



Gifts of children Bibles, catechisms or hymnals and instructing on how to use them is a fantastic ministry many churches and schools have implemented. When creating a faith milestone activity such as this, be intentional: include a gift, a blessing and an equipping component.

Define the purpose for the milestone.

I have seen Sunday school programs gift Bibles to early elementary children to be used with their parents at home and have also seen schools gift Bibles to be used and left in the classrooms. Defining and communicating the specific purpose with the families will help ensure the children are receiving both full education and the benefit from the milestone, regardless of what it is.

- If the Bibles will only be used at school, realize that parents will not have access to these Bibles to explore with their children at home. This type of milestone is more about curriculum, so getting parents involved takes more intentionality.
- If giving a Bible to a child for use in the home, including a parent training piece is crucial to help guide and set expectations.

Once the milestone has clear expectations and purpose, the next step is designing an intentional curriculum. One of my favorites is defining special uses of the gift. If hymnals have been gifted, this could be setting up a hymn of the month that is sung in chapel, Sunday church service, Sunday school, or used as memory work.

Catechisms can be used as a guide to study the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. Or maybe it could include a mini history lesson (such as why is it called the Apostle's Creed or where the different names for communion came from), looking up the Scriptures and having discussions around the questions that are listed in the sections.

Consider the age of the recipients

Age and growth are important factors when picking an appropriate resource for a particular age group or class. The resource should be usable and understood by the child when the gift is received, but also be a resource they can continue to learn from for several years. Second or third grade is a good age group for Bible milestones. They are decent readers but still like pictures. Look for Bibles with narratives in conjunction with attractive pictures, character sketches, highlights, "defining big words," or other extras in the margins for the children to explore. Have the children practice finding the books of the Bible, including chapter and verse, as this is an important skill in learning to read Scripture.

Get creative and include the congregation to make the milestone feel special.

The importance and role of family

The next level or component is family. Family in this sense includes not only the nuclear family but also the church family. This can be as simple as inserting the milestone into the church service as a blessing. Next, decide who will be handing out the Bibles. Parents can receive the Bibles as they enter church before they are seated, or members of the congregation can stand around the sanctuary with piles of Bibles.



It may look like this: The parents and their children can be called forward at the same time as one large group or can be spread out as small groups. The pastor or parents will then speak the words of blessing. After prayer, a verse of Scripture may be read out loud together from the new Bible, marked with a new bookmark of course. What if members of the congregation wrote a message on the front or back cover of the new Bible before it is even gifted? What if a handful of members were asked to highlight their own confirmation verse in a child's Bible and write their name next to it? Think deep and wide here and get very creative. My church even gives the children stickers that say, "I received my Bible today!" The congregation will love feeling involved in this faith milestone and it will communicate to the child just how important this event or gift is.

Train the family along with the child

Take advantage of the day the gift is given and ask the family to attend a special Sunday school hour with their children. This may include stations that families walk through together, a group activity, or maybe include personalization, such as a calligrapher who will write the child's name in fancy lettering inside the front cover. This hour might also include donuts, juice and coffee to fuel the families as they walk through stations.



I find it advantageous to include a time where the children and parents have separate training. The children can learn more about their Bibles and start digging in. Parents can receive needed encouragement and ideas on how to be in the Word together. Give parents realistic expectations for how this time could look and feel. Even messy moments in the Word together can be amazing.

If the gift's purpose is to be used in school, the day of activity can revolve around setting a tone for a positive home and school connection. Start with a syllabus and approximate timing so parents have an idea of what topics you plan to teach and when they'll be covered. Make sure to include examples of things that will be sent home, spending most of your time explaining what the expectations are for how these items should be used at home.

Allow time for parents to practice with each other

Build in an activity and let the parents walk through it with another parent. Never assume a parent knows how to use these resources, were taught from these resources, or has confidence in doing this with their child(ren). They may need some assistance at the beginning, but they will soon come alongside with smiles and anticipation. When executed with a well thought out plan, purpose and continued support, families will be eager to participate and continue in a tradition of instilling Christian milestones into their children's lives.

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QUESTIONS?

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