



Talking to God, part 2 of 2—

Teaching Babies to Talk to God

by Sharon Ellard

Early Childhood Consultant in the Sunday School Field Ministries Department

Babies Can Learn Too

During the first 12 months of life, babies learn many lessons. Church teachers who understand how babies learn can begin to teach them first Bible lessons in the church nursery.

Before babies will pay attention to pictures or music or other interactions, they must be comfortable, rested, fed, and at ease. So gentle, loving care is the first phase of teaching babies at church. Teachers who rock, cuddle, and feed babies help them learn to love and trust God's people in God's house.

May I Have Your Attention, Please?

When a baby is ready to learn, the next step is to get the baby's attention. With babies, attention is a two-pronged strategy. The teacher watches for what already has the baby's attention as much as she strives to gain the baby's attention. With that reality in view, teachers scatter lesson-related toys and pictures within the baby's view or reach. When a baby looks at or reaches toward a specific toy, the teacher interacts with the baby and the toy in a lesson-related way. This may involve moving the toy in a specific pattern, singing a song about a picture while pointing to specific parts, or some combination of

these. Teachers can purchase teacher guides, such as *Radiant Baby* from *Radiant Life*, that provide pictures and suggest specific ways to teach with safe toys.

Sometimes a teacher will begin a learning activity. Here are several simple ways to gain a baby's attention. Move a teaching object through the baby's line of sight. Tap on a picture or make a sound with a toy. Begin singing a repetitive song that matches the way



you are moving a toy or interacting with a baby. Simply hold a toy out within a baby's reach. Rested, comfortable babies will respond to any of these strategies.

You Too!

Babies learn from imitation. So nursery teachers need to participate with babies in learning activities. Sometimes this will mean

that while a baby holds a toy or baby-proofed picture, the teacher uses a duplicate to teach a simple idea about God. For example, while a baby holds a laminated magazine picture of a banana, the teacher moves a duplicate banana through the baby's line of vision, saying, "Yummy, yummy, banana on a plate." After laying her picture on a colorful, plastic plate, the teacher holds the plate out to the baby and taps the plate to see if the baby will lay his picture on the plate too. If the baby does, the teacher smiles and applauds. If the baby doesn't, the teacher smiles and says, "Thank You, God, for yummy, yummy bananas." This brings us to the next teaching principle.

Play It Again, Sam

Babies learn through repetition. As nursery teachers repeat learning activities again and again and again, babies begin to make the connection between what the teacher is doing and what the baby can do too. This part of teaching babies involves choosing activities that fall within babies' realm of ability. For newborn babies this means holding pictures within 11 inches of their eyes. For 4-month-old babies, this means laying toys within an arm's length so he can reach the toy. For 8-month-old babies, this means rolling balls or vehicles

that they can crawl toward. The Bible teaching activities need to fit the baby's emerging skills and be repeated until the baby makes the connection: "Wow! I could do that too."

This is why baby lessons in *Radiant Baby* are monthly les-

sons rather than weekly lessons. By repeating the same ideas and activities for a month of Sunday's and Wednesdays, you give babies time to add Bible learning to the learning that is being repeated at home.

Praise is a powerful motivator.

When teachers smile, cheer, and applaud babies' efforts, babies want to learn new activities so they can please these loving adults again. Praise helps babies learn "I can do many things" and "When I do good things, I feel happy."

Questions For Further Study—

1. List ways of teaching infants to pray or express praise to God.
2. Why is repetition important?
3. How well-equipped is your nursery with items that can be used as teaching tools?
4. How does the curriculum you use meet the needs of your ministry to babies and toddlers? What improvements can be made?



Radiant Baby is a one-year curriculum containing Bible-focused activities that help you share God's love with the very youngest in your church. The kit includes a teacher guide with 12 full months of lessons, the *Little Lamb* puppet, a music cassette, 12 posters, 4 board books, activity cards, and more. Order number 59VA1595 from Gospel Publishing House, 1-800-641-4310.