

Little Hearts for His Glory

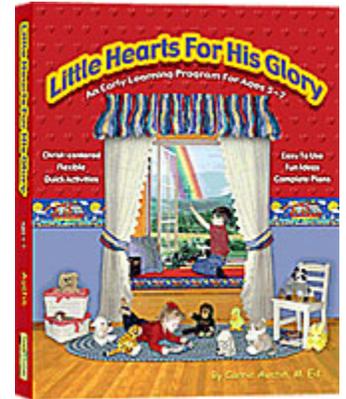
Publisher: Heart of Dakota

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Reviewed by: Jean Hall

The cover shows a little girl lying comfortably on the rug, reading to a circle of stuffed-animal friends, while her brother crouches on the window seat, teaching a little toy friend about rainbows and God's promises. "Christ centered," the cover states, and "flexible, quick activities, easy to use, fun ideas, complete plans." I admit to being a little cautious at first glance. I have bought curriculum before on the strength of a winsome illustration and bright promises, and ended up using only the first ten pages or so. Still, I've heard good things about Heart of Dakota, so I had to open this one up and explore a bit...



The "Special Thanks" page is promising: *First thanks go to Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, with a hope that He would be glorified.*

The Table of Contents is well organized, chronological, and ambitious, going all the way from the beginning of history to the present day in thirty-four units.

The Introduction is thorough, and I find myself nodding as I read. This author has done her homework; she is keeping her readers in mind, answering some of my questions before I even think of them!

And so I discover that the program has two components: Learning through History and Learning the Basics.

Learning through History gives a necessarily broad overview of history from Creation to the present day, integrating Bible stories with stories from history and incorporating Bible memory work, devotionals, science, art, dramatic play, games to develop thinking skills, rhymes, gross motor skills and music. Learning the Basics focuses on language arts (handwriting, phonics, fine motor skills, storytime, language) and math.

In short, this is a complete set of lesson plans for children who are ready to begin to learn phonics and "early" (kindergarten through first grade) math. Each unit comprises five days of lessons, planned to take up about ninety minutes a day. The lessons are visually and logically broken up into nine boxes, each box containing an activity, giving the program wonderful flexibility. You can go through an entire day's work in one block of time (with appropriate breaks), or you can space them throughout the day, allowing time for switching laundry from washer to dryer, or helping an older child with schoolwork, or nursing a baby, or kissing and bandaging a cut finger, or any number of interruptions.

Each activity box is logically laid out, with the subject area at the top (Fine Motor Skills, Reading about History, Science Discovery, Bible Study, Rhymes in Motion, Storytime, Math Exploration, Phonics, just for a few). The activity is clearly stated. Most of these activities require little preparation and use commonly found household materials (aluminum foil, pennies, and paper clips for one science activity, for example). Added materials are clearly marked as "necessary" (those you would have bought before beginning the program, as the introduction states) or "optional"--and as the "optional" materials are supplemental, you can still do the learning activity as written in the teacher's guide without the feeling of "missing something." At the bottom of each box is the "Key Idea" behind the learning activity, a summary of the purpose behind that activity.

I like this! Short lessons, gauged to capture a child's interest and to engage the imagination, and yet these short lessons have solid content, building character along with academic skills. Not every subject is covered every day; for example, you might do a "Science Discovery" activity twice a week, lending variety to the program.

The lesson plans call upon materials that we have used and enjoyed in the past: *History for Little Pilgrims* and *History Stories for Children* from Christian Liberty Press, *Rod & Staff Workbooks D and F*, and a Storytime Set of tried-and-true stories from Thornton Burgess, Beatrix Potter and H. Garis ("Uncle Wiggly"). As a matter of fact, you can buy the teacher's guide and these additional books in an "Economy Package" for

\$69. You may add your own math, phonics, and handwriting programs or purchase those recommended in *Little Hearts for His Glory* from Heart of Dakota Publishing.

A few more optional resources are listed, such as *Hide 'Em in Your Heart* by Steve Green, to aid in Bible memory work, and *The World God Made* or *Our Father's World* or *God's Wonderful Works* from Christian Liberty Press for reading connected to the science discovery plans in each lesson.

God's character, promises, and provision are clearly shown in object lessons, and the Gospel is presented in simple terms by the time you reach the end of this study. Along with activities and crafts, there are discussion questions and comprehension questions, making for a well-rounded program.

The Appendix contains suggestions on teaching phonics, very practical in nature: "This schedule is suggested **once your child shows an interest in learning to read** (emphasis added) and "Since I believe phonics instruction is a very personal decision for each family, I specifically designed *Little Hearts for His Glory* to work with any phonics program that you choose." Next are schedules for using alternate science and math texts instead of those listed in the lesson plans, and a list of Optional Literature Suggestions (lots of good books and Wee Sing songs--can there ever be too many read-alouds?). Rhymes in Motion contains fingerplays and physical activities, in many cases sung and performed to familiar tunes. The rhymes that are not sung have the sort of rhythm and rhyme scheme that delight small children, along with memorable gestures that are just right for wiggly learners. The rhymes, of course, reinforce the learning going on in history and Bible and even touch on rote learning such as days of the week and months of the year. A bibliographical list of Resources rounds out the teacher's guide.

All in all I'm very impressed with this program, and am happy to recommend it to any mom looking for a comprehensive, flexible, pre-planned program where fun and learning go hand in hand.

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