

Learning through Play / Lydia finds God

Child's voice: 49, 50, 51.....98, 99, 100 – ready or not, here I come! There you are.. I found you! Now it's your turn...I'll go and hide.

Tammy: Hello, I'm Tammy and Carol and I want to welcome you to Women of Hope. Do you remember playing hide and seek when you were a child?

Carol: ...Oh I loved that game with all my brothers and sisters and friends in the neighborhood. It was so much fun. But who would ever think that “fun” could be important? Well, you guessed it – a teacher!

Ros is here with us again. And she was a teacher of very young children and is going to talk with us about ‘play’ and how important it is for young children to *learn through play*. Hi Ros, It's good to have you back.

Ros: Hello again ...And I remember being very scared when I played hide and seek with a friend many years ago. She wanted us to hide in the dark down a long passage way. I don't know what I was afraid of – but I didn't like that dark passage. I was glad when the game was over!

Yes, I was a pre-school teacher for a long time and I *also* love watching children play. *A child learns through play.*

You know, I enjoyed teaching parents too about the importance of play...and what their children were learning as they played.

Tammy: That sounds interesting Ros. Tell us more.

Ros: Sure. As parents we're very concerned that our children learn aren't we...but you know, children probably learn best when they're enjoying themselves...so in their early experience there's plenty to learn as they play.

Each day as I set up the pre-school room, I would think carefully about the various play activities and what the children were going to learn through that activity. Let me give you an example:

I would always have an area where the children could play with puzzles. This would help them to learn about shapes and colors. It also helped to train their minds to be logical and think carefully about which puzzle piece went where. It taught the child patience. I would often sit down with the child who was struggling to find the right pieces and make suggestions, like “what about this one?” Or

put the next piece near their hand – or round the right way so they could see that the shape of the puzzle piece was the same shape as the hole. And of course I would be very excited when they put it in the right place. Encouragement always helps a child to keep going and to enjoy what they're doing.

Tammy: So there's a lot more to it than the children just having fun for half a day.

Ros: Oh yes! We want them to enjoy their first school experience away from home...and there *is a lot* to learn. And mothers can help their children to learn through play in just the same way. You don't need expensive toys or equipment. If you don't have a jigsaw puzzle, you can just cut up a picture from a magazine into various shapes.

Carol: Do you have pre-schools where you live? If not, perhaps you can get together with some other mothers and care-givers of small children, so they can learn as they play together. That would help to get them ready for school.

Ros: Another very important thing for young children to learn is how to get along with other children...*and* how to get along with the teachers. As they share equipment and play games with others, they learn to take turns; to wait for their turn; to share – even when they really want something now! They learn that there's a beginning and an end to play time. They often don't want to finish. It's important to give a child a warning that it will soon be time to pack away. It's important to do this at home too. This helps them to accept it when the time comes. When a child is totally involved in play, it's not fair to suddenly expect them to finish with no warning. We wouldn't like it, even as adults, if someone came along and snatched something away from us that we were enjoying.

Carol: **Oh I know** we wouldn't. At home I always said to my family, "Dinner will be ready in 10 minutes." Then as time got closer I would say, "OK, time to stop and wash your hands," so they knew that it would be time to finish what they were doing and come.

Tammy: Yes I found we could all get along much better if the family knew what was expected of them and what was coming next.

Ros: In pre-school, or a mother's play-group, children learn the routines - when it's time to pack away we all help. When they get used to this they really enjoy the fun of packing away. And of course they know that something else fun is about to happen – it might be time for sitting together on the mat and having a story. It might be time for sitting together to eat some fruit. Even these times together are very important for learning about how to take turns and get along with others.

Carol: Here on Women of Hope today, Ros is sharing some thoughts with us about how important it is for children to enjoy play. So, Ros, I used to enjoy games of pretend the most. Children love to pretend don't they!

Ros: Oh yes. Don't you love to watch children pretending?! I love it when my 2 ½ yr old granddaughter talks on her little toy phone, and sounds exactly like her mother..."hello...yes...u huh...really? Ok, I have to go now...bye bye." And she sets off with her "baby" doll in her little pram and her shopping bag over her shoulder and says, "I'm going shopping," as she waves goodbye. We sometimes ask her to get something for us at the shops. She loves us to join in pretending!

Tammy: So, tell me – what is she learning by pretending? Does she know she's pretending, or does she think it's real?

Ros: They're both good questions Tammy. I'm sure *you* will have often seen children act out what they see happening around them. This is the way they make sense of their world. At the time I think it's very real to them. As a little girl rocks her dolly and then lays it gently in her bed, she's learning what to do and how to do it by copying what her mother does.

Sadly, sometimes what children act out is not very pleasant. Whatever they see and experience they need to act out so that they can learn how it feels for them. This might include shouting angrily at someone, if this is what they experience. And we've all seen children pretending to shoot others, with either a toy gun or even a stick that will do as a gun. It's sad isn't it that children have to see this kind of violent behavior. But they must act it out – to see how it feels for them.

So, in pre-school there will always be a 'home corner' where the children can play out the roles of their parents or others in their home.

Tammy: Tell us more about what you would set up in a pre-school, and what the children would learn from it as they play.

Ros: Sure, there's always a place for them to be creative - where they can make a mess and not get into trouble. Don't you love watching children as they paint or draw? Sometimes they'll just play with the colors and mix them together – covering the whole paper with brush-strokes of color. Sometimes they'll concentrate carefully and paint or draw members of their family. They may draw something that they've experienced. And again they're trying to work out what's happening in their world by putting it in a drawing. Or at home they might make shapes in the dust, or use chalk, or just water, on the path or the fence.

When a child shows you a drawing or painting that they've been working on carefully, the best way to appreciate it is to ask them to tell you about it. This shows that you're interested and they'll tell you which 'blob' is mummy, or daddy or their pet, and you can tell them how good it is. If you ask, "What's that?" the child will wonder why you don't know...as it's perfectly clear to them – they just created it!

Carol: Ok, this makes sense to me now. By asking a young child to, "*tell me about your drawing,*" they get excited and start talking about what they have just done.

Ros: Always, then they can explain it to you without feeling that it's not good enough or you don't understand. As you encourage your child to be creative, they'll create more and more interesting – and often more realistic paintings or drawings.

Tammy: Ros, tell us some more about what children learn through play...

Ros: Of course as the child plays with puzzles and drawing or painting he's also learning how to control his hands and fingers. This is called – 'fine muscle control.' When a child is very young, give him big crayons or pencils and large pieces of paper. As he gets older he'll develop enough control to start writing letters and words – but it takes time to develop the fine muscles to do this...so for now, let him just enjoy playing with the paper and crayons or chalk on a path.

And in the same way we want children to develop their large muscles - in their legs and arms and body as they play. So we provide them with plenty of space to run, jump, skip and climb. These play activities not only help to develop their whole body muscles, but also their lungs and heart – to keep them fit and healthy.

In a pre-school playground there will always be something to help children develop their *balance*...a plank to walk along (not too far off the ground) and maybe some flat stones to step on; things to crawl through and climb over.

Carol: You know, just as children need to learn to balance when they're young, I've noticed that often an older person begins to lose that sense of balance. And if they don't stay active they will also lose that muscle strength that they first developed as a child that aids with their balance.

Ros: Yes...it's very important for all of us, throughout our lives to have times when we can relax and "play." It's good for our muscles, our heart and lungs, and also good to help us enjoy our life and stay calm.

As our children grow up we should never stop making times to play with them – in the fields, at the park, kicking a ball, or on the beach...or anywhere that we can do things together that we all enjoy. Your family will stay close and enjoy your company if you take time to play together.

Tammy: Thanks Ros – that’s a good thing to remember.

Hello. Welcome back to Women of Hope. We have another friend with us today who is no stranger. Fran’s been with us often. Welcome back Fran.

Fran: Hi! Yes, I’ve been telling stories about the people who followed Jesus in those first years after he returned to heaven.

Tammy: Haven’t they been exciting? We’ve heard how God gave his Holy Spirit so that they were able to spread the good news. They travelled widely, and everywhere they went they met with difficulty! But still, many people believed in Jesus, and received God’s forgiveness and new life.

Carol: One of the most exciting parts of the story was how God showed those early followers that the good news was for *all* people. It wasn’t just for the Jewish nation. You might remember that a Jewish man named Paul hated the Christians. But God showed him that Jesus was the savior he had promised, and Paul was determined to preach about Jesus to those who weren’t Jewish.

Fran: So today I want to tell you a story from God’s word, the Bible, about how Paul met a special woman. But first I have to explain how Paul came to be in her city. (Acts 16:6-15)

Paul and his friend Silas had been travelling and preaching in Turkey. Groups of Christians were growing, and it was all going very well. But one night Paul had a strange vision. He saw a man from Macedonia, (a town) in northern Greece, who begged him ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ When this vision finished, Paul was sure God was sending him to Macedonia, so they got ready immediately and set off by boat. They arrived at an important city called Philippi. Luke was with them; he was the man who wrote down everything that happened.

On Saturdays Jews always met together to pray and worship God. So Paul and his friends went down to the riverside. They knew that any Jewish residents would probably be meeting there to pray to God.

There were just a few women there; so they sat down and began to talk to them. One was a woman named Lydia. Lydia was a businesswoman, who traded in purple dyed cloth from her home city. She wasn’t born Jewish, but she had learnt about the true God who made heaven and earth, so she used to meet with the Jewish women to pray.

When the women heard Paul speak, God opened Lydia's heart to understand and respond to Paul's message about Jesus. She must have shared the message with her family and household. The Bible tells us that they were all baptized, dipped under water, as a sign that they had become followers of Jesus. Then she said to Paul, 'Since you accept that I am a true believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.' So they went to stay with her. And she proved to be a true believer and a true friend.

That's the end of Lydia's story in the Bible.

Carol: Thank you Fran. What did *you* think about that story? Better yet, what did you think of Lydia?

Tammy: I liked her right away - she seemed like an independent woman, earning a living for her family. I wonder if she was a widow?

Fran: Maybe she was, the Bible doesn't say. She must have been fairly successful because she had a big house where guests could stay.

Carol: But don't think she was just interested in making money. She must have really wanted to know the truth about God. She had a very open heart!

Tammy: Why do you say that, Carol?

Carol: Well, she had already turned away from the idols of her own people, and joined the Jewish women. They must have explained to her that there is only one real God, who made heaven and earth. That God was holy. And that He had told them how to live their lives, following his laws. That must have sounded good to her.

Fran: I suppose the women would have told Lydia too that God had promised to send a savior. They were expecting a divine person who would rescue God's people and turn the hearts of people to God. Many Jewish people were hoping and looking eagerly for this savior.

Carol: And I am thinking that they must have told her about God's promise to Abraham, their ancestor, that through him *all* nations of the earth would be blessed? (Genesis 12:3) That would have meant a lot to her, I'm sure, to think that God cared for her and her people too, that they were all welcome to join his people. Perhaps they told her what their prophet said: 'You will look for me, and find me when you look for me with all your heart' (Jer 29:13). But maybe she wondered *how* God would bless all nations, and how *she* could find God.

Fran: Well, Paul could answer that question! His message was clear- *Jesus* was that promised savior, and *anyone* could put their faith in him. Jesus had taken on himself the guilt of the whole

world, and died in our place, and now anyone could accept him as *their own* savior. They could know that God had forgiven them, and given them new life. Anyone could be blessed through Jesus!

Tammy: It seems that Lydia was looking for God with all her heart. And just like those children playing hide and seek, she found him.

Fran: Or rather, God found her! He specially sent someone who could explain about the true God, who she was trying to find. Now she could know him through Jesus.

My friend, I wonder if you've been looking for the truth about God. Maybe you've longed to find the one who made you, and you haven't known how to worship him or how to live the right way. As you hear about Jesus, and how he came to show us the way to God, I wonder if *your* heart is open, like Lydia's. If you are truly looking for God, I want to tell you, he is looking for you! He's been looking for you long before you even cared about him. He has done everything that's needed for you to know him: you only need to put your faith in him, tell him you're sorry for all the wrong things you've done, and ask him to be your master and savior.

Carol: Think about those words God gave the prophet. 'You will look for me, and find me, if you look for me with all your heart.' Are you looking?

Tammy: Friend if you are looking for God or you have more questions about God and Jesus, perhaps you know a follower of Jesus that you can ask.

Carol: Or maybe you would like to write to us.

We do hope you will be with us again. Remember; look for God with all your heart and you **will** find Him.

Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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