. Did the boys and girls play together? _____
- d. In what activities did they participate? _____
- e. How long did they stay with one activity? _____
- f. What, on average, was the height difference in the boys and girls? _____

MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRIMARY CHILD

“Let me read it.” “Let me write it.” “Let me do it.” These phrases are the trademark of the primary child who has begun school and is discovering more about himself and the world around him. He is an eager learner and wants to discover for himself.

He is learning to read and write.

There is a wide variety in reading and writing abilities in the primary years. The first grader is just beginning to recognize words while the third grader may have an extensive reading vocabulary. The primary child is thrilled to finally be able to read for himself. Although his reading may seem slow and labored to an adult, he should be encouraged to read as much as possible.

Remember that he can read lowercase letters better than capital letters or cursive writing.

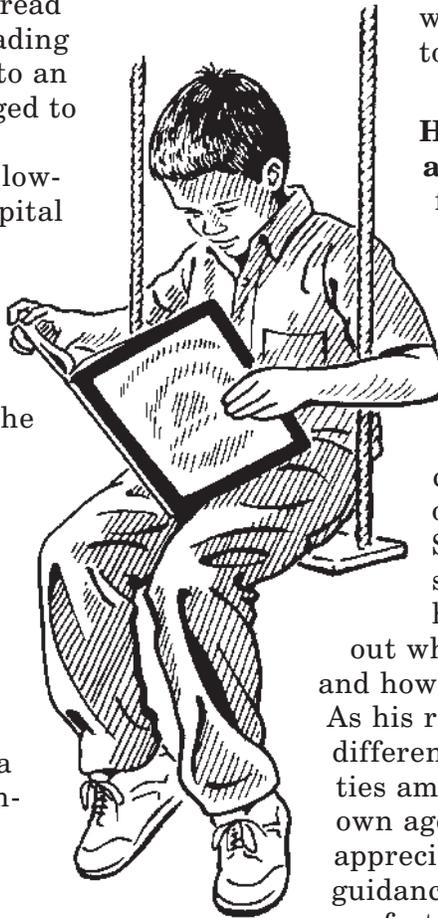
He loves to learn new words, both to speak and to read. If his reading instruction includes a good foundation in phonics, he will eagerly attack words of several syllables but will need help to say them correctly. The typical primary child increases his vocabulary from 2500 to 3600 words from first to third grade.

Reading awakens many new interests. He develops a better understanding of community workers: firemen, policemen, rescue squad workers, doctors, nurses, librarians, telephone and electrical repairmen, men who work on road crews, and the machinery they use, etc. He has a keen interest in books about nature and about children who lived long ago or in other lands.

He loves to play games with words and numbers. Simple games with flash cards are

an effective way to teach addition and subtraction facts or to teach consonant blends or consonant-vowel combinations. He enjoys writing and will work diligently to write neatly. He craves and deserves plenty of praise for his efforts, for this is truly strenuous work for him.

He has a longer attention span. A six-year-old's attention span can be as little as ten minutes, and should increase gradually in the next few years. Wise parents and teachers will alternate quiet seat work with activity that allows him to release his pent-up energy.



His reasoning powers are awakening.

He is beginning to form his own conclusions about what he reads and hears. His reasoning powers are just budding and he needs guidance to reach right conclusions. If a child hears that deacons are responsible to take care of the church's money, he may conclude that the one who passes the offering basket is a deacon. Sometimes his conclusions may seem so absurd that adults accuse him of lying. Take the time to find

out where the child got his information and how he formed his conclusion. As his reasoning expands, he will notice differences in physical and mental abilities among people, especially children his own age. He needs help to accept and appreciate these differences. He needs guidance to accept himself and to feel comfortable with his own abilities.

He is better able to discern between fact and fancy. He likes true stories best. He can also enjoy stories where animals talk or trees think or buildings in a city feel sadness. He does not appreciate a person who tries to make him think that the tale is true.

His senses are keen. The primary child loves to use all of his senses in learning. It is easy to teach him primarily through hearing, but encouraging him to feel and see and taste and smell will keep his interest longer. He should have many opportunities to learn by active participation rather than passive observation.

He lives in the here and now. He is learning to tell time and read a calendar, but he is mostly oriented to his own time and place. He has very little conception of states, nations, and the world. He has little conception of the historical sequence of Bible stories or family memories. This also means that his projects should not extend over a long period of time.

He is curious and he has a good imagination. If his verbal expression has been respected in the preschool years, the primary child will continue to ask many questions. The more he learns, the more he will want to learn. Caregivers should help him view the world as an interesting place with many exciting things to learn. He should be surrounded by books and magazines that help him discover answers to his questions. He should be taught how to use a library to find information about topics that pique his interest.

He likes to imitate grown-ups in his play: he plays house, school, church, farmer, or medical people and likes to make his play as realistic as possible. Hats and dress-up clothes and play tools are favorite playthings for him.

He has a good memory and is literal-minded. He does not forget people and experiences as quickly as a preschooler. Neither does he forget promises. Caregivers must be careful to keep promises they make. With this child it is better not to make a promise than to make one that we cannot keep. He can also memorize Scripture easily.

This child is not ready to understand abstract terms. He takes everything he hears literally. The Bradys' minister was away for a week of revival meetings and Father remarked that Brother Hershey was in Kansas fishing. Later seven-year-old Mark was overheard telling a friend that Brother Hershey went on vacation to fish. Words with double meanings can confuse the primary child. We must explain what we mean if we use a word with a double meaning. When using object lessons to teach spiritual truth to primary children, the connection between an object and the truth it represents must be clearly explained.



Write the mental characteristic that is described in each situation:

7. Barry's favorite books are about Curious George. _____
8. Kendra's favorite time of day is library hour. _____
9. Lora was heard explaining to her little brother that stories where animals talk are "just imagining." _____
10. Becky read a story set in the time of the Civil War and asked her mother if she remembered it.

11. Jason likes science best because his teacher plans many hands-on activities.

12. Sarah thought she should only take pennies for the Sunday school offering since her teacher always had the class sing, "Dropping, dropping, hear the pennies fall."

Lessons 10, 11

- 13. Kevin enjoys exchanging letters with a distant grandparent.
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LOOKING BACK . . .



Write true or false.

- 14. _____ A two-year-old will enjoy interacting with others more than playing alone.
- 15. _____ A three-year-old can learn simple courtesy and table manners.
- 16. _____ Four is an age of many fears.
- 17. _____ A five-year-old loves to please.
- 18. _____ *Be quiet* may be the most-often-used phrase by a four-year-old’s caregiver.
- 19. _____ Don’t ask a child *why* he did something wrong, but *what* he did.
- 20. _____ Four-year-olds will be noisy if not controlled.



List four guidelines to remember when disciplining a preschooler.

- 21. a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

Lesson 11 Social, Emotional, and Spiritual Characteristics

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

He wants to play with others and he wants child friendships. His family’s social life, church life, and school have exposed him to other boys and girls his age who enjoy the same things he does. He enjoys group games and he has a fierce sense of fairness. He is quick to run to someone in authority for help if he senses that another child is cheating.

Primary children like games that require

active participation by everyone. In tag games they enjoy being “it” as much as being chased and may purposely allow themselves to get caught so that they can chase others.

By the time he is eight or so, he may have one special friend with whom he shares secrets and special times.

He likes to talk. A primary child loves to tell about his friends, his activities, his

toys, and his interests.

He needs caregivers who will listen to him with respect and interest. As his thinking abilities continue to bud and blossom, it is a joy to investigate the world with him; to help him sort through the good and bad times with his friends at church and at school; and to teach him new skills.

He wants to be grown-up. He wants to imitate adults. He thinks of himself as “big” and does not appreciate stories or songs about “little” children. He likes to help adults work. He wants to go to the barn with Dad; she wants to cook alongside Mom. He likes to pretend he is an adult in his play.

He likes non-competitive play with both sexes. He is not ready for team games where scores are kept. He is more interested in running than in scoring. Girls will join boys in building farms and cities out of boxes, blocks, or sand. Boys will join girls in playing house, store, or doctor and nurse. Boys and girls of this age do not mind working and playing together.

He is inclined to be selfish, but he respects authority. The primary child’s world is expanding to include others, but in many ways he is still self-centered. He is tempted to cheat and lie to be first or best. He must be taught that he cannot always have the most or be the best. He needs to learn to respect the rights of others.

He is keenly sensitive to the praise of adults in his work and play. He wants to know his parents’ and teacher’s evaluation of what he does and will work hard to win their approval. Expressions of appreciation will encourage him to try more and more difficult tasks. He respects authority that helps him know what he can and cannot do. He may test the rules occasionally but he is secretly glad when parents and other caregivers kindly and firmly insist that he obey them.

He is easily excited. He can become so excited about a game that he seems to jump up and down, yell, and run all at the same

time. Sometimes a new activity can excite him so much that his whole body seems to shake, his voice becomes shrill, and he becomes clumsy and falls over his own feet. That is why adults need a long night of rest before they chaperone primary children on church picnics or school field trips!

This child needs calm parents and teachers to guide him through new experiences that cause anxiety and excitement. Shouting and harsh scolding only increase his excitement. A firm loving hand on a shoulder, a quiet command given with a smile, and simple explanations of what is expected can do much to help him enjoy new experiences.

Sometimes he withdraws. If a primary child feels unable to do the work that parents or teachers require of him, he may refuse to try by saying, “I can’t,” or “I don’t know how.” Sometimes this is rebellion, but more often it may be that child feels overwhelmed and has not developed sufficient skill so that he feels secure in attempting the task. Some children are timid and need special encouragement to join in group activities. They find it especially difficult to do something before a group. Such a child should say a verse or poem to the family to build his confidence before he does it on a church or school program.

He still has many fears and he needs security. He may fear the dentist, the school nurse, or the policeman. He resents holding his mother’s hand at the mall, but he fears becoming lost in a department store. Shadows of trees outside his window seem to be wild animals that chase him. Stories about danger and violence may make him wakeful at night. He needs much reassurance that he is loved, wanted, and cared for by his parents and other caregivers, but most of all by God. Stories about God’s care can help allay his fears.

A primary child needs Mother to be at home with him. He should not come home from school or play to an empty house. She is still the most important anchor in his life.

Lesson 11



Write true or false:

1. _____ A primary child will do well in a highly competitive game of baseball.
2. _____ He does not mind playing with the opposite sex.
3. _____ He enjoys being "It."
4. _____ He does not appreciate being asked to help with adult jobs.
5. _____ He does not care whether he pleases his parents and teachers.
6. _____ He does not worry about becoming lost or about a visit to the dentist.
7. _____ He can become overly excited about a new activity.
8. _____ He rarely refuses to try a new and challenging activity.
9. _____ He tends to be sharing and sensitive to the needs of his friends.
10. _____ He is secretly glad when an authority figure is firm about rules.

SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS

To the primary child religion is a natural part of life. He does not think about talking about the Lord at one time and being quiet at another. He will ask questions of a spiritual nature at any time that something in his experience triggers them. He will sing songs he learns at Sunday school or relate Bible stories he has learned in the midst of any normal activity such as mealtime, playtime, bathtime, etc.

He has a rapidly growing concept of God and enjoys Bible stories immensely. He is curious about death and heaven. He has a strong desire to be good.

However, he should not be pushed into a

premature conversion experience. When a child seems disturbed about some wrong he has committed, a simple confession to the one he has wronged is enough to erase his guilt and enable him to be at peace again.

If a child has learned memorized prayers for mealtime and bedtime in the preschool years, he can be encouraged to move away from them to prayers "in his own words" in the primary years. He should be encouraged to pray simple petitions for those he loves and any needs they may have. He can also thank God for special blessings he enjoys. He can also learn to come to God with his own needs.



Follow the directions.

11. **Tell how a primary child tends to view religion and God.**

12. **Tell how a child's guilt for wrongdoing can be taken of.**



Do this activity.

- 13. Ask a schoolteacher of 1st, 2nd, or 3rd graders if you may observe her class for a couple of hours. Plan with her how you can help with some class activity. Try to plan your visit so you can participate in at least one recess. Write a detailed report of your experience. Think about these questions as you write:

What was the reading ability of the students?

How did the teacher help them understand a new concept?

How well did they play together?

Were there any quarrels at recess?

How were they resolved?

Who was the most active child?

Who was the quietest?

Were the children generally obedient?

What was their overall attitude toward the teacher?

What was her attitude toward them?

LOOKING BACK . . .



Complete these sentences about the primary child's mental characteristics.

14. He is learning to _____ and _____. His vocabulary is rapidly _____. Reading helps him develop a better understanding of many things, for example, community _____ and their work, nature, and _____ who lived long ago.
15. His _____ is lengthening. He can stick to one subject longer.
16. His _____ powers are awakening. His _____, however, are not always correct. It's good to check on his meaning before assuming he has told an untruth.
17. He can discern between _____ and _____.
18. He uses all his _____ in learning.
19. He lives in the present, so historical _____ is still vague for him.
20. He is _____ and will ask many questions if not deterred from it.
21. He has a good _____ and likes to imitate grown-ups in his play.
22. He has a better _____ than he had as a preschooler and is generally _____-minded. Abstracts can confuse him.