

Happy Birthday Sesame Street!

by: *Bob Adams*

Sesame Street DVDs now come with a warning label. According to the [New York Times](#), last year's release of Volumes 1 and 2 of the perennial children's favorite contains the following: "These early 'Sesame Street' episodes are intended for grown-ups, and may not suit the needs of today's preschool child." Gen X parents all over the country are now faced with a dilemma – do they view these videos with their Gen Z kids?

On November 10, 1969 sunny days hit the airwaves of public television for the first time. We were introduced to a cast of real and make-believe characters who interacted throughout all the situations of a typical brownstone in the Upper West Side of New York City. Reality television? NOT! Quoting the Times article: "The people on "Sesame Street" had limited possibilities and fixed identities, and (the best part) you weren't expected to change much. The harshness of existence was a given, and no one was proposing that numbers and letters would lead you "out" of your inner city to Elysian suburbs. Instead, "Sesame Street" suggested that learning might merely make our days more bearable, more interesting, even funnier. It encouraged us, above all, to be nice to our neighbors and to cultivate the safer pleasures that take the edge off – taking baths, eating cookies, reading. Don't tell the kids."

Fast forward to 2008: churches all over the country are now focusing on children's ministries which use multi-sensory communication of the Bible lesson. Not content to have children sit in chairs in rows facing a teacher who reads a lesson and asks questions, many churches now have some variation of the following:

- Classrooms transformed into biblical scenes duplicating a Palestinian village or a hillside outside Galilee through the use of theatrical sets
- Costumes & short dramas (both teachers and children) to communicate Bible stories
- Props that visually reinforce the Bible story

This multi-sensory environment is a product of the Sesame Street generation: puppets popping out of trash cans, windows, and all over the set to interact with real people. Today's adults grew up on it; now they are refining it for their children and taking the concept to even higher levels.

Current approaches to ministry with children can be grouped into three broad areas of secular media classifications:

- Sesame Street – a cognitive learning style
- Disney – an entertainment learning style
- Nickelodeon – a multi-sensory style

It's beyond the intent of this post to analyze the pros and cons of each, but consider this:

[Research](#) from the Center on Missional Research indicates that all the high quality programming utilizing and dynamic activities is great and very effective in reaching children (and their parents), but **it never seems to be enough.**

Churches having a life-changing impact with their children are the ones that connect children to one another and have adult leaders (and/or mature older students) who regularly interact and care for them. Despite all the pizzazz and glitz of incredible programs, mentoring seems to be the key to sustained, effective evangelism among children.

I think Gordon may have had it right after all. Happy Birthday Sesame Street!

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