

Spiritual Development

Dear Facilitator: In Luke 2:52 it says, “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

While we might understand that God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world, it might be hard to understand that while Jesus was God, He was also man. In other words, just as babies must learn and grow, Jesus also had to learn and grow. Today I smile to myself when singing the song “Away In a Manger.” The lyrics in the second verse are as follows:

*The cattle are lowing
The poor baby wakes
But little LORD Jesus
No crying He makes*

Is it true that Jesus never cried? For an infant, crying is not a sin; it is a way to communicate. Personally, I believe Jesus cried. He also had diapers that had to be changed, and He had to learn how to roll over, crawl, and walk.

I do not know about you, but for some reason Jesus learning and growing gives me hope for my future. He truly understands what it takes to be stretched physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

This week we are going to focus on how we grow spiritually. This is called spiritual development.

It might be helpful for you to know what we hope to accomplish through this lesson.

continued

Notes


Participants will:

1. State stages of spiritual development.
2. Identify family member's stage of spiritual development.
3. Develop ways to help the process of spiritual development.


We pray that God will give you direction and clarity as you prepare the lesson and activities. We hope that the families in your group will grow together in God's love and become a source of friendship and support for one another.

Blessings


Welcome *5 minutes*

 **Say:** Welcome back! I hope it's been a good week for all of you as you have been working diligently on many things that are positively influencing your family.

Last week we spent time learning how to identify and solve problems with humility and grace.

 **Ask:** Did anyone try something this past week that made a positive difference in your family that you would be willing to share?

Introduction *5 minutes*

 **Say:** (Adapted from Bruinsma's work) What is this (hold up an unsharpened pencil)? What needs to be done to get its full use? (Sharpen it.)

A pencil is made up of cedar wood and graphite. When you sharpen a pencil, you gradually peel away the wood so that the graphite of the pencil is exposed.

A pencil will not work well until the graphite is sharp and exposed.

Sometimes, when we learn new things, we must work hard and get rid of things that are getting in our way, like the wood surrounding the graphite of a pencil.

When a baby is born, she will waive her arms in circles, looking like she is reaching for nothing. As the baby grows and develops, the movements become more deliberate, and eventually she can grab and reach for items successfully.


All people grow physically, intellectually, emotionally, and even spiritually.

Today we are going to focus on how we grow spiritually.

Today's teaching objectives are to:

1. State stages of spiritual development.
2. Identify family member's stage of spiritual development.
3. Develop ways to help the process of spiritual development.

Family & Table Talk 20 minutes

 **Say:** Share memories of how you learned a new task.

1. What went well?
2. What kind of obstacles did you encounter?
3. What would you do differently if you had to do it all over again?

After the meal, children are dismissed to their group.

As you begin this portion of the evening, explain that each time you will start with the overview and then the lesson time.



Scripture SUPPORT

Luke 2:52

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

1 Peter 2:2-5

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the LORD is good. As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:9-12

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the LORD and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

40 minutes

Parent Training

Faith Formation

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Think about what a baby does to learn how to walk.
Let's come up with a list of steps.

DISCUSS

1. Baby is born.
2. Baby reaches.
3. Baby scoots and crawls.
4. Baby pulls herself up.
5. Baby walks.

While we know and understand that people need to develop certain skills to be strong enough to walk, there is a development that we often neglect. It is spiritual development.

Just as a tree trunk develops new rings through the years, faith also develops a variety of stages over time as a person matures. Each stage passes and builds upon the previous stage.

(Adapted from "Will Our Children Have Faith?" by John Westerhoff III.; found: <http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com>).

Christian faith, like the human body, has an expected pattern of growth and development. The different stages are usually addressed at certain ages and can (like physical growth) be delayed with faith development ending before the final stage is reached.

Experienced Faith

- The key to experienced faith in early childhood is observation and reaction. Children observe love and faith in their interaction with adults and react to what they experience. At this stage, they are too young to consciously think about faith, but they demonstrate unwavering faith.
- The needs at this stage are to:
 - Experience trust.
 - Experience love.
 - Experience acceptance.

Little children need a few trusted and loving adults in their lives. Sometimes pets provide the love and acceptance adults are too busy to give.

- Foster faith at this stage through warmth, hugs, active listening, and countless experiences of unconditional love.

Belonging Faith

- The key to faith for a primary-age child is a sense of belonging. Children of this age have a keen sense of the order of things. They are also great “joiners.” They want to belong to a church that is bigger than their family and to clubs within the church.
- The needs for children at this stage of faith development are to:
 - Experience a sense of authority. They are satisfied to have their “why” questions answered with responses like, “because the Bible” or “because the Adventist Church” says so.
 - Experience the community they belong to. Stories of God’s working in Bible times and in the beginnings of their church feed the child’s growing faith.
 - Experience awe and wonder, which are partly what worship is about.
 - Experience a sense of being wanted at church, being accepted by their teachers and peers, and being missed when absent.
- Foster faith by filling the above needs through stories, drama, art, and creative worship experiences in a warm, accepting atmosphere.

Searching Faith

- The key element of the adolescent’s searching faith is critical judgment. For the pre-adolescent, quoting authorities is not enough. They want to examine all the information for themselves.
- The needs at this stage of faith development are to:
 - Establish their own identity. They are questioning and examining their beliefs, their lifestyle, their appearance, all authority, and anything they identify with to define themselves.

- Know that the religion of the head is equal to the religion of the heart. This compels teens to ask searching questions that challenge the adult's beliefs. They become critical of any explanations that cannot be supported by logic, good sense, and scientific inquiry. Adults need to accept the questions without feeling threatened, working with the adolescents to find the answers.
- Be needed in the faith community.
- Foster faith in adolescents through serious Bible study, short-term journeys, mission trips, and service opportunities.

Owned Faith

- The keys to a lasting faith for the adult are: conversion, witnessing, and discipleship.
- The needs for adults at this stage of faith development are to:
 - Be an example.
 - Find opportunities to witness by word and by lifestyle.
 - Help others put faith to work.
- Foster faith through teaching opportunities.

DISCUSS

- Where are you on the tree trunk?
- Where do you want to be?
- How can you get there?
- Where are your children?
- How can you help them get there?

We have a handout that has been adapted from “The Discipline Guide for Children’s Ministry.” As we look through the chart, we can find resources or strategies on how to enhance spiritual development for toddlers through 12 years of age. There are also resources for physical, intellectual, emotional, and social needs.

SUMMARY

We covered a lot of material in the lesson.

Our objectives were to:

1. State stages of spiritual development.
2. Identify family member's stage of spiritual development.
3. Develop ways to help the process of spiritual development.

To end our lesson, please answer the following:

1. Who has an insight tonight about something you've learned or want to try?
2. What will you change or improve in your role as a parent this week?

Notes

Age	Physical	Intellectual	Emotional	Social	Spiritual
T's & 2	Move, explore, experience	Need to see, touch, taste, smell, and hear. Don't rush, attention two minutes	Test limits, routine. Teacher needs to maintain calm, be gentle	Copycats, repeat, will frequently invade others, selfish, solitary play	God cares for you. God made everything.
Preschool	Constantly in motion, begin to use small motor skills, make sure projects do not frustrate, noisy	Read pictures, imaginations, help them distinguish between fantasy and reality, 3-4 minutes attention, nonsense jokes/ words, questioning, listen patiently and help them communicate, follow no more than 2-3 instructions at a time, example of adults	Desire to please adults, helpers, need to be thanked, exhibit emotions freely and intensely.	Sense of group, watching closely that everyone in the group receives fair treatment, rules enforced consistently, parallel play, focused on themselves, unrealistic to think of them being unselfish, aware of bully games	Practice interacting and applying Bible truths that have social implications
K	Full of energy and need exercise	Let me do it, attention 5-6 minutes, memorization is not a good thing—their good memories exceed their ability to understand—they are parroting, enjoy completing stories over and over again, spell out expectations clearly, begin to understand cause and effect, here and now	Please and again approval of teacher, want attention, fragile emotions, difficulty with pretending, greet each child	Conscious of peers, fair, class rules stated clearly, girls advanced than boys, competition detrimental	Authority figures help create their concept of God. Discipline with affection, love, and forgiveness
6 & 7	Constantly moving, because in the process of developing control of large muscles these kids are unable to move slowly, awkward so get dirty easily, active-learning experiences	Adventurers, variety of activities, repetition, 6-8 minutes attention span, kinesthetic learners, beginning to read, literal thinkers, can learn to sing in tune	Desire friendships with adults, unrealistic expectations of themselves—tell them to not be discouraged, do not compare, express emotions physically, worriers	Want to be first, difficulty taking turns and need opportunities to practice, insensitive to feelings of peers, hypersensitive about themselves, eliminate competitive activities, cooperative activities	Difficulties with abstract—hands on—wash dirty hands for sins forgiven, focus can snag on aspect of story—don't be too elaborate, give actions stories, troubled if don't turn out fair

Age	Physical	Intellectual	Emotional	Social	Spiritual
8 & 9	Enjoy games	Can work independently, in-depth projects, if passive too long will act out, atmosphere of trust, careful to damage self-confidence	Demonstrate how new experiences are relevant, attempts tasks beyond abilities and then becomes upset, looking for place to belong	Concerned about truth, avoid highly competitive activities where child feels like a loser, can begin reasoning with children in discipline, empathetic, resent opposite sex, need friend of same gender	Begin evaluating ethics and actions by biblical standards
10 & 11	Growth spurts, fatigue, emotions, extremely sensitive, given sufficient quiet time to rest and recover	Interested in everything so easily distracted, daydreaming, concept of time, need to repeatedly remind them of deadlines to register for upcoming events, making transition from concrete to abstract	Frequent mood changes and out of control, anger will emerge as result of fatigue	Very close to friend of same gender, working with mixed groups gives opportunity to learn how to relate, service projects	New or renewed commitments to God and church, lost cause to keep these kids from talking to one another

Capehart, J, Gordon, W., & West, B (1997). The Discipline Guide for Children's Ministry. Loveland: Group.

Ages 4-16

40 minutes

Student Training

Faith Formation

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Objectives

- **Help children be aware of the need for spiritual growth and development.**
- **Help children be aware of what stage of spiritual development they are in.**
- **Help children be aware of things they can do to grow spiritually.**
- **Help children be aware of what the Bible says about growing spiritually.**

We have learned that God created man and woman in His image. That means that we are made to resemble God. God is amazing, and because we are made to be like Him, He wants us to be amazing too. He has placed inside each one of us special gifts and abilities that He intends to use in the wonderful plan He has for our lives.

In the Bible, John 4:24 tells us that God is a spirit being. And since we are created in His image we are spirit beings too. On the inside of your body is where your spirit lives. God communicates with us through our spirit. Job 32:8 says, "But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of Almighty, that gives them understanding."

When people accept Christ Jesus as their personal Savior, it is their spirit that is

born again and becomes a new creation. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts as our helper, teacher, comforter, and guide. Our physical body looks the same, but the spirit inside of us changes that very day. The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) Essentially, we become a newborn baby in the spirit.

Just as we learn what is best to keep our physical bodies strong, healthy, and growing, it is just as important to learn what will make our spirit grow strong and healthy. If your spirit is healthy, then the Holy Spirit can guide you along the path that God has planned for your life. We need to make sure our new spirit is being

nourished with the things of God. In the Bible, it says, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). We need the help of the Holy Spirit so that like Jesus, we can grow wiser and more mature in the things of God.

As we involve ourselves in activities that teach us about God and His Son Jesus, our spirit will become more and more like them. It is important that we talk to God each day and thank Him for our blessings and ask for His advice and help as we face life’s challenges. Talking to God is praying. God loves it when we spend time with Him in prayer! There are other ways that we can develop our relationship with God and help our spirit grow like hearing and reading Bible stories, memorizing Bible verses, and watching videos about Jesus.

As you get into your teen years, God wants to be an important part of your life. It makes Him smile when His teenage children choose to spend time with Him in their own private devotion time.

Being involved in church is also critical to growing spiritually. Sabbath should be a special day for God’s children because it provides a formal opportunity for us to worship God and fellowship with other believers. It is also a powerful spiritual growth enhancer to get involved in a youth ministry and attend Christian conferences and workshops. This can give teens a place to go where they can receive the positive support, encouragement, and prayers of their Christian teen peers. As we grow spiritually, God expects us to begin to use the special gifts that He has placed inside each one of us to serve others.

There are several levels of Christian spiritual development. Let’s look and see where you are in your Christian growth. The first step of spiritual growth and development is asking Jesus Christ to be your personal savior. When a person does that, whether they are young or old, they become a spiritual newborn baby. This is the foundation of every Christian believer. In 1 John 2:12, John says, “I



Scripture SUPPORT

John 4:24

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.

Job 32:8

But is the spirit in a person, the breath of Almighty, that gives them understanding.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here!

Luke 2:52

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

1 John 2:12

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

Matthew 28:19-20

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.” He addresses them this way because baby Christians believe in God but still don’t take it too seriously.

As baby Christians learn more about Jesus, their belief in God grows stronger, and they begin to be bothered by their conscience regarding right and wrong. As they continue to grow spiritually, they may begin to sporadically attend church and experience guilty feelings when they display inappropriate behavior. New Christians still may not know much about what having faith in God is all about. As they grow even more, they attend church regularly. And just like parents love their child and teach them about life and the world, it is the responsibility of the church family to love the new baby Christians and teach them about the promises of God and instructions in the Bible and the kingdom of God (Matthew 28:19-20).

Baby Christians begin to learn more about God and His commandments, but they are still quite immature. First John 2:3 tells us, “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.” In the Bible, in 1 Peter 1:14, Peter says that these immature years of Christian spiritual growth can be challenging. He warns, “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.” During these years, it is important to listen to your parents, pastors, and other church teachers and leaders who can help you keep you on the path that God has planned for you. Make it a habit to read your Bible, attend church, and continue to stay involved in church activities. It is also important to make good choices and to pick Christian friends who make good choices. First Corinthians 15:33 says, “Don’t be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”

As time passes and you continue learning about God and His Son Jesus and how to follow the instructions in the Bible, your spirit will become more developed and mature. Not only will you know the instructions and commands that the Bible

teaches, but you will also have a desire to live it. And as you live your life according to the Word of God, it will cause you to be blessed and prosper in all that you do. Joshua 1:8 says, “Keep the Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” It will be obvious that the Holy Spirit abides in you, and your spirit will be more and more closely aligned with the image of God, and you will fulfill the purpose for your life. Then you will be ready to give others the good news about Jesus Christ just as it was given to you.

DISCUSS

- Lead children in a discussion about how God created man and woman in His image.
- Lead children in a discussion about how God is a spirit being and because man and woman are created in God’s image, they are spirit beings too.
- Lead children in a discussion about what it means to accept Christ as your personal Savior.
- Lead children in a discussion about how to make our spirit grow and stay healthy as well as our physical body.
- Lead children in a discussion about some of the ways we can develop our relationship with God and help our spirit grow?
- Lead children in a discussion about levels of Christian spiritual growth and development.



Scripture SUPPORT

1 John 2:3

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

1 Peter 1:14

As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

1 Corinthians 15:33

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

Joshua 1:8

Keep the Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Notes



Activities

Activities are age appropriate. One is focused on ages 4-11, and the second is for older children ages 12-16.

AGES 4-11

Materials

Technology to show video

My Spiritual Growth Plan Worksheet

Pencils, crayons, or markers

Have children view YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/JOrcqqpHCt8> (Briefly discuss)

(If not possible, do activity without video.)

- Have children write on their “My Spiritual Growth Plan” worksheet something they will do each day of the week to help them grow spiritually. Have children share some of their plans.
- Assign children a Bible verse from the lesson Scripture supports.
- Have them memorize the verse to recite in your next class time.
- (Give a small reward for students who memorize the verse.)

AGES 12-16

Materials

Technology to show video

My Spiritual Growth Plan Worksheet

Pencils, crayons, or markers

Have children view YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/JOrcqqpHCt8> (Briefly discuss)

(If not possible, do activity without video.)

- Have children write on their “My Spiritual Growth Plan” worksheet something they will do each day of the week to help them grow spiritually. Have children share some of their plans.
- Assign the older children a Bible verse from the lesson Scripture supports.
- Have them memorize the verse to recite in your next class time.
- (Give a small reward for students who memorize the verse.)

Notes



CHALLENGE QUESTION

DO I TALK TO GOD EVERY DAY?

CHALLENGE COMMITMENT

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO TO WORK ON THE CHALLENGE QUESTION THIS WEEK?



AFFIRMATION *Have children repeat:*

*I am growing stronger
spiritually!*

MY SPIRITUAL GROWTH PLAN



Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:14

MONDAY _____

TUESDAY _____

WEDNESDAY _____

THURSDAY _____

FRIDAY _____

SATURDAY _____

SABBATH _____

Resources & Materials

<http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/637318/26587361/1444150967840/westerhoffstyles-of-faith.pdf?token=25eiXOkMimSThYQfnobBHQnFVKE%3D>

Object Lessons for Every Occasion by Sheryl Bruinsma, Baker Book House, 1991, p. 78-79

Unsharpened pencil, pencil sharpener

Coles, R. (1998). *The moral intelligence of children: How to raise a moral child*. New York: Plume Books.

Damon, W. (1999, August). *The moral development of children*. *Scientific American*, 281(2), 72-78.