



Lively Stones | PETER 2:5

Holding forth the word of life

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BUILDING THE GODLY FAMILY

How Preschoolers Can Glorify God by Being Helpful to Others

By Yeap Song Ching

Having been requested to write an article on the above theme, I racked my brains for ideas. After all, do I not teach character in my daughters' primary school? Do I not have experience with preschoolers after serving some years in the Kindy Worship Service held at 8 a.m. almost every Sunday?

After some time had lapsed, I realised one truth: I did not know enough to write an article on the theme. I needed help. And who better to turn to than Sister Poh Yok, otherwise known as Mrs Tan Poh Yok in the kindergarten where she is the Principal? Moreover, Sister Poh Yok has had many years of experience in training preschool teachers. I could not have found a better candidate for an interview on the above subject.

Before I began my interview with Sister Poh Yok, I thought it wise to define what "helpful" means and why it is important for Christians to be helpful to others.

The dictionary defines "helpful" as providing assistance;
being useful or showing a willingness to cooperate.

As Christians, we are to learn from our Lord Jesus Christ. If you remember, He stretched out his hand to catch hold of Peter as he began to sink in the sea (Matthew 14:30-31). His helpfulness is also exemplified in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33-35). So, as His disciples, we should follow in His footsteps. But what about preschoolers? Are they too young to learn to be helpful? I put this question and others to Sister Poh Yok and here are her answers...

Song Ching: Poh Yok, do you think it is too early to train preschoolers to be helpful?

Poh Yok: Learning to be helpful is only one of many social skills that preschoolers develop as they watch and learn from the people around them.

Song Ching: What makes you say that?

Poh Yok: There is no time frame as to when a child starts learning social skills. It takes place all around them. They are exposed to it daily and they pick up both good and poor social skills. Depending on the home environment that a child grows up in, learning to be helpful can start as young as 18 months. If you are a parent who believes in doing everything for your child, then it is unlikely that your child will learn to be helpful from

young as he will be reliant on you to 'serve' him. However, if you are one who believes in teaching your young child to do things for himself, then it is likely that the child will be able to not only help himself but help others as well.

Song Ching: Why is it important for preschoolers to learn to be helpful?

Poh Yok: We need to look at this from two perspectives.

From the child's perspective: All children naturally yearn to be noticed and praised. From a very young age, they learn that being helpful gains them attention, praise and sometimes even rewards! They want to help around especially if it is to help someone they like. In pre-schools, it is very common to have lots of little 'helpers' in the classroom.

From the adult's perspective:

Teaching little children to be helpful helps them to be aware of their social environment. They see beyond themselves - they become aware that there are other people out there besides themselves. They

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see that they can be 'useful' little people. They realise that they are not helpless, that they don't need to depend on someone (an adult or older sibling) to come along and do things for them.

However, in this day and age, sometimes in the homes, helpfulness is not a virtue that is encouraged because the maid does everything for them. So sometimes to these children, being 'helpful' is to do the maid's job! So we have to change their mindsets and help them understand that helping someone is a virtue, however menial the task.

Learning to be helpful helps to develop confidence and independence in the children. They also learn to appreciate themselves through their simple achievements. Through helping others, children also naturally open themselves up to their friends and social relationships develop through interaction and bonding together as they help one another.

Song Ching: How are preschoolers trained to be helpful in the kindergarten? Could you give us some concrete examples?

Poh Yok: There is no formal way to train children to be helpful. What is more important is providing learning opportunities for children to naturally develop the skill. Forcing it on the child or constantly harping on the need to be helpful will not lead to a child being helpful. The child may do it for you there and then to avoid a scolding or punishment but he will not continue to do it in the long run.

In a classroom, the teacher can easily model helpful behaviour for children to follow either by doing so herself or by setting up situations for children to help her. One very common way of helping children learn to be helpful is for a teacher to acknowledge a deed of kindness by praising the child verbally or with a pat on the head or a hug. After repeating this form of reinforcement each time a child is kind or helpful; eventually, the teacher will find herself with many little helpers.

Song Ching: What can parents do to get preschoolers to help at home?

Poh Yok: All of us want to be wonderful supportive parents so we do EVERYTHING for our children from helping to clean their mouths to picking up things that they have dropped, to carrying their things for them, etc. However, if we can turn the situation around and provide opportunities for the child to be helpful by asking him to help mummy pick up the toy or help mummy to carry the bag or help mummy get the towel etc. The child then learns to 'help mummy' with some simple tasks.

When the child next finds himself in similar situations where help is needed, he will go "Aha! I can do that!" - The child knows that it is something he can do because he has done it before and is therefore confident of extending a hand to help. Conversely, if the child has little experience in helping to do even simple tasks at home, he may not even attempt to help as he does not see a need to help out or may not feel confident of being able to handle the task.

Song Ching: Well, Poh Yok, thank you for all your time and advice. I am sure parents will find your advice practical and easy to follow.

Poh Yok: Thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences.



Sister Poh Yok with her daughters, Tabitha (left) and Rebecca

Announcements:

1. Offering on Missionary Sunday in June was given to the work at Libo Cerias under Roska.
2. SS EXCO meeting is scheduled on 17 July 2005.

3. Teachers' Day Lunch Fellowship
Date: 4 Sept (Sunday after Worship Service)
Time: 1-3pm
Venue: Teochew Garden Restaurant, The Concourse, Beach Road

Editorial Team: Mrs Julia Koh, Mrs Selina Lee