



WINNING CHILDREN
in our
HARVEST FIELD

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the leadership of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board (TBMB) for allowing me the opportunity to put this book together. This resource focuses on assisting our churches in the process of winning children in Tennessee for Christ.

I am fortunate to personally know the ministry leaders listed below. Their years of service makes them uniquely qualified to share their invaluable wisdom in this book to help all pastors, bi-vocational pastors, children's ministry staff, and anyone in children's ministry leadership to understand that there are basic principles every church can follow to reach children with the Good News of the Gospel.

It is my sincere prayer that everyone who reads this book will feel reenergized and ready to do the work to share the Gospel!

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FORWARD

Dr. Randy Davis

You can't miss the prominently displayed pictures of my four grandchildren when you enter my office at the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board Church Support Center in Franklin. There are dual reasons for that. First, I personally believe they are the most beautiful grandchildren in the world!

But secondly, their photos remind me why I am pouring the best, and the rest, of my ministry years into serving churches as they reach Tennessee for Jesus Christ. The motivation for a passionate pursuit of accomplishing Great Commission work is our children and grandchildren.

People across our state share this concern. During a series of listening sessions we held with Tennessee Baptists in 2019, and then again throughout 2023, the most pressing desire Tennessee Baptists have consistently communicated is reaching and discipling our children and students for Christ. It didn't matter where people were geographically located, inner-city Memphis to the rural area surrounding Mountain City. There is a shared and great burden for the youngest among us.

Make no mistake, there is a battle for the minds, hearts and souls of our children. Our children are facing an American culture that has not existed in our lifetime. Hell has cleverly packaged wrong as right; right as wrong. This is a most difficult time to be a child.

But the gospel provides hope, and this next edition in the TBMB's WINNING series is full of practical helps to equip adults for sharing Jesus and in ministering to children. This resource is to support those standing in the gap for Tennessee's children. May we fervently engage the fight for the future of our children!

It is a joy to be with you on this journey.



PREFACE

Dr. Roc Collins

Winning Tennessee Matters!

Tennessee is a beautiful state! I love Tennessee from Mountain City to Memphis and all points in between. From the Mississippi to the Smokies, there is something special about Tennessee.

Our history gave us our name as Volunteers, and that legacy is still a characteristic of the citizens of Tennessee who are willing to volunteer in service to their neighbors.

I could go on and on about all the good to be found in our beloved Tennessee. However, the sad truth is that many in Tennessee are lost without Jesus. We boast a population of over 7 million in our state, and our most recent statistics tell us that over 4 million do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. My heart breaks as I consider the lostness around us.

WinTN is not just a slogan or a theme but it is a necessity. **This is an urgent call!** Our neighbors all across the state are dying without Jesus Christ. **How will we WinTN?**

The Tennessee Baptist Mission Board is unapologetically seeking to win Tennessee for Jesus. Our number one objective is to see at least 50,000 Tennesseans saved, baptized, and set on the road to discipleship annually. Since we have a population of over 7 million people, we have plenty of prospects. Having plenty of prospects means there is opportunity, but our challenge is to witness, win, baptize and disciple. We can talk about it, but the stark truth is that the number of Tennesseans we are baptizing each year is below 20,000 on an annual basis. We must do more!

The steps that are necessary were written in the book *Winning Our Harvest Field: What Really Matters*. In fact, they are the same steps that I took as a pastor to see people saved, baptized, discipled, and mobilized to fulfill the Great Commission. **The steps represent a church-based strategy to WinTN.** The task is great, but these are a few simple actions we can take to see Tennessee won for Jesus.

STEP 1

Harness the Power of Prayer

First, Pray! If we are to win Tennessee, we must begin with prayer and end with prayer. Pray the Lord of the harvest to raise up laborers for the task. Pray for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to draw people unto Himself. Pray that we will be burdened, broken, and willing to be His witnesses.

STEP 2

Intensify Efforts to Identify and Reach People

Second, Connect! Step two focuses on connection. We need to be intentional in creating relationships with people who need Jesus. To simply stay locked in our four walls with “our” people is not an option. We must seek the lost. Jesus was accused of and criticized for eating with sinners. Let it be said of us too! Before we can win four million lost Tennesseans, we must identify them and connect.

STEP 3

Boost Involvement in Worship and Groups

Third, Invite! Churches across Tennessee must be open to whosoever. Inviting the lost to church and lovingly welcoming them to a fellowship of believers. Tennessee churches must be a place where everyone can come and find hope and help in Jesus and be loved through the process of discipleship. We cannot just sit on our comfortable pews, enjoy the fellowship with our friends, and rest in the salvation we have been given while the people all around us are slipping into eternity with no hope in Christ.

The focus is on relationships. And groups and worship are the primary relational strategies in every church. Connection begins with identifying people, discovering prospects, but culminates by inviting people into a relationship: a relationship with Jesus and His church.

STEP 4

Heighten Personal Evangelism through Group and Member Involvement

Fourth, Witness! Intentionality in evangelism is absolutely necessary to win Tennessee to Jesus. There must be an intentional drive to witness to people. We cannot afford to just wait and see if there is an opportunity to witness but under the power of the Holy Spirit, we must seek out those occasions and make the most of them. In the words of Charles Spurgeon, “Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor.”

STEP 5

Implement Actions to Serve Your Community

Fifth, Serve! We must serve our communities if we are to win Tennessee. The fields are white unto harvest. We must see Tennessee and tell Tennessee. Such actions open doors to share Jesus with people.

STEP 6

Build a Disciple Making Culture

Sixth, Disciple! Winning people to Jesus is only the first step in disciple making. Growing new believers into multiplying disciples is the second step. Both steps are essential to win Tennessee.

STEP 7

Strengthen Next-Generational Ministries to Reach and Disciple Preschool, Elementary, Middle and High school Students and their Families

Finally, Multiply! The next generation is at stake. There has never been a more critical time to do all we can to reach the current and next generation for Jesus! We must multiply.

To win Tennessee, we must not only reach the kids but their parents. Every generation matters and must be reached.

Let us not grow weary but rather be invigorated to win Tennessee! The Winning Our Harvest Field Book will provide a foundational understanding of this strategy. This book will be a blessing to you and a guide for how to implement the Winning Our Harvest Field Strategy so that we can Win Every Generation in Tennessee for Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

Vicki Hulsey

Winning Children in Tennessee Matters!

From the time I was two weeks old, my mother made sure I was in Sunday School each week. Our family rarely missed being with our church family on Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, and often other times during the week. Parents and church leaders partnered together to help children hear about God's love, understand how to have a personal relationship with Jesus, and be discipled to grow in their daily walk with Christ. Families learned to not only be a part of a missional church, but to be on mission to families in their own neighborhoods.

Growing up in a church bursting at the seams with young families, I found it hard to imagine that not every child went to church. As the years went by, I began to meet more and more people who did not attend church at all. As I grew in my walk with Christ, I began to have a great burden for the lost and recognized I had a responsibility to share God's great love with others. Fast forward to today, it breaks my heart to see the number of families that have no connection to a church home. Even more heartbreaking is the realization that out of a population of over 7 million people, approximately 4 million people in Tennessee have no relationship with Jesus Christ.

When I share with churches in our great state of Tennessee, I usually begin by making this statement: "Reaching Tennessee with the gospel is more urgent now than in any other time in history." Almost without fail, I see several people looking at me with puzzled expressions on their faces. Someone in the group usually questions why I would think that. After all, we live in the buckle of the Bible belt! I respond by sharing about the decline in the number of people saved and baptized by Tennessee Baptist churches. I share research that points to the large number of Tennesseans that have no relationship to Christ. That stark reality makes it impossible for me to ignore the lostness in Tennessee.

What does recognizing lostness in Tennessee mean for ministry to children? I regularly receive calls and emails from churches asking for help in reaching children and young families in their communities. Pastors often begin the conversation by sharing that they have no children attending their church. Other pastors share that the number of children in their church is a fraction of what it was ten years ago.

There was a time that if a church advertised a special event for kids on their church sign, kids would flock to the church. Unchurched parents would bring their children to Vacation Bible School because the parents had fond memories of attending VBS as a child. Sadly, today that is no longer the norm. Many of today's parents have no idea what

VBS means on a church sign. They might even wonder if the church is having vegetable beef soup for dinner. For those who have grown up going to VBS year after year, it is hard to imagine that someone would not know what VBS stands for. But, knowing that today's kids are the first generation that the majority of their parents did not grow up in church, how can we expect them to know if no one tells them?

The question I hear most often from churches is “What do we need to do to attract young families to our church?” An even bigger question is “How do we reach today's kids with the gospel?” The reality is that for parents with no church background, it may never occur to them to come to a church building for any reason. Reaching today's families may require getting outside the walls of the church building and going to where children and parents are. Many of today's parents do not have an automatic trust for the church. As the church, we must earn trust through showing the love of Christ as we build relationships. That often starts away from the church building as we do life with our neighbors rather than just living next door.

It is my hope that this resource will assist churches in reaching their harvest field, specifically the next generation. The authors of this book draw from a wealth of practical experience as they demonstrate how the seven steps in the Win Tennessee strategy can assist churches in reaching children and families through **prayer, people, relationships, the gospel, love, discipleship, and multiplication**. As you read, you will find some authors' churches using different names than your church for Bible study or other ministry areas of the church. Regardless of how ministry names or church sizes may differ, these authors share sound principles and tips that are applicable for all churches.

My prayer is that the insights and experiences shared in this book will be a valuable resource for your church in winning children and families in Tennessee for Jesus! As you begin to pray about your commitment to win children in your harvest field to Christ, I am available to dream with you as you flesh out how to implement these steps in your own church strategy.

Let's win the next generation to Jesus!!

CHAPTER 1

PRAYER MATTERS

Shane and Sarah Brown



If we are going to win Tennessee, a primary goal of children and youth ministry leaders must be to support families in raising young people who go into their world with a deep relationship with Christ and a love for those around them. Whether you are a children's ministry director, Sunday School teacher, small group leader, missions leader, or baby soother in the bed babies class, you are a ministry leader and play a vital role in planting seeds in young hearts. All of us who work with children of any age, want to see them come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is easy to get caught up in the latest curriculum; fun activities that will inspire hearts and minds; and the latest technology to keep them engaged. However, one of the most important things that we can incorporate into our life and ministry is prayer. We once asked a wise couple with four grown daughters how they raised such solid young women. They shared that one of the most important things they did was spend a lot of time on their knees in prayer.

Many books have been written about prayer. People have a lot of information about how to pray, when to pray, and why to pray. The difficulty is not in the fact that the resources are not available. The difficulty is that it just isn't happening. I (Sarah) find myself thinking or reading about prayer more often than actually praying. I (Shane) often have great intentions when it comes to prayer, but it ends up as more of a to-do list for God or an SOS in the midst of a crisis. At any given moment, we can find a million other tasks to do rather than pray.

It is often assumed that people in ministry have a great prayer life, but we are finding that is often not the case. Not because we do not think it is important but because there seems to be a spiritual block to praying. In a survey that Ellison Research conducted for Lifeway (2005), it was discovered that out of a sample of 860 protestant pastors, only 16% were highly satisfied with their prayer life. This leaves 84% of those in the ministry wishing they had a better prayer life. While these same questions haven't been repeated in more recent research done by Lifeway, it is possible that percentage could be even greater with the increased demands on pastors today. The survey results revealed that the younger the pastor, the more dissatisfied they were with their prayer life. But pastors are not alone. The disciples had the actual, living Son of God teach them how to pray. After teaching them clearly how to pray and modeling rhythms of prayer times, He took them to the garden to pray, and what did they do? They fell asleep! Twice! The men who were literally walking with Jesus had difficulty praying – so why would it be easier for us?

This chapter is meant to be an encouragement to pray. It is not going to be a technical manual on prayer, but simply a push to begin praying. As you give of your time working with children, pointing them to Christ, one of the best things you can do for your life and for the children you work with, is to develop a daily rhythm of prayer. Prayer is important to God. Throughout Scripture, we see the pattern, "Ask...and I will." Prayer changes things in the spiritual realm and the physical realm. We will see how instrumental prayer is to the

overall evangelism goals in Tennessee. This mindset and posture lead us to loving others well, and a better understanding of the power of relationships. Through relationships, we share the Gospel out of love, desiring a multiplication of believers who become true disciples of Christ. We are going to focus on three areas of prayer: praying as an individual, praying as a couple, and praying as a community.

Praying as an Individual Matters

R.C. Sproul said, “Prayer does change things, all kinds of things. But the most important thing it changes is us.” Repeatedly, we hear individuals express the desire to have a more solid prayer routine; however, they do not feel the confidence needed on what or how to pray. It would be good for us to remember what children are often taught about prayer: that prayer is just talking to God about what is on our minds. At times it could be like having a conversation with an old friend; and at other times, someone that you admire. Even with this mindset as a framework for how to pray, we may still find it difficult to “find the right words” when talking with God. Of course, we know that God is not looking for the “right words.” He simply wants a willing heart; one that is open to communing with Him through conversation and quiet reflection on who He is and what He is doing in our lives and the lives of others.

God has given us a powerful tool for prayer: the Bible. We have personally found that when words are in short supply, simply praying Scripture is one way we can easily talk to God. There is power in God’s Word. The Bible is living and active (Hebrews 4:12), and it never returns void (Isaiah 55:11). I (Shane) have been using this idea for several years now and have found it to be very helpful and encouraging as I talk with God. I use topics such as strength and courage, couple them with Bible verses, and then pray over whomever or whatever might be on my heart and mind that day. For example, using Philippians 4:13, my prayer may go like this, “God I pray for my wife and kids today; may they have strength in all you have for them today. May they rest in the fact that they can do all things through You who gives them strength.” I continue to pray for others on my list, rotating these topics every twelve days. This has helped keep my prayer life going.

Here are 12 powerful verses to pray over yourself, your spouse, and your children:

1. Strength: Philippians 4:13
2. Courage: Joshua 1:9
3. Peace: Philippians 4:6-7
4. Provision: Philippians 4:19
5. Direction: Proverbs 3:5-6
6. Protection: Psalm 91:1-2

7. Joy: Psalm 16:11
8. Compassion: Ephesians 4:32
9. Justice: Isaiah 1:17
10. Wisdom: James 1:5
11. Hope: Romans 15:13
12. Love: 1 Corinthians 13

(Taken from: <https://club31women.com/12-powerful-verses-pray-children/>)

When we say your/our children, we are referring to any child that you have contact with, whether they be biological or those that you serve in your area of ministry.

We should be praying specifically for the salvation of our children and many Scriptures can be used as a starting place. Using a familiar passage we all know, John 3:16, as a prayer might look like this: “God, thank You that You loved insert name so much that You sent Jesus to die for him/her. I pray that insert name would believe in Jesus so that he/she will not perish, but have everlasting life.” Other verses might include:

- 1 Peter 1:8-9: “Though insert name has not seen You, may he/she love You and believe in You that he/she may be filled with inexpressible and glorious joy because insert name is receiving the result of his/her faith, the salvation of his/her soul.”
- John 10:9: “May insert name realize that You and You alone are the gate. May insert name enter that gate and be saved. May he/she enter and find your pasture.”
- Ezekiel 36:26: “I pray that you would give insert name a new heart and a new spirit. Remove insert name's heart of stone and give him/her a heart of flesh.”

We can also use Scripture when asking God to use us to plant the seeds that would lead to salvation: “Lord, I know that the fields are white with harvest (John 4:35) and that this is the time for bringing lost souls to you. You said, ‘Ask and I’ll give the nations to you....’ and Lord I am asking for the children of insert name of your church or ministry (Psalm 2:7-8). I pray that the eyes of their hearts may be opened and that they would each confess that You are Lord and be saved (Ephesians 1:18, Romans 10:9). May I not become weary in doing good but finish this task that You have called me to (Galatians 6:9, John 17:4). Here I am Lord, send me (Isaiah 6:8). In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

In the survey done for Lifeway, those with the most satisfying prayer life prayed for things outside of their immediate needs and wants. “The study clearly showed that what drives a satisfying prayer life for a minister is spending less time asking God for things and

more time listening to what God has to say, praying for issues beyond their own personal and church needs, and spending much more time overall in prayer,” said Ron Sellers, president of Ellison Research. This means we cannot just pray safe, boring prayers. We need to be willing to pray scary prayers. Prayers that will move us from where we are today. God has given us this weapon and we need to use it. As we begin to pray sincerely and earnestly, God will begin to change our hearts and shape our prayers to match His heart.

Praying as a Couple Matters

“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by the Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20, NKJV). Besides praying individually, another important habit (if you are married) is to pray with your spouse. Praying with your spouse can yield excellent results. This is why Satan will do everything to keep it from happening. At first, it will feel extremely awkward. Praying aloud with the person who knows your ups and downs is very different from public praying with strangers; it is more intimate. After at least 15 years of encouragement, we finally started praying together in the morning. It is not a thirty-minute call-down-fire prayer time. It is a short prayer that quickly addresses any concerns of the upcoming day. It has built a bond between us and sets our day off on the right foot.

There is a different level of connectedness that exists when you pray with your spouse. You begin to share your hopes and concerns with one another. Praying as a couple also builds a stronger level of trust and openness. When we disagree over how an issue should be handled, we have found that it is much more productive to pray about the issue together than to try to sway the other person to see it our way. It is almost impossible to fight and pray at the same time.

Two principles we use in our prayer time together: Keep it short. Keep it consistent. We encourage you to start praying with your spouse today. Grab hands and talk to God about whatever is on your mind. We guarantee only good will come from the experience.

Praying as a Community Matters

Praying over the community is also an important part of the ministries we lead. As a ministry leader, you have many opportunities to connect with families in your church as well as outside of your church in the community. Leaders can and should model for kids and families the importance of covering our church families and our neighbors in prayer. This part of prayer is a great way to get the entire church body involved no matter how large or small your church family is. A couple of ideas include prayer walks, getting church members to commit to praying for kids and families by name, and community pastor prayer opportunities weekly and monthly.

Several years ago, we were inspired by the Pray for Me Campaign to develop our version of this movement and commit to praying for each of our children and their families each week. Our prayer team led the charge and assigned a prayer partner to each grade level class from birth through college/young adult. These prayer partners are given rosters of our children and their families' names to pray over for the school year. We even include our weekday preschool ministry children and families' names. We are fortunate in our community to be church partners with a local elementary school, and we include them in this prayer ministry. The administration has allowed us access to students' names and faculty/staff lists to assign prayer partners. This means that each week or even each day for an entire school year, all the kids and families in our church, our weekday PreK ministry as well as the over 300+ children in the school we support, are being prayed over by name.

In addition, each fall we conduct a prayer walk before school begins, covering the schools, the faculty, and staff as they begin a new school year. This is a non-threatening way to show the love of God without being accused of not appropriately separating church and state. Depending on your school of choice and the administration, you can either pray while walking the halls or pray as you walk around the exterior of the building. Either one yields the same results. The important factor is that you are gathering with a group of fellow believers and specifically and strategically praying for that school.

Two final ideas for growing towards a community of prayer were started by our senior pastor during the pandemic. Our senior pastor has a burden for prayer and this burden opened the door to two amazing things happening in our community. The first is that local ministry leaders of all areas and denominations gather via Zoom every Thursday and pray for thirty minutes (7:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.). We never go over that time and we pray over the same four topics each week, with the ministry leaders rotating their prayers for these specific areas: government authorities, health, social civility, and Gospel spread. It has been a beautiful experience to see many denominations coming together under the banner of prayer.

This led to a monthly in-person gathering where we rotate through local churches on the first Wednesday of the month. During this time, we pray over the pastor, the church, and the community they serve for about an hour. The pastor gets a chance to share ministry needs and personal requests that allow us to be specific when we commune with God in personal prayer during that time. Again, this has been a humbling experience as fellow believers and laborers in the harvest work, get the chance to love on and encourage one another. This could be a powerful way to gather together with fellow children or youth workers to share in the burden of reaching the kids in the community.

Our Families Matter

Ministry leaders to ministry leaders, we are sure you are aware that our families are struggling, and our children's souls are on the line. The reasons seem endless: divorce, competing family activities, cultural divides, cultural wokeness, political turmoil, moral failures, and social media – just to list a few. As leaders, we are stretched thin on many levels as we try to be all things to all people. Over the last decade of ministry and two decades of marriage, my wife and I have concluded that the best course of action we can take is to first pray for our families. They need that. After we pray, we wait for God to open the door for us to minister to their lives. But we must first seek God on their behalf and be willing to listen as He shows us how to help our families follow after Him. Jesus said this very thing: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33. NKJV). As you work with children, remember that the programs, curriculums, activities, and technology will come together, and the harvest will happen as you seek Him first.

In and of ourselves, we are not the heroes our families need. They need ministry leaders who seek God individually, as a couple (if applicable), and as a community. This is where we are going to experience a true move of God. The good news is He is more than able and will do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). We want to remind you about where we started this conversation for children and youth leaders in that we believe prayer matters. Remember that wise couple? Let's get on our knees and seek the One who has the answers.

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

What does this chapter say about my prayer life?

What does this chapter tell us about God?

What does this chapter call me to do?

How does this chapter change the way I relate to people? (How can I use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?)

How can the leaders in our class/group use a class roster to pray with a kingdom mindset?

What can our church do to ensure that church families and neighbors are covered in prayer?

Who are the people in my life I need to intentionally pray for to come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ?

CHAPTER 2

PEOPLE MATTER

Tammy Trembley



As children's leaders, we often see or hear comments about parents bringing their children to church in order to use the church as childcare. We also see a lot of moms bring their kids to church and the dad is not involved. The desire of our hearts is to get entire families involved in church, and I believe that should be our goal, but I also believe we should not give up on just the child attending church or moms attending with kids. I'm not saying you would give up, but I want to give you encouragement when it can feel frustrating.

I was a child that attended church without my parents. I didn't stay in church all my growing up years, because I did not have that spiritual foundation and the spiritual support from my parents. However, I did remain in relationship with Christ all my life. I knew He was there, and I knew He loved me. I knew this because of a faithful children's director at a Vacation Bible School that shared Christ with me. I knew this because an aunt and uncle took me to church one summer. It took me until I had my own children to realize that their spiritual welfare was my responsibility, but eventually I did come back "home". I was also a mom that took her children to church for years without my husband. For years, I prayed that one day he would be the spiritual leader of our family. I felt like giving up many times. However, God answered my prayers.

I have served in children's ministry for 30 years in various positions. I have led countless children to Christ. I have seen that after many children began coming to church, some of their parents began coming. I have seen repeatedly that when a child came to know the Lord, the parents and siblings saw and believed. My life is a testimony to that! My children and husband also came to know the Lord because someone didn't give up on me. When my daughter grew up, she became a missionary. She spent time in Africa and China before the pandemic. I don't share all this to toot my own horn. I share this as an illustration that when we believe that people matter and children matter, it is a blessing to see how God can use us and then use them for His purpose. We must be diligent and do what the Lord has called us to do. Who knows how many people have come to know the Lord because that children's director led me to Christ many years ago at VBS? I have also met MANY people who share that they were a "bus kid" and now they are Kingdom Workers! So yes, PEOPLE MATTER and CHILDREN MATTER. Jesus said it himself! "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14, ESV).

We know that scripture to be true; however, we can't just sit around and wait for the children to come to us. They are only going to come to us if their parents bring them, so we must go out and be where the children are. We must go outside our comfort zone... go beyond our walls. How do we do this? We start by praying and asking God to show us where he wants us to serve, and where He wants us to be. We look for children with needs and we go there to meet those needs. Needs might include food, shoes, conversation, prayer, or other needs that we discover.

Start with Prayer

Our church has a prayer team. We have a goal to enlist at least 100 people to pray for 100 days before an event begins. We use the Remind App and add the contacts to the app. We currently have over 160 people praying daily for VBS and a ministry called Beyond Our Walls. Every opportunity I get, I ask people to join the prayer team. Prayer team members do not have to go anywhere or pray in front of people. Daily, I send out a request, whether it be to pray for the hearts of the children attending the program or pray for no roadblocks keeping children and/or parents from attending. We ask for prayer for the weather, no technical glitches, the buses to start... whatever the need is. We ask God because He wants us to ask Him. Daily, over 160 people are asking and praying for the same specific thing. They can pray in their own home and on their own time. This is not a big ask for our congregation as each one of us should already be praying daily. Many people can serve on this team that may not be able to serve in children's ministry in any other way. In order to not make this a time-consuming task, you can spend a couple of hours and schedule all of the requests in advance. Then you don't have to remember to do this every day. I add events that are on the church calendar, so the requests are relevant to that particular day. For example, on the day we took 45 kids to camp, I asked for traveling mercies. On the day I knew we were having a fundraising car wash, I asked for good weather. On the days we are sharing the gospel such as the final day of camp or VBS, I ask for special prayers for these times.

Another great opportunity is Pray4TN. Pray4TN is a movement across Tennessee to pray for every household in Tennessee. Individuals in your church can become a light in their community by signing up at <https://www.tnbaptist.org/pray4tn/>. By providing your address, you will receive a list of the names and addresses of your one hundred closest neighbors. You can choose to receive a daily email asking you to pray for five of your neighbors. Then you are praying for neighbors every single day! At the end of twenty days, you will have prayed for your one hundred closest neighbors. Then you will start back with your original five neighbors and go through the list again. What an amazing tool this is!

Go Beyond the Walls

I mentioned earlier about going beyond the walls of your church. Our church has a ministry called Beyond Our Walls or BOW. BOW consists of Backyard Bible Clubs held during the summer on Sunday evenings. We go to five different apartment complexes and meet with the children who live there. Many people in our church are involved. The prayer team is a vital part of this ministry. Youth serve in this ministry and the children of our church are also an important part of this ministry. Our "church kids" play and make friends with the children we serve in these communities. The "church kids" even have their own training where we talk about the importance of making friends and including the

children at the apartment complexes. There is a group that services our activity bins weekly so every Sunday night the correct lesson plan, craft, and needed supplies are in the bin. Beyond Our Walls has led us to have a thriving van ministry. We have met many children that now come regularly to all church activities, have accepted Christ as their Savior, followed through with baptism and some have even been able to reach the rest of their families through this ministry. At the end of the summer, we have a giant pool party or slip and slide party with a cookout. The entire church family is invited along with the children and families we served over the summer. This allows the church to meet and mingle with the families from the community. We do have to remind and train our church members to go outside their comfort zone by trying to meet and talk to the people from the apartment communities. It is a natural tendency to want to sit and converse with people you know, but staying comfortable is not what Christ has called us to do.

Because we have several organizations in town that try and meet the needs for school supplies for children in our community, we do something different. We gather the clothes and shoe sizes of the children in need and make sure these children get at least one new outfit to wear on the first day of school. Most get even more than that, but think how loved these kiddos must feel to know someone shopped specifically for them. We get multiple pictures from the parents on the first day of school with children in their new clothes. I keep a list of what church members bought for which child so I can pass the picture on to the purchaser. This is a win-win. Both parties are blessed.

I would also encourage you to look for opportunities to be out in the community at large as much as possible. Be where the children are. If there is a Christmas parade, have a float. If there is an autumn street fair, have a booth. Easter Egg hunt? Be there! Always have a flier ready and spark up a conversation! For children connected to your ministry, go to the recitals, ball games, gymnastics, karate practice, etc. Don't get overwhelmed trying to do this on your own. Share the joy by enlisting others to help. Let your small group leaders know what you know about the children. I provide postcards with postage already attached so that leaders only need to write a brief note letting a child know they have been thought of and prayed for. Who doesn't like receiving mail saying someone is thinking about you? Snail mail is still a great personal touch!

Our church has a special ministry just for pre-teens (4th and 5th graders). It started with about 6 kids and has grown to over 40 children because we teach these kids specifically to share the gospel and invite their friends. We teach them that just because they are young does not mean they do not have an impact on their surroundings. They want to do the right thing; they want to make a difference. I regularly share the gospel with this age group and ask them to practice sharing with one another. We have shown them many ways to share the gospel from bracelets to jellybeans, apps on their devices, strings, balloons... Why? Because you never know when a conversation will come up and they need

to be ready (1 Peter 3:15). This is the age where children's influencers often begin to shift from their parents to their friends. We take a special interest in this age group because they are about to head into middle school where the influence is not only from friends and teachers. Social media and the internet often begin to have a strong impact. These kiddos need to be shored up. We have a special Bible Study for this age group where we meet once a month and have dinner (the preteens who have a birthday that month get to pick dinner) and Bible study. We go through a book of the Bible or study what the Bible says about a certain subject such as peer pressure, bullying, or friendship. One evening we met at a local park for a picnic to do our Bible study. The kids that were involved in "Hang Out" knew some of the other kids that were just playing at the park and invited them to join in. That night, we added 3 more to the group, and I had an amazing conversation with their parents!

We also do service projects. For instance, during covid, we made cookies and posters and went to a local nursing home and walked around the outside of the center, waving at the residents through the windows. The posters said things like, "Jesus loves you" or "We are praying for you". We have worn our church t-shirts and walked along the road and picked up trash. People driving by saw us, honked, waved, and gave us a thumbs up. What a great way for your town to see your church and kids doing a good deed for the community! We also take this age group on special trips. We have been kayaking many times. We have been to the Ark Encounter every year. One year we attended a conference just for preteens. This gives the children an opportunity to bond as a unit, invite friends to fun outings, socialize with peers and leaders, and most definitely worship and grow closer to God.

Our regular programming on Wednesday nights is called Impact Kids. Our main verse for that program is 1 Timothy 4:12. During Impact Kids, children study about missionaries. We use the Children in Action Literature from WMU, but modify it by adding high-energy worship at the beginning, having a game time, a craft time, and high-energy worship at the end. It's like VBS every week! We use the elements that we learn in our studies to invite and minister to people in our community. One church we learned about had ice cream socials, so we had an ice cream social. I created invitations for the children to invite someone. I thought each child could invite one person, but some children invited their entire school class! It was amazing and we were packed full of kids! Not only did every child hear the gospel that night, but every child witnessed it as well.

Another element I feel that has led to us being able to reach children is that our church has a working relationship with the local schools. We take gifts for teachers, or occasionally provide a lunch for teachers and staff, thanking them for all they do. We find out what the needs are for the children at the school and try to meet those needs. One principal shared a need for socks and underwear. We had a sock and underwear drive at our church and

were able to take two giant bags full of socks and underwear to the school to distribute as needed. We have learned that our schools often are in need of help in the lunchrooms. They need help cleaning the tables and helping kids, especially the younger ones, to open their milk or ketchup. Once a week, usually on a Wednesday, I would go to school during the lunch hours just for this purpose. The kids knew that if Mrs. Tammy was there, it was church night. I would give out hugs, open ketchup, clean up spills, and just visit with the kids. They love it, but so do I.

I have realized that if I post things on Facebook, send text messages, or emails, the parents may see it, but the kids don't. I must find ways to let the kids know about the fun things we do. If the kids know, they will ask aka "bug" their parents to do it. So, I started putting up posters in the church where the kids are. The water fountains, the restrooms, their classrooms. I visit classes on Sunday mornings and let kids know what's coming up. I remind them about the event at every opportunity. I also started mailing the kids postcards directly to the kids, telling them about the event. An even better idea might be an invitation inside an envelope with the child's name on it. How special it is to get mail!

What about sports? Sports is such a hot topic these days. Many sports have practice on Wednesday nights or kids participate in traveling teams that take them away from Sunday morning worship or Bible study. This is another reason I feel it's important to visit a practice occasionally (on a night when we don't have church activities). It lets the kids know we haven't forgotten them. Another element of sports would be to have a sports clinic or camp. Our church does not have a level area where we could have a soccer clinic, but it does have an indoor fellowship hall where we had a cheerleading clinic. One of our members is a middle school cheer coach. We hosted a free cheer clinic on a Saturday morning from 9-11. She taught them the stances, moves and a simple cheer. Everyone got a free set of pom-poms I purchased inexpensively online. Then the new cheerleaders performed for their parents when they came to pick them up. At the conclusion of the "program", I shared the gospel and shared with parents about other events our church had for their children. Other possibilities are to have a soccer clinic, a basketball clinic or a sports camp at a park or school. At my previous church, we had a full-on sports league. We had football with cheer, basketball with cheer, and soccer. We had over 100 children participate in each season. In the summer, we had a sports camp where kids were able to choose what sport they wanted to participate in. As long as I had a coach, we offered it. We charged for these camps because we took the kids on field trips. However, it could be as simple as you need it to be.

One final idea I have to offer is for your church to provide a special needs class for children. This has become a growing need for children and families. We have a wonderful lady who is a special needs school teacher who offered to lead the class. We allow youth to serve in this class as assistants. This has been another win-win for us. The youth

enjoy serving, the kids in the class feel as if their “peers” are there to play, and it breaks down some barriers between the groups that could develop because one group doesn’t understand the other group. Sometimes, isn’t that what bullying is about? Someone is different, not understood, not known?

To reach people, reach children. We must be willing to go where they are and step into the mess with them. Share with them the love of Christ, not just with words... with actions. Tangible actions. Talk to them. Listen to them. Be there for them. Hug them (side hug only). Let them know they matter. Remember their birthday, their ballgame. Tell them they matter. Tell them you love them. Tell them Jesus loves them.

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

What does this chapter say about the children and families God has placed around me?

What does this chapter tell us about God?

What does this chapter say about discovering those far from Christ?

How does this chapter change the way my group/class should relate to people?

How can I incorporate learning the names of children in my group/class into my daily routine?

Which of these strategies should our group/class consider adopting?

What church-wide event could I volunteer to serve in that would allow me to meet more unconnected children and families?

CHAPTER 3

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Candy Macon



Oxford Languages defines a relationship as the way two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected. In this chapter, we will focus on the connections between children, families, and church leaders. Our ultimate goal is for children to understand how to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14 CSB).

Bonding between families and leaders occurs anywhere and anytime you spend time together. Leaders can express that they truly care for a child and their family by visiting in their home, attending a music event, dance event, or a ballgame, and contacting them often. Personal involvement between small group leaders and parents is essential to building a relationship with the child. During these times, you discover the needs of the child and family, hear prayer requests, learn how the child learns best, gain information on their school setting, allergies, hobbies, pets, special activities, etc. Remind them to keep you informed of needs and schedules. The leader is building trust with the family at this time in order that the child can feel safe and loved at church. You also get to know other parents and children who notice that you care about children.

Helping families to connect with other families is part of the strategy to win Tennessee. If I see new children/families on Wednesday evening at dinner, I show them where their classrooms are and try to introduce them to the staff and children/families in their age group. I notify the appropriate adult and children’s small group teachers, encouraging them to contact the prospective family to invite them to their small group. If you meet a new family while attending an event outside of the church or even a church event, try to find a church family with children of that age or other adults that age and make introductions. Invite them to church, give them information about the time, location, etc. and offer to meet them there and sit with them. Visitors are more likely to attend if they know someone.

The small group setting at church provides more opportunities for personal relationships with others as they work together on activities. When leaders have invested in knowing the children outside of the classroom setting, the children feel comfortable sharing what is going on in their lives and asking questions about becoming a follower of Christ because it is a smaller group. You can also encourage them to help visitors and shy children to be involved. I have talked with some of our parents about a new child needing a friend and they encourage their child to do extra activities with them. I have definitely noticed in Connect Group (Sunday School) the bonding that occurred between regular attenders and new children after they had attended church camp this summer.

When we demonstrate to children in fun ways how learning God’s Word can help us live for Him daily, they want to return often and invite their friends to come. Children need to have an opportunity to talk, move, sing, listen, and share. If you are excited about teaching these precious children how to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, they will be

excited to attend church, learn more about Jesus, and want to be a follower of Christ.

Keeping parents informed of activities in the classroom or church is very important. Use every form of communication available: verbal, mail, text, phone call, handouts, Facebook, etc. Contact absentees often, but don't forget to thank those who are there regularly. Thank them for being faithful in attendance. This year, most of our 4th graders were not children who had grown up at Wallace Memorial. In September we had an "Open House" after our Connect Group for parents to visit with the leaders, ask questions, and even participate in some activities.

Many families today attend worship while their child is attending Kids Worship or Small Group. Do the children observe you or know that you attend worship as well as lead a small group? Children also need times to experience worship because they are part of the body of Christ. They need to see godly examples of how to worship and need to feel that they belong to the church community. It is here that they can experience the ordinances of baptism and Lord's Supper. Also, they can be encouraged to participate through singing, learning motions to songs, playing an instrument, praying, or taking up the offering. Worship is an important part of one's relationship with God. When Mary and Joseph found twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49 CSB). Should we not teach and demonstrate that it is necessary to regularly be in God's house to worship Him?

Children's leaders and teachers can be a part of the strategy to win Tennessee by boosting involvement in groups and worship. A close friend shared a good example of helping families build relationships. A husband and wife who were small group teachers had a cook-out at their home before promotion Sunday. They invited the children who would be promoting, their parents, their siblings, the pastor, as well as leaders in other areas like children's choir and missions. This relaxed and fun setting allowed them to get to know others before entering the classroom on Sunday morning. Children got to know one another, parents got to know leaders, and parents got to know other parents. The unexpected benefit was that the next Sunday morning, parents who had never attended a small group went to an adult small group for the first time because they were invited by the parents of children in their child's small group. Encourage those parents who regularly attend an adult small group to follow-up on visiting parents. This is important because we also want to get parents connected to a small group where they can build close relationships and hear God's Word.

Attending church and church activities is not a priority in many families today. This could be due to sports, blended families, illness, lack of interest or not having a relationship with Jesus Christ. We as leaders need to help the irregular attendee to feel as welcome as the regular attender. Contact them during the week by sending the Bible

lesson, hand-out, coloring page and scripture. Phone calls, texts, and emails are excellent ways to communicate that you care. Review previous lessons each week in class – especially if you are going to play a game. You do not want the child to feel they don't belong. Encourage regular children to tell absentees that they missed them.

Because many children do not have consistency in their lives, that can cause distrust of adults. We as leaders must provide consistency at church by being early to the classroom to welcome the first child, being regular in attendance and having regular substitutes. This promotes trust, safety, and security. Visible security measures also need to be in place by the church. Children today experience a lot of negativities at school, home, and even the church. They often feel insecure and have a lack of self-esteem. We have many opportunities to share with them that they are created by God, designed for a purpose that God will show them, and empowered to do His will and serve Him. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10 CSB).

Building Relationships with Children and Parents

HOW do we achieve this goal of building relationships? Following is a list of additional suggestions:

- **Promote fellowships outside of the church.** Ideas include family picnics and games at a local park or a home; a water party with food and lots of water games where EVERYONE (including leaders) gets wet. Children enjoy seeing their leaders having fun.
- **Caroling in a neighborhood or nursing home.** Allow different children to pray at each home or room you visit. Provide hot chocolate and cookies at a home afterwards.
- **Ice skating and snacks for classmates, their friends, parents, and teachers.** Take time to engage in conversation with as many people as possible.
- **Visit a local Baptist Center to take food, clothes, toys, etc.** Our children thoroughly enjoyed taking a short tour, and sorting clothes and food. Their ability to agree on how to do it and their laughter was thrilling to hear. Afterwards they played on the Baptist Center playground and ate the lunch they brought when they returned to the church.
- **Have a family game, craft night, and pizza at the church.**
- **Write a note to visitors welcoming them to your class.** I attach a label with EXTRA typed on it to a piece of EXTRA gum. I tape the gum to the note that says

“YOU are EXTRA (place the gum here) special to GOD and me!”

- **Keep in touch via social media, cards, letters, visits, and phone calls.** Send pictures of an activity, etc. via text to the parent. This lets them know that their child is learning and participating with others.
- My favorite is to **visit in the home with a child to share the Gospel, answer their questions, or disciple them after their decision to follow Christ.** Lifeway’s “I’m A Christian Now!” is a helpful tool to use. This year I have had the opportunity to disciple four of my Connect Group children who have expressed interest in knowing more about how to become a Christian. The discussion that takes place is priceless as they are allowed to ask questions, express feelings, personally hear the Gospel shared, and learn to share their testimony. Often other family members are present and hear the Gospel presented in a way that they understand even better.
- **Play a game on promotion Sunday to find out more about the children.** Make signs with birthday months by quarters, local school names, pictures of different pets, types of sports including dance and cheer, different foods liked by children, and different learning styles (music, drama, art, crafts, reading). Have leaders hold up the birthday signs and encourage children to go to their appropriate signs. Have everyone introduce themselves and tell their birthday. Continue by holding up school signs, then pets, sports, and learning styles, introducing themselves each time. Our children and teachers have enjoyed this game for years.
- We used **FaceTime, ZOOM and Skype** during COVID to teach the lessons, share what was going on in our lives, and just chat with families. There’s no reason we can’t continue to do that to stay in touch with some of our families.
- **Volunteer to help children read at a local school.** Take snacks or breakfast for the teachers. Have a luncheon for the teachers before school starts. This ongoing ministry has brought several families to our church, and some have been baptized.

If you have a sports program at your church, take advantage of this opportunity to engage with the families. For years as the Upward Director at Wallace Memorial Baptist Church in Knoxville, I spent practice time at basketball, cheer, and soccer, getting to know the parents and sharing the Gospel with them. If they did not have a church home, they were invited to Wallace Memorial. An invitation often includes a personal testimony as to why you attend your church. Adult and children’s leaders can be notified to contact

those who have expressed some interest in attending. Many families became a part of our church family as a result of this ministry and some accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We were intentional in sharing the Gospel at every practice and game. Often, I still see some of these families in a doctor's office, local store or a ballpark and they remember our connection. I cannot always tell you their names, but I remember the faces of the children. Relationships matter.

Building relationships with children is essential. It has been said that “nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” Jesus spent time with his disciples where they were, taught them compassion, and how to share the Gospel. Should we not do the same? If children enjoy coming to our churches because people care, they will invite their family and friends to come with them. We are seeing this happen often at Wallace Memorial, where they hear the Gospel taught and see it demonstrated. Then we must continue to contact these new families.

Leading Children to Build Relationships with Others

Children's ministry can be a vital part of winning Tennessee for Jesus. I have challenged my fourth graders this year to share a penny with a cross in it with anyone they talk to. I do the same and we gladly share our experiences in class. A visitor came after a child shared a penny with them and invited them to church. It's never too early to demonstrate how to share what they know about our Lord and Savior.

My fourth graders often write cards of encouragement to the homeless in Knoxville. Some cards are delivered to one of the shelters and others are given out on Wednesday nights as we feed the homeless in our neighborhood. Some of the children even serve with their parents as they learn about building relationships with those less fortunate. We are following our pastor's leadership as he reminds us every Sunday to “Be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22 CSB). One of the boys even shared the Gospel with one of the homeless men. Recently, one of the cards was returned to our class with a note from the recipient thanking the writer for their note. This taught all of us how important even a small note of kindness is to others.

I asked some of the mothers of my Connect Group children how building relationships mattered to them. One mother said that leaders who demonstrate in their lives the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) shows their child what it means to live as a Christian which further develops and deepens their relationship with Jesus.

To be a great childhood ministry leader, we must have the greatest relationship of all - a sincere relationship with Jesus Christ. When we share with children how Jesus/God is working in our life, they begin to understand that God is real, not just in a Bible story. Our testimony is not just what happened when we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, but how we know that He is with us every day in every situation. Share examples of this with children often. When we pray for safety before taking them on a trip and thank God afterwards for the safe trip, we are teaching them about prayer and that God cares for our needs. We also need to let the children know that we are not perfect, but if we ask Him, Jesus forgives us when we sin and He will do the same for them.

We need to be intentional about building relationships and sharing the Gospel with children (on their level of understanding) and their families. Prayer for God's guidance and leadership, planning and preparation are essential. Pray about how you can improve relationships with children and families in your ministry. We can always find a reason not to go or not to call. "So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it" (James 4:17 CSB). Just take that first step! We are a team, winning Tennessee for Christ. "God is faithful; you were called by Him into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9 CSB).

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

What does this chapter say about my intentional relationships with families who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

What does this chapter tell us about God?

What does this chapter say about the importance of groups/classes and connecting people?

How does this chapter change the way our group/class leaders should work to boost the involvement of parents in groups?

What are 2 things I will do in the next six months to build relationships with children in my class outside of our regular group/class time?

How can I encourage children in my group/class to build relationships with others for the purpose of sharing the love of Jesus?

CHAPTER 4

THE GOSPEL MATTERS

Todd Capps



Decisions! Decisions! Decisions!

How many decisions do you make on a daily basis? Think about it—you decide when to get up. You decide what to wear. You decide what to have for breakfast. You decide how you will respond to people. You decide ... I think you get the picture. One website indicates the average adult makes 35,000 decisions a day¹. I don't know about you, but it makes me tired just thinking about this.

The next question I ponder is, “how many of these decisions have a lasting effect on life?” Does the shirt you wear today really have a lasting impact? I would venture to say that the majority of decisions we make on a daily basis do not have life-impacting outcomes. Let me tell you about a decision I made that did, and still does have a lifelong impact.

Being raised by Christian parents, I was in church about three weeks after my birth. I think my dad unlocked the building upon our arrival, and turned off the lights when we left church each Sunday. Growing up in a Christian home, I knew the importance of going to church, praying, reading the Bible, and having a relationship with Jesus Christ. At the age of eight I attended a revival service at my home church in North Carolina. I heard the guest preacher talk about inviting Jesus to be the Savior and Lord of your life. That night I talked with my parents about what the preacher said and they explained to me what it meant to be a Christian—the gospel. My parents guided me through a time of prayer in which I asked God to forgive me of my sins. I asked Jesus to come into my life and be the Savior and Lord of my life. Did I understand everything that was taking place in my life, absolutely not! But I did understand enough to know I was making a major decision. Since that night in April 1975, I have sought to draw closer to God in my day-to-day life. I have sought to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. I have sought to share the love of Jesus with others and help them on their path to Christlikeness. While there have been many decisions in my life that I have questioned, I have never questioned the fact that Jesus became Savior and Lord of my life in 1975. But why does this matter? It matters because the gospel that changed my life in 1975 is still changing lives today!

The Times—They Have Changed!

Check out these statistics about children in Tennessee.

- Between 1990 and 2017, Tennessee was among the top 25% of states with the greatest increase in the number of children.
- Tennessee has approximately 1.5 million children (birth–18 years)².
- 89.1% of households have a computer³.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/stretching-theory/201809/how-many-decisions-do-we-make-each-day> June 29, 2002.

² <https://www.tn.gov/tccy/programs0/kc.html#:~:text=Tennessee%20is%20among%20the%20top%20quarter%20of%20states,said%20Kennedy,%20%E2%80%9CThe%20state%E2%80%99s%20future%20relies%20on%20them.%E2%80%9D>

³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TN>

- 81.5% of households have an internet subscription⁴.
- Tennessee's population has now exceeded 7 million people.
- According to the American Belief Study of 2021, approximately 73% of the population is unchurched.
- If this percentage holds true for children, 1,095,000,000 children are unchurched and potentially have no relationship with Jesus.
- Of the approximately 7 million people living in Tennessee, approximately 4 million have no relationship with Jesus (57% of the population). If this percentage holds true for children, 885,000 children have no relationship with Jesus.

Let's be honest with ourselves. How is the church doing in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) to make disciples of all nations? If 57% of the population has no relationship with Jesus, we are not doing well at all (when I was in school 57 was a failing grade). So, what can we do?

We need to start by realizing the gospel matters! Just as the gospel mattered during the New Testament era, as well as when I accepted Jesus, the gospel still matters today.

The Gospel Matters in the Lives of Children AND Parents

Spend some time reflecting on these questions:

- How old were you when you became a Christian?
- How did you know you needed to become a Christian?
- From a human perspective, who was instrumental in leading you to Christ?
- What do you remember about your salvation experience?

Look back at my testimony.

- Who was instrumental in me becoming a Christian?

If you were like me, your parents played a key role in your spiritual journey. However, this is not the norm for many children today. In fact, today's children are the first generation of children to grow up with the majority of their parents not going to church. A 2021 Barna research study found that most parents, regardless of their religious background, want their children to have a healthy relationship with spirituality (although this is not necessarily Christian). Of these parents, 73% are concerned about their children's spiritual development⁵. Additionally, 70% of Christian parents are concerned their children will not stay true to their spiritual faith⁶.

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TN>

⁵ <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-parents-concerns/>

⁶ <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-parents-concerns/>

In a recent survey completed by Ministry-To-Children.com, researchers found 32.1% of people accept Jesus as Savior and Lord during the ages of 7-11; 36.8% during the ages of 12-19; 11.3% in their twenties; and 4.7% after the age of 30⁷. What does this tell us about the importance of children's ministry? Children's ministry matters because the majority of people accept Jesus before the age of 18. Children matter! Parents matter! And sharing the gospel with both of these groups of individuals matters!

Who Are the Influencers in Children's Lives?

Do a quick search of today's influences on children and you may be surprised at the individuals and items impacting children. One of the most influential aspects on children today is social media. The real question is, what is social media influencing our children to do? While we could spend a lot of time analyzing the pros and cons of social media, let's examine the personal aspect of influences—the people in the lives of children.

Once again, reflect on your childhood. Who were the most influential people in your life? List who you believe are the most influential people in children's lives today.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Did you list parents, grandparents, coaches, dance instructors, baby-sitters, school teachers, peers, older teens, pop-culture individuals such as musicians or actors/actresses? Who did you not list? Who has lost their influence on children? How influential are Christian leaders in children's lives? Do the children see us as someone who can influence their lives?

How much time do we have to influence the lives of children? Let me encourage you to consider this. If your Sunday School/Small Group Bible Study is one hour long and a child has perfect attendance, the child would receive 52 hours of Sunday School a year. Fifty-two hours is equal to two days and four hours over the course of a year. How many of the children in your church actually come anywhere close to perfect attendance? Many churches today no longer offer children's ministry programming on Sunday or Wednesday evenings. According to the American Belief Study of 2021, 73.4% of the population of Tennessee does not attend church at least once a month

⁷<https://ministry-to-children.com/childrens-ministry-statistics/#childhood>

Why would we need to know how much time the children spend in our ministries? Time matters and spending time with children matters! If we are to be influencers in the lives of children, we must take advantage of all the time we have with them.

Increasing Effectiveness as an Influencer

Since spending time with children matters, how can we increase our effectiveness as an influencer with children?

- Make sure our actions match our words – Do we live out what we teach?
- Be present – How is our attendance? Children are more influenced by people who have a consistent role in their lives.
- Be prepared – Look back at the number of hours children are in our ministry. We need to be prepared and take advantage of every moment.
- Go beyond what the children expect – Many children expect you to be present at church, but what do they expect outside of church? Visit in their homes. Attend sporting events, dance recitals, school plays, and so forth.
- Get to know each child individually – Visit each child in his home. Get to know what he likes and dislikes. Take a personal interest in the child.
- Communicate with the child – Mail postcards to the children from your vacation, send birthday cards, and “I’m thinking about you” notes.
- Hold the child accountable for his actions and decisions – All children need adults who will direct them in their actions and decisions.
- Pray for each child by name – Keep a list of the children in your ministry in your wallet or purse. Pray for each child and his family each day.

Why Reach the Influencers?

In some situations, children may spend more time with influencers outside the home than with their parents or guardians. Add up all the time children spend in school, sports, and other events and you probably get more time away from parents than with parents. I’m sure you will get more time spent in these events than church events.

Let’s consider the impact of a coach on children. Check out the schedule of one of the children in my church related to sports:

Monday Practice – 6:00–8:00 pm

Wednesday Practice – 6:00–8:00 pm

Saturday Game Day – 9:00–11:00 am

That is a total of six hours spent in practice or at a game. Notice something else that

may be different from when you were a child. Practice night includes Wednesday. Gone are the days when sports worked around the church's schedule. In fact, many children participate in games on Sundays or teams who travel over the whole weekend. (Please understand I am not bashing sports.) With the children spending this much time with a coach who will help them develop sporting skills, what else do you think the coach is teaching the children? How does the coach respond when the team wins? What about when the team loses? How do parents respond to one another? What do the children hear from parents and other adults as they respond to umpire calls, other coaches, and even other teams? In one sense, these individuals are influencers in the children's lives as well. What priorities are the children learning?

For individuals who serve in children's ministry, a vital aspect to remember is that children's ministry involves more than reaching children. As a volunteer in children's ministry, we must recognize who the influencers in our children's lives are and reach them as well. Look back at the list of influencers. Beside each influencer, write a way you could build a relationship with this individual and gain the right to share the gospel with him/her. Here are just a few ways you can build relationships with influencers.

- Be supportive. Go to sporting events, recitals, school plays, and so forth.
- Send the influencer a "Thank You" note expressing your appreciation for his/her time and commitment to impacting the lives of children.
- Provide a gift card to a coffee shop or restaurant.
- Volunteer to assist as needed.
- Speak positively of the influencers' efforts.
- Take advantage of opportunities to have gospel conversations with these influencers.

I'm sure you could add many more suggestions. The important aspect is to remember the gospel matters in the lives of the influencers and to reach children, we have to know children. As we undertake some of the actions above, we must live out the gospel. We must make sure our actions model the gospel. People are watching and who knows, maybe we can become an influencer of the influencers.

Many times, we in children's ministry know how to share the gospel with children, but do we feel comfortable sharing the gospel with adults? Children's ministry includes ministry to the children as well as the adults in their lives. There is only one gospel and that gospel is for both children and adults. If you are not comfortable sharing the gospel with adults, work with your pastor or other adults. One of the best ways to become comfortable is simply practice sharing the gospel with another adult. God called you to be an influencer for children and He will equip you in reaching the adults in their lives as well. Adults matter!

Is Reaching Today's Children an Impossible Dream?

Nothing is impossible! Okay, there are a few things that may be impossible—getting me to skydive is one of them. But when we think about the impossibility of reaching today's children, this can become a reality. As we reach the influencers, we are reaching the children, but let's not stop there. While the message of the gospel has not changed, the methods of reaching children have. Imagine if children's ministry was done the exact same way it was thirty years ago. What do you think children would think of our methods? How effective would we be in reaching children? So, what do leaders in children's ministry need to do to achieve the impossible dream? Let's look at just a few things we need to do:

- Know the Word.
- Know the world of today's children.
- Connect with children in the world they live in (do you know the movies and shows the children watch, who are their favorite sports heroes, what is their home life like, etc.).
- Evaluate and continually update our teaching methods.
- Acknowledge the stresses placed on children.
- Celebrate the uniqueness of each child.
- Allow each child to be himself/herself.
- Hold children accountable.
- Embrace technology. It is a part of our world and we need to use it to our advantage.

So, what about at church? What are some ministries the church can provide to fulfill the impossible dream? The number of ministry opportunities is endless. Over the years I have heard of churches doing all types of ministries. Below are some ministries you can provide as you seek to reach children and their families with the gospel (a word of warning—know your church. Not all of these ministries may work at your church.)

Ministries for Children

- Sunday School/Small Group Bible Study and Worship
- Vacation Bible School
- Backyard Bible Clubs
- Community Bible Clubs at schools
- Bible Release Programs
- Neighborhood Fall Festival
- Community Movie Nights

- Day Camp
- Sports Camp
- Art/Music Camp
- New Christian Class
- Preteen Retreats
- Family Outings (ball games, hiking, swimming, so forth)

Ministries for Adults

- Sunday School/Small Group Bible Study and Worship
- Bible Studies
- Parenting Classes
- Couple's Retreats
- Muffins with Mom
- Donuts with Dad
- Women's Ministries
- Men's Ministries
- Community Groups based on hobbies or interests

Keep this in mind! An event can become just another event if we do not have a plan and purpose for the event. At each of your ministry events gather the name and contact information for each family. Follow up with each family through personal contact (more than an email or postcard). Let each family know you appreciate them participating. Use the contact information to share about additional ministries and upcoming events. Keep in mind—follow-up does not just happen—it must be planned!

You are probably wondering; how does this help me fulfill the goal of achieving the impossible dream to reach children. As you connect with families, you are building a relationship with them. As you build these relationships you gain trust and over time, this trust can lead to conversations in which the gospel can be shared. Relationships matter because the gospel matters.

Dream the dream—what would your church look like if you reached the people with the gospel? What difference would it make in your community? How about the state of Tennessee? What about our country? Can we dare to dream that the gospel can change the world?

Accepting the Fact, the Gospel Matters

Hopefully, no Christian would argue with the fact—the gospel matters. Take away the gospel and you take away the testimony of the Church. As we conclude this chapter, let me make a few comments:

- Share the gospel as much as possible. In conversations with children, parents, and others, look for ways to share your testimony of God’s saving grace in your life. Always be prepared to share the gospel as often as you can. Paul stated, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6, CSB). Be faithful in planting or watering and watch God work!
- Engage people in personal evangelism and go beyond the walls of your church building into the community.
- Accept the fact it is your responsibility to share the gospel with children and adults.

Remember:

Children Matter - Parents Matter - Influencers Matter - You Matter

The Gospel Matters

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

Where do I have opportunities to have gospel conversations with children, parents, and other influencers in the lives of children?

When was the last time I had a personal gospel conversation? How prepared did I feel to share the gospel?

How does our church train us to have personal gospel conversations? In what areas do we need to do a better job with these trainings?

What are two ways I plan to increase my effectiveness as an influencer with children over the next two months?

What are two ways I will seek to build relationships over the next three months with influencers in the lives of children? How comfortable do I feel in sharing the gospel with adults?

CHAPTER 5

LOVE MATTERS

Allison Young



Why Does Love Matter?

Love – a little word with a lot of meaning wrapped inside it. Some people use the word to express deep emotion, while others use it in off-hand conversation. Some people are really intentional in displaying it, while others avoid showing it no matter what. Some people receive it daily, while others would give anything to see a glimpse of it. And although it has so many meanings and connotations around it, as children’s leaders it is vital that we teach and demonstrate to children that love matters because not only is it a biblical mandate, but it is ultimately who we have been created to be and what we have been created to do.

Biblical Mandate

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39, CSB)

The above verse comes straight from the mouth of Jesus when He was asked to provide God’s greatest commandment. The questioner asked Jesus this question in order to trick Him because, of course, all of God’s commandments are important. But through His answer, Jesus revealed that ultimately, every one of God’s commands comes down to love. And if that wasn’t enough, Jesus quoted from God directly (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18), so there wasn’t an opportunity for His response to be challenged.

It is rather eye-opening when we stop to think that really all of what God commands us to do is love. I will never forget teaching this verse to a group of kids in relation to the Ten Commandments and literally connecting the dots of how each commandment fit into these two categories that Jesus presented. They were astounded!

Why is this so astounding? Because for many people, kids especially, obedience to the Lord seems like a giant task, especially when first introduced to the Bible and being told how to apply it to their lives. But when we approach obedience to God from the standpoint of love – which is just how Jesus did in this verse – and in what God requires of that love (to love Him and others), obedience to what He has asked His children to do doesn’t seem so out of reach.

Who We Are Created To Be

In order for children to understand how to love God and others, they must first understand God’s love for them. Understanding this concept is foundational to a child’s faith journey because it is God’s love that will lead them to obedience to His command to love.

Designed in Love: *“I will praise you, because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well.” (Psalm 139:14, CSB)*

As His “very good” creation (Genesis 1:31), we can see that God has a very loving place in His heart for humankind. The fact that He designed each one of us so specifically shows that we matter to Him because every detail of who we are inside and out is unlike any other of His creations.

In a world full of gender identity confusion, children can sometimes feel like their differences make them strange. I was once asked by a child if I thought they were genderless because they liked to do things the other gender liked to do. I quickly reminded the child that genderless is not a part of God’s design and that He made us male or female, giving us each special talents and passions that He wants to be used for His glory.

When we help children realize that God uniquely made them, this realization helps them to see God’s love for who they are and why they matter to Him. And as children identify themselves as part of God’s extraordinary design, the love they have for the Creator flows into a desire to show and share that love with others.

Put It Into Action! Have children make a list of their interests and talents. Explain to children that these interests and talents are God-given and what make them unique from one another. Ask children how they could use their God-given interests and talents to show love to God and to others.

Saved in Love: *“Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10, CSB)*

There is no greater love that has been demonstrated for humankind than that of Jesus willingly going to the cross to die for our sin. Rather than subject His special creation to an eternal death, God sent Jesus to be the punishment for every single person’s sin so that by believing in His Son and what He did, every single person could have eternal life. This is the gospel and should be what every person ministering to anyone should present constantly. Why? Because men, women, students, and children will never be able to fully love God or others without first admitting, believing, and confessing the great and unexplainable love Jesus has for them.

In a children’s ministry setting, it does not matter the class, event, trip, or outreach – every single time children have an interaction with the church, the gospel should be presented. One never knows when or how Jesus is working in a child’s heart, so any opportunity could be the time that they decide to give their life to Him.

My church hosts a food box packing event around Christmastime that is open to members of the community. Over the years it has been attended by people, usually a lot of families, that have never been in the church building but want to come in order to do “something good” for the community. The organizers of this event always make it a priority before beginning to explain the outreach and why the outreach is important – not just to feed the hungry, but also to share the love of Jesus with them. A short gospel presentation then follows and all who are participating in this event have the opportunity to hear about God’s love for them.

Put It Into Action! Host a Family Night for families in your community where a complimentary or low-cost dinner is available and godly entertainment is presented. Focus the night on God’s love for families, explaining that God has a family and desires to grow His family through love.

Called in Love: *“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35, CSB)*

Although we are called to do many different things for the kingdom, all followers of Jesus are called in His love, to love others. In showing love to others, we reflect His love and character through our interactions; and as they see Him through us, they know we are who we say we are.

While most children’s “calling in life” may not be set in stone during the childhood years, the calling to love others most certainly can be. Children have numerous interactions throughout a given day. By teaching them how much Jesus loves them and how to live into His calling to love others, they are able to be ambassadors for Him even as children.

I see this in the hearts of the preteens I have taught over recent years as several of them have become involved in my church’s special needs ministry. Regardless of whether or not they will be involved with special needs individuals as adults, they know they can show love and they do so as they tenderly interact with their special friends. As my church begins to get more and more unchurched families coming for the first time because they offer this ministry, parents of these special friends are seeing the love of Jesus through these preteens because they stepped into their calling to reflect His love.

Put It Into Action! Coordinate with a local assisted living home and collect names of residents. Set up a time for children to write personalized, encouraging letters to the residents to brighten their day.

What We Have Been Created to Do

Once children understand that love is the basis of who they are created to be, it becomes a whole lot easier for them to understand that it is also what they have been created to do. Again, a child's specific calling is rarely defined at an early age, but a spiritual calling to love is relevant regardless of age. As such, children's leaders should make it a priority throughout the childhood years to help children know what it means to live in love, serve in love, and go in love.

Live in Love: *"Do everything in love." (1 Corinthians 16:14, CSB)*

Everything has a pretty simple meaning. It means...well, everything! Some things may be easy for us to do in love and may be so commonplace that they aren't even noticed. Other things may be difficult to do in love and, more often than not, those are the things people – especially children – can pick up on and emulate. Where I currently see the Christian world having a hard time following this 1 Corinthians 16:14 exhortation from Paul, is as it relates to attitude and behavior. Sadly, it is bleeding into the attitudes and behavior of our children. Respect and decency for others—even other believers—seems to have been thrown out the window and replaced with insult and judgement. It's mindboggling.

For a couple of years, I served as the childcare coordinator for a Christian inner-city ministry. I made it a point during my time there to plan spiritual lessons that centered around practical behaviors such as kindness, obedience, and friendship, so that the children would know what these behaviors mean in not only the world at large, but spiritually, as well. For a while, things were going well and I was seeing progress in the children's attitudes. However, about six months in, things began happening in the world that drastically divided society. And oh, did I see it in the behavior of those children! They would come to class angry and with hurting hearts. When I would attempt to get to the root of the issue, it more often than not had to do with something unrelated specifically to them but rather to what was going on in our divided society. It broke my heart. However, what broke my heart even more is that outside the ministry, I would see or hear people who called themselves Christians communicate this divisive spirit publicly. It was so defeating. And sadly, I do not think it has gotten much better.

We want children to live in love in all that they do, but how can we expect them to do this when we aren't willing to do it ourselves? Living in love will require humility and selflessness so there is some vulnerability on our part to listen, forgive, and not make it all about us. However, it is vital that children see this in us so that they know what it means for them to live their lives in full obedience to God's command to love Him and others.

Put It Into Action! Have children make a schedule of what they do in a typical day. From that schedule, challenge children to think of how they could live in love doing the various tasks they listed on their schedule (for example: Ask, “How could you live in love at the breakfast table?”).

Serve in Love: *“For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.” - Galatians 5:13*

As a believer of Jesus, we don’t just coast through life until heaven. We put our faith into action and serve others so that they can see and, hopefully one day, know Jesus. Service to others can be as simple as packing blessing bags for the homeless or bringing in paper towels for a local ministry. But sometimes serving others can be a challenge because it can require sacrifice or stepping outside of one’s comfort zone. Serving others is a quality children can most definitely learn at a young age because it helps them to develop empathy and generosity.

I have seen children really get a glimpse into this idea of practicing sacrifice and developing a generous heart through various food/supply drives or packing events. One such event I participated in involved children packing candy bags for a mission trip that a group from our church was taking. When the children walked in and saw a bunch of candy on the tables, they were instantly ecstatic because they assumed they would be the recipients of it. I gently reminded them that the candy was there to be a blessing to others and that in support of those individuals, and to make sure they got all of what we had for them, we would not partake in the candy that day. No candy certainly meant sacrifice for the children who were part of that packing event, but I hope it sparked a thought in their mind that sometimes loving others means letting go of your wants and desires.

We impact the future by teaching children to serve in love because they have the potential to grow and be compassionate and generous adults who are looking for ways to support others for the glory of God. This could be through them having the resources to give an endowment to a ministry that will help generations of families, volunteering at a mobile medical clinic because they work in the health care industry, or tutoring inner city children because they have a passion for education. All are ways they can abundantly serve as adults because they learned what it meant to serve in love as children.

Put It Into Action! Plan a stuffed animal drive for your community’s local Department of Children’s Services (DCS). Encourage children to bring in new or gently used stuffed animals to bring comfort to children who may be struggling in difficult family situations.

Go in Love: *“Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.” (1 John 3:18, CSB)*

To go and do something implies action. It means not just saying something but doing it. Going was a very important action to Jesus. Through His ministry, we see Jesus going many places, teaching AND serving others in the name of His Father. And after His resurrection, before going back to heaven, He charged His disciples (which includes us) to “go” and do as He had done (Matthew 28:19-20). Going and showing Jesus’ love can seem like a huge, logistical challenge with adults, let alone children, but it is so very important. I highly encourage churches and children’s ministries to consider involving children when thinking through mission opportunities or trips for the year. No one can truly understand what it means to love others until they come face to face with the others they are to love.

When I was 10 years old, my parents made the life-changing decision to move our family half-way across the world to serve as missionaries in East Asia. I had spent the past nine years of my life learning what it meant to live and serve in love, but when I stepped onto that foreign soil, my eyes were opened to the love God had not just for me, but for the world Jesus talked about in John 3:16. That developed in me a love for that world, as well.

And while this was my personal experience and involved a very long airplane ride, I have also seen those same eye-opening moments in the faces of children who have been involved in local outreach opportunities or nearby mission trips. One such trip that comes to mind is a 5th grade mission trip where preteens traveled to Jackson, TN to lead VBS for children living in a housing project. These preteens spent a whole week pouring their love and Jesus’ love into these kids. On the last day as we were pulling out of the housing complex, a girl leaned over to me with tears in her eyes and said, “But I don’t want to leave them!”

It doesn’t matter where you go, just don’t stay put. Simply go! Going in love is a culmination of both living and serving in love and it’s important this action be put into practice during childhood. Children cannot be sheltered from the world around them and be expected as adults to love the others of the world when they’ve never met anyone outside of their own world.

Put It Into Action! The possibilities for children to “go” are truly endless! Opportunities can include visiting nursing homes, baking cookies for first responders, or doing yard work around the local elementary school. Trips can include offering family mission trips that allow for parents and children to participate or even preteen-age group trips to nearby towns.

Conclusion

Obedience to God ultimately does come down to love – love for God and love for others. Jesus could not have made it plainer in His answer in Matthew 22:37-39 or in His obedience to it. His life was the perfect illustration of why love matters. There is no greater example to present to children in what it means to obey God by loving Him and others, than the example of Jesus. And He believed that children could do this! Lest we forget, children were often on the mind of Jesus as He regularly referred to their openness and meekness in relation to faith in God. Through Jesus, children can see who they were created to be because of God's great love for them. They can also see through Jesus what they were created to do by living, serving, and going in God's great love, not only for them, but also for others.

Children's leaders, now is the time to help children see that love matters. Not only do they need to know it for themselves, but there is a lost and dying world that our children have or will have access to that needs to know it, as well. Our small group and large group opportunities for kids are literal training grounds we can utilize to teach children this principle. As we train them, let us also encourage them to remember the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 4:12, "Don't let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity."

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

What does this chapter teach us about love?

How can I love people on my street? In my community? At local schools?

In what ways is our church an example for children of how to live in love, serve in love, and go in love?

Ways the leaders in our children's group/class will lead children to love God and love others are:

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

LIVE IN LOVE

Our plan to put it into action is:

Target date for completing this action:

SERVE IN LOVE

Our plan to put it into action is:

Target date for completing this action:

GO IN LOVE

Our plan to put it into action is:

Target date for completing this action:

CHAPTER 6

DISCIPLESHIP MATTERS

Ken Hindman



THIS IS AN URGENT CALL!

Why the urgency? Because children are dying without Jesus. So here is the question... what would need to be stated for you to understand the urgency behind the need to get up and do something that impacts kids for Jesus? Do you feel the urgency to drink water? No, it is a learned behavior and you do it automatically. Do you feel the urgency to eat food? No, it is a learned behavior that you do automatically. Do you feel the urgency to breathe? No, it is a learned behavior and happens 24 hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year until you breathe your last. So, what can we do to make the process of evangelism and discipleship natural behavior for all of us; natural behavior that comes like drinking water, eating food, and breathing?

Make it easy. Open your Bible for a moment and read Matthew 18:3. What does that verse tell you about salvation? Now read Romans 10:9-10, 13. All these verses talk about the fact that salvation and its process is nothing complicated. It is easy. If it is so easy, then why is it so difficult to get people to be a witness for Christ, to share their personal faith with others, and to take the time to slow down and share Jesus and His Gospel message with others? The Bible says there is a battle we fight. In Ephesians 6:12 we read that we are not fighting a battle of flesh and blood, but we are fighting a spiritual battle. Satan and his demons don't want you to tell others, especially children about Jesus. So, to keep the process of witnessing, you have to realize that you are fighting a battle, but you will always win the battle by calling on the Lord for guidance. Next, you need to know your stuff. Memorize the needed Bible verses. Ask open-ended questions. (That is a simple question that requires a response other than a yes/no answer.) Now, you need to pray for the Lord's guidance. He will open the door for you to share your faith with others. Your responsibility is to always be ready both in season and out of season.

Make it accessible. Make what accessible? The tools you need to be a witness. Do you need a Bible? Then keep one in your pocket or purse. Do you need a witnessing tract? Then always keep a few with you. Do you need a bracelet, cube, or some other item? Then do whatever it takes to always have access to each of those items. You never know when you might need to pull them out and share Jesus with a child.

Make it a part of everyday life. Many times, I see adults who feel that all things related to the Bible should only be discussed on Sundays at church. No. it must be part of our everyday life. It must be a part of where we live, at home. It must be part of where we work, and it must be part of where we play. Where do you live, work, and play? Where do kids live, work, and play? Think about it. Evangelism is an all day, everyday process. Without evangelism, there is no discipleship.

Follow this Plan

Pray - In chapter one of *Winning Our Harvest Field: What Really Matters*, David Evans, Pastor of Springfield Baptist Church in Springfield, Tennessee, challenges us to harness the power of prayer. Are you harnessing the power of prayer? Are you calling the creator of all things to guide you as you witness? Are you trusting His guiding hand to lead you? You must! This is where we all must start.

Connect - Connecting with kids can be easy. Kids are everywhere. Most organizations who serve to support kids are always looking for additional volunteers. You can find groups of kids in neighborhoods, parks, community centers, and churches. Connecting with kids should never be the problem.

Invite - Invite kids to participate. I usually go when invited. Most people do, especially kids. Invite kids and their families to everything you and your church has to offer. Yes, this takes time and a bit of planning, but the invite must happen.

Witness - If you are not willing to be a witness to a child, you need to realize that some kids will never hear the message of salvation. You must be willing to witness to children. Remember, someone was willing to be a witness to you; can't you do that for someone else?

Serve - Serving kids bring such joy. Remember, there are millions of ways to serve others, especially kids. In my experience I have found that serving kids always leads to listening. When you are willing to serve and offer a listening ear, you open yourself up to speaking truths to a child. Eventually, this may lead to being able to share the message of salvation with them as you witness to the child.

Disciple - This is the marathon of evangelism. In the coming pages I will share the basics of discipling a child who has decided to follow Jesus Christ as his/her personal Lord and Savior.

Multiply - Believe it or not, parents go where the kids go. Kids have so much buying power in today's world. If a child feels safe, loved and welcome, they will tell their parents and other kids that they want to be a part of your group. That is how we multiply. You get the kids; you also get the parents.

Disciple Making

Matthew 28:19-20 states the following: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” When I think of disciple making, discipleship, or a disciple, Matthew 28:19-20 always comes to mind. Disciple making describes the processes and actions a church takes through its ministries to move people along in their discipleship journey. It is the pathway the church uses. So, what is your pathway for discipleship with kids? Here are a few suggestions that our church uses with kids, that have proven to be effective tools on the discipleship journey.

Salvation Decision:

It has already been stated, but just for a firm understanding, I am assuming in your church, that all children under the age of 12 (6th Grade) who are making salvation decisions, understand their issues related to personal sin, the need for a Savior because of their sin, and someone who paid the price for that sin. They also need to understand that Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, went to a cross, was crucified, buried, and rose from the grave; thus, proving victory over their sin. Each individual must come to a salvation decision as the Holy Spirit leads. This is critical to the discipleship process.

Baptism:

Like the salvation decision process, baptism is critical to the discipleship process of a child. Please do your part as a church, to make sure parents schedule and follow through with baptism. I strongly suggest that baptism follow the salvation decision within the first 6 weeks. Kids need to make sure these two experiences are viewed as close together as possible for proper growth maturity. Remember to remind kids that baptism is a public way of showing others the decision we made privately in our heart and that when we are baptized, we are following the example set by Jesus Christ. For more details related to the baptism of Jesus, open your Bible and read Matthew 3:13-17.

Disciple Making for Kids:

Now comes the hard part. Here is a plan for disciple making that is tried and tested for over 30 years and has brought loads of success and has produced hundreds of mature Godly men and women who are serving churches, congregations, Sunday School classes, Life Group Classes, organizations, businesses, and families all across this country and around the world. I say this with all humility; this is my personal process for disciple making.

When a child makes a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ as his/her personal Lord and Savior, I encourage churches to provide some type of new Christian's class, new believers class, or discipleship class. We call ours the Next Steps for Kids class. Some might remember the Survival Kit for New Christians from many years ago. Others might use another name like a New Christians' class. Trust me, the name of the class is not important. The class content is the important thing. So, for the sake of moving forward, let's call the class the Next Steps for Kids Class. Here are my suggestions for what must be considered in the class as a part of the overall teaching plan.

Next Steps for Kids Class:

- **Meeting time:** This may vary from church to church. In our church, we choose Sunday morning during the prime meeting time for our church. Why? This helps us emphasize the priority and importance of this class.
- **Number of Meeting Sessions:** Three is the preferred number of sessions, but four will allow you to build a bit more of a relationship base with the students in the class.
- **Length of Each Session:** 1 - 1 1/2 hours
- **Location of Class:** Nice classroom space with age-suitable furnishings for kids and adults.
- **Attendees to the Class:** In our church, we include the child who made the decision to follow Jesus Christ as his/her personal Lord and Savior, and at least one parent/guardian. Both parents are suggested if at all possible. If we feel this is the single most important decision a child ever makes and we know parents are the primary faith trainers in the home, parents should be included as an important part of this process whenever possible. Even if a parent is not a Christian, this may be an opportunity for them to hear the Gospel.
- **Content for the Class:**

Session 1: What it Means to Be a Christian

- Define the word, Christian.
- Look up in a Bible each of the following verses: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10, and Romans 10:13.
- Take the needed time to talk about each Bible verse. Point out and talk about words that might need more explanation, such as wages,

death, gift, all, sin, eternal life, God, Jesus, confess, and saved. Don't assume that the kids know or understand the meaning of these words. Many times, I find adults who don't know the correct meaning of these words.

- Allow each child to participate in the class by sharing his/her salvation story and process. Remember that your goal for this class is to make sure all kids have a firm understanding of the Bible verses discussed and what each verse means to their personal disciple making process. Make every effort to ensure there is a good level of personal understanding with each child.

Session 2: Observance of the Ordinances of Baptism and The Lord's Supper

When was the last time that you shared with a group of kids the biblical reason behind why we observe the Lord's Supper, what it is, what it is not, why we do it today in our churches, how often we should do it in our churches and why we baptize with water baptism? In this session you will take the time to answer all these questions. This session should also include a field trip to the church baptistry area. Kids have loads of questions related to their personal baptism experience and this is your opportunity to lay aside any fears related to water baptism. Remember, the devil is at work, and sometimes he may choose to use a child to place fear in the hearts of other children related to what happens during baptism. Use this time to put an end to all these myths, questions and fears.

During this teaching of Session 2, I also prepare the elements of the Lord's Supper. I use the polished silver trays with the lids, the white tablecloth with the pleats ironed in, the "fruit of the vine", and the unleavened bread. I use all these items to properly teach kids the reverence and importance of the Lord's Supper. I also include a bit of biblical history related to the very first Lord's Supper, where Jesus celebrated with his twelve closest friends. The kids and parents love Session 2 and you will as well. Remember to make learning fun. Take time at the end of this session to make sure all questions are answered.

Session 3: The Church

In this session, we take a close look at two things. One, the church, as the Body of Christ, from the Bible, and second, the church on a local basis. (In other words, what you do in/at your local church.) The book of Acts is the basis for the study of information. Acts provides us with a great example of what we should

do as a local church. Acts 1:8 is a great starting point.

For a closer look at the local church, we talk about our church staff, ministries, programming, opportunities to volunteer, membership expectations and a few other areas. The best part of this session is when we share pictures of church staff with the kids in the class and then allow them to identify the person with the job. Kids and parents love that. Why are these things so important to younger believers? Well, how else will they ever learn the biblical ways the Lord intended the Body of Christ to respond to the needs of His children?

In our church, we strongly suggest that a child not proceed with baptism until the three sessions of this class have been completed. 99% of the time parents agree. We also stress that the public baptism date and time is a decision of the parent and that kids need to listen to the suggestion of their parents before baptism is scheduled. It will take some careful planning on your part to schedule classes soon after a salvation decision has been made.

I strongly encourage you as a church and the family to record this experience. Pictures, videos, handwritten notes that can be kept in a safe place are all methods you might use that will allow the child to reference as the years pass. I was baptized 47 years ago. Yes, that is a long time, and it is difficult to remember all the experiences surrounding my baptism. This is where looking at a picture or a video can be helpful.

You may want to add a time of celebration following a child's baptism or you may encourage parents and families to provide some type of celebration. Make salvation, baptism and the Next Steps for Kids class a time that is special for all kids. That will go a long way in laying a firm foundation for the long-term discipleship plan.

On-Going Bible Reading:

I suggest you encourage kids to start reading their Bible in the book of John. Depending on the age of the child, you might suggest 3-5 verses per day for younger kids but for older kids, I suggest the plan of one chapter each day. Remember, the goal is to start the habit of reading God's word on a regular basis. Encourage a parent to take the time to read this chapter with their child, talk about what they are reading, and answer any questions related to the text.

Personal Prayer:

Guiding a kid to realize the importance of talking to God daily and many times throughout the day is vitally important in their discipleship making process. Take the time in the discipleship process to teach a child how to pray and talk to God. Remember

to include the five key types of prayer. Praise, thanksgiving, petition, forgiveness, and back to praise are all important in a young believer's discipleship maturing process. For a model to follow, open your Bible to Matthew 6:9-13 and spend time talking about how Jesus taught us to pray.

Weekly Bible Study:

This looks different from church to church, but this is your Sunday School, Life Group, Connect Group, D-group, etc. that you provide for kids on a weekly basis at your church. Whatever you call these classes you need to make sure they accomplish the following:

- Teach the Bible.
- Use the Bible as the primary teaching tool in the class.
- Teach that the Bible is true from Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21.
- Teach that the Bible is God's message to us on how we should live our lives.
- Include the teaching of simple Bible skills.
- As much as possible, make sure the class is age-suitable for the kids attending the class.
- Provide a smaller setting with fewer than 20 kids in the class.
- Leaders and volunteers should be mature Christians, great teachers, willing volunteers, and have an up-to-date background check on file in the church office and go through regular scheduled training.
- Classes meet weekly.
- Classes could meet on Sunday or other days of the week.

Worship:

Kids who are walking through the disciple making process need to be encouraged to participate in a weekly worship service at your church. Kids must be taught how to worship. Be careful as you teach and lead kids in worship. The Bible warns of strict consequences for those who cause a child to stumble (Matthew 18:6). Kids need to be encouraged to worship as they sing, read, listen, give, and pray.

- Sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs.
- Read God's word, the Bible.
- Listen as others share how the Bible has impacted their lives as a Christian.
- Give offerings to the local church.
- Pray during worship as you have been instructed.

Worship should happen on a regular basis, at a church that teaches the Bible, led by a team of men and women who are committed to sharing their faith with others.

Remember, KIDS LEARN BY WATCHING OTHERS, so please make sure the worship is God honoring and not a performance for man.

Serve:

Yes, I struggle with the questions of when kids should start serving, but at whatever age you choose, lead kids to serve. This is possibly one of the greatest factors related to the discipleship making process and long-term success. In the book, *Nothing Less*, by Jana Magruder, she points out the results of massive research, that adults who stay connected to the church were kids who served with and watched their parents serve in the church. Are you going to disciple kids to sit in church or serve in church? My suggestion will always be to lead kids to serve.

As you provide a process of disciple making in your church, you will see lives who are changed. Not by what you do, but by what the Lord will do through you. Kids need you. Kids need you to disciple them. Kids need a strong Bible teaching church that is willing to take the time, energy and money to invest in their young lives. You can do this. I am praying for you because I know this is What Really Matters. We are Winning Our Harvest Field for His glory. My prayer is for God's kingdom to grow and flourish as you disciple kids for a lifetime of serving Him.

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

What does this chapter teach us about discipleship and disciple-making?

Who has been the biggest disciple maker in your life?

What was one of the biggest growth seasons in your life as a disciple?

What is your disciple making plan?

What stage of discipleship do you feel you are in right now?

What are two ways God is calling the leaders in your group/class to come alongside children and/or parents in their journey toward discipleship?

CHAPTER 7

MULTIPLICATION MATTERS

Eric Boswell



Ask any third grader and they will tell you that multiplication is hard. However, the trick to learning multiplication is finding a pattern. I believe the same is true when we look at multiplication through the lens of discipleship. At first it may seem difficult, especially when we put an emphasis on what we have to do to bring about the multiplication. Thankfully God's Word gives us a clear pattern that helps us understand the process for multiplying (growing) disciples.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul gives us a look into the pattern for how to bring about growth/multiplication.

"What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's coworkers. You are God's field, God's building." (1 Corinthians 3:5-9, CSB)

Did you catch it? We aren't responsible for the growth (multiplication). That is up to the Lord. Our role in the process of multiplication is being obedient to the Lord by planting seeds, watering those others have planted, and trusting God for the increase. Once we understand this key truth, multiplication becomes a lot easier.

Multiplication in Children's Ministry

"Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matthew 19:13-14, ESV)

Why is children's ministry important? Children are important to Jesus; it doesn't get clearer than that. However much like the disciples encountered with the children in Matthew 19, our churches don't always view children as a priority. Those of us who work in children's ministry know that statistically more people come to faith in Christ as a child than at any other age. When we talk about multiplication in children's ministry, we are talking about how the parents of a child and the church community reproduce their faith in the lives of children through intentional discipleship.

In children's ministry, we have a great opportunity to impact the lives of children through building meaningful relationships with kids and their families, sharing the gospel, and equipping parents to be spiritual leaders in their homes. Multiplication in children's ministry is multifaceted. It does not happen through one person, at one location, or on one day of the week. In this chapter, we will be discussing multiplication through the lens of three different locations where ministry to children occurs weekly:

- Multiplication in the Home: Parents, the Primary Disciplers
- Multiplication Within the Walls of the Church: Equipping Missional Kids
- Multiplication Outside the Doors of the Church: Taking the Gospel Out

Multiplication In the Home: Parents, the Primary Disciplers

“Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-8, CSB)

For Christian families, multiplication begins at home. Parents who have come to faith in Christ have the responsibility to teach their children what it means to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” as commanded in Deuteronomy 6. As you look at the Old Testament, you see that God first establishes the home as the place for spiritual instruction, the church comes later. However, we live in a day and age where many Christian parents don’t know what it looks like to disciple their own kids. I believe the reason for this is that for many decades, family discipleship has not been modeled in the home or taught in the church. Our parents are simply ill equipped (or at least feel like they are), so with the best of intentions, parents seek out the “experts” just as they would for any activity their kids might be involved in. Just as parents look to a tutor when their child needs help in school or a coach to help them improve their skills in sports; parents look to the church to help their kids grow spiritually. Parents have advocated their responsibility in spiritually discipling their own children to the church, and for far too long, the church has willingly obliged.

It is time that churches begin to change the culture by equipping parents to assume their role as chief disciplers in their home. In order to do that, we must help parents understand what discipleship looks like. Our Christian parents should be modeling what it looks like to love God by spending time with Him through prayer and by studying the Bible. They should be faithfully teaching God’s Word to their children and including God in their conversations throughout the day. The church should come alongside parents to equip them for this task. Milestones in the life of a child such as child dedication, salvation, baptism, etc. are great opportunities to instruct parents on intentionally discipling their children.

In order for parents to be successful, we must provide them with tools that make spiritual disciplines feasible. For example, if you are wanting them to establish a daily quiet time, equip them with a Bible reading plan and a journal for writing down how God speaks to them through His Word. The journal can also be used for journaling prayer requests. If you are encouraging families to participate in a family devotional each week, provide a list

of worship songs they can sing together as a family with a scripture passage to read together and a couple of questions that can be discussed as a family. It may also be helpful to have a class for parents on the topic of discipling kids. Just think of the impact that can be made in the lives of kids and generations to come when parents are intentionally discipling their children.

While parents are the greatest influencers in the life of a child, we all know that we have children in our churches who have parents who are not believers. Maybe these kids come with a friend, grandparents, or even through a bus ministry. We cannot expect nonbelieving parents to multiply their faith and create new disciples; after all, zero times anything is still zero. I have heard kids from homes with nonbelieving parents referred to as spiritual orphans. In these instances, I do believe the church must adopt these kids and take on the role as the chief discipler. Our prayer should certainly be that we would have opportunity to share the gospel with these parents, win them to Christ, and nurture them through a discipleship relationship and help them to grow to become the chief disciplers of their homes as God intended.

Multiplication Within the Walls of the Church: Equipping Missional Kids

*“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
(Proverbs 22:6 ESV)*

While parents are the chief disciplers of their children, what we do at church certainly matters. We help to reinforce parents’ teachings and help challenge kids to grow deeper in their relationship with God. It is easy for our children’s ministries to be driven by the programs that we provide; however, our programs should be driven by our goal to make disciples of Christ. The programs within our ministries are simply a tool used to facilitate multiplication through the teaching of God’s Word and discipleship driven relationships. While I don’t know what programs your church offers, I do suspect that if I walked in, I would find caring adults faithfully teaching kids the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is multiplication.

Our kids have a unique opportunity to reach their peers in a way that we as adults cannot. We need to help equip our kids to be on mission for Christ. Raising missional kids starts at an early age. We need to be teaching our kids the importance of building relationships with others with the hope of having an opportunity to share the gospel. From a young age, we can encourage kids to invite their peers to worship services and church related events such as Vacation Bible School.

As children come to faith in Christ, we should encourage them to share their experience with Christ with others in their lives such as family, friends, neighbors, teammates, etc. In order to help them feel comfortable doing this, we can help them to write out their salvation testimony and practice telling another person. We may want to help them become familiar with a simple Gospel presentation, such as Lifeway's The Gospel: God's Plan for Me, the Evangecube, or the Roman Road. Recently a preteen girl in our church came to faith in Christ. Immediately she began telling friends about the change that had taken place in her life when she encountered Jesus Christ and made Him Lord and Savior of her life. This is a perfect example of being obedient to what Christ has called us to do and trusting Him for the increase.

Mission Education programs are a great venue for teaching the kids in your church about being on mission for Christ outside the walls of the church. Our Royal Ambassadors (RAs) and Girls In Action (GAs) are constantly being challenged to take what they learn from missionaries and apply it to the world they live in. A great example of this happened a couple of years ago when we were learning about some missionaries who took cookies to people in order to build relationships with neighbors and to share the gospel. Shortly thereafter a family in our church made up kits of fresh baked cookies and decorating supplies and delivered them to their neighbors on Valentine's Day to show the love of Christ.

When we help our kids see they are missionaries in their world, then multiplication occurs naturally. I dream of the day where churches all over the world begin commissioning our Christian kids as missionaries to their schools, neighborhoods, sports team, dance teams, etc.

Outside the Doors of the Church: Taking the Gospel Out

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20, CSB)

About five years into my time as a Children's Pastor, I became unsettled in my spirit. I knew the Lord desired more from me and my church. I began to sense the need for us to expand our ministry to kids and families outside the walls of our church. I felt the Holy Spirit point blank ask me, "Do you only care to minister to kids that enter the doors of your church?" Of course, the answer was "no", and I immediately began praying for the Lord to show me where He was leading. I felt the Lord was calling our church to be more outwardly focused and willing to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to children who might never enter the doors of our church.

Ministering to kids outside of your church can vary from church to church. It could be a sports program, apartment ministry, bus ministry, etc. For our church, it was an opportunity to begin an after-school program at a local elementary school. We had already built a strong relationship with the school's principal, assistant principal, and teachers by volunteering in the office, reading to classes, and tutoring children. God provided a team of people who helped get this ministry started.

Before we ever started the after-school program, I volunteered one hour weekly in a Kindergarten classroom helping kids who needed some extra help identifying letters, numbers, colors, sight words, etc. One of the first kids I had the privilege of working with was Christopher. Christopher had some challenges both mentally and physically, but he worked hard and we always enjoyed our time working together. A couple of years after that encounter, Christopher began coming to our after-school program and we got the opportunity to know his mom and sisters quite well. During the summer Christopher and his sisters attended our Vacation Bible School and more seeds of the gospel were planted.

Another child, Luke, came to our after-school program for the first time right before spring break. We were teaching on Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Luke listened intently to every word of the lesson. He came to me afterwards in tears as he was so saddened by what Jesus endured. I took this opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with Luke. Over spring break, I prayed that Luke would come back to our after-school program and he did. After the Bible lesson, Luke said he wanted to go to Heaven and be with Jesus. So I went through the gospel again and this time Luke made Jesus Lord and Savior of his life.

When we began our after-school program, we felt that it was necessary that we continue to build our relationship with the school. We wanted to be a part of the life of the school and not just show up once a week for our program. We began meeting with the school's principal and guidance counselor to find out what needs the school had. Our church began to do things like helping at school events such as their Fall Festival and Christmas breakfast.

In addition to our after-school program, we began a ministry to meet needs of families from the elementary school, whatever they might be. We provided umbrellas for refugee families who were walking their kids to school in the rain. We assisted a single father trying to raise two boys with very little resources. Our church took a collection of furniture, clothes, gift cards, and food for a family that had a house fire. Through countless situations like this we had the opportunity to reach out and be the hands and feet of Christ and share with families about the hope found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Over the years we have planted many seeds and seen numerous kids and some parents come to be lifelong followers of Christ. Our job was simply being obedient to the Lord's direction, meeting needs, and boldly proclaiming the gospel, and the Lord has brought about the increase.

Called To Multiply

If you are a disciple of Christ then you are called to multiply yourself by making new disciples. While it is God who brings one to salvation, it is our role to obediently walk alongside those individuals as they grow and mature in their faith. For multiplication to occur in our children's ministries, it takes our parents, volunteers, and even our kids being obedient to whatever God is calling us to do. It is a partnership between the parents at home, along with the precious saints of the church, working together to help many children learn the gospel, love the gospel, and live the gospel out so that God may be glorified and lives are changed through encountering Him.

QUESTIONS

to Guide Your Group's Discussion

What does this chapter say about our role in the process of multiplication as seen in 1 Corinthians 3?

How does our church equip parents to intentionally disciple their children?

What are some ways our church is equipping missional kids?

What are some of the ways you have served to take the Gospel beyond the walls of the church in the past?

How can our group/class help host a multi-generational/family mission project?

TO HELP EVERY CHURCH WIN ITS HARVEST FIELD

Mark Miller

Every Church Matters

Every church matters if we are to win Tennessee. Bill Sutton, one of the pastors I served with, taught me an old revival song from the early 20th century entitled Win Them One by One. The first verse and chorus go like this:

If to Christ our only king
Men redeemed we strive to bring,
Just one way this may be done—
We must win them one by one.

Chorus: So you bring the one next to you, And I'll bring the one next to me; In all kinds of weather, we'll all work together, And see what can be done;

Tennessee will be won when every church implements a strategy to win the ones next to them and my church wins the ones next to me. The song goes on to say, “in no time at all, we'll have them all, so win them, win them one by one.” Every church counts.

Partnership Matters

The Tennessee Baptist Mission Board's mission is to “Make Christ Known by Serving Churches.” Our passion is found in our calling to serve your church. As you make a commitment to win Tennessee, we are ready to come alongside of you and your church to partner with you in seeing people saved, baptized, disciplined, and mobilized to fulfill the Great Commission.

When people ask me, what do you do? I respond, “I serve churches in Tennessee as a consultant, coach, conference leader, and champion.” As you make a commitment to implement the seven steps outlined in this book, your TBMB (Tennessee Baptist Mission Board) staff is a valuable resource for you.

The Baptism-Discipleship Team is made of specialists that relate directly to the ministries of your church. For example, my passion is helping churches with Sunday School, adult Bible study groups, and discipleship.

The New Church Team is ready to assist mother churches in planting new churches. New churches are needed to win Tennessee.

The Church Revitalization Team exists to help churches identify and overcome obstacles and develop a path towards health. Healthy churches are a necessity to win Tennessee.

The Resourcing Team provides help for churches in the matter of stewardship and promotion of the Cooperative Program and Golden Offering for Tennessee Missions. Increased giving is necessary to win Tennessee.

Other teams and specialists exist to help your church with service, communications, missions, worship, etc. Search to find the right specialist for your need or complete a *Need Ministry Support Form* at www.tnbaptist.org.

We look forward to partnering with your church on specific strategies, emphases, and events to impact your harvest field.

APPENDIX 1

Helping Children Make Life's Most Important Decision

HELPING CHILDREN MAKE LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT DECISION

Many times, we talk with children about what they want to be when they grow up. We may even ask them if they want to get married and have children. Sometimes we talk with children about what the world will be like when they are adults. Many of our conversations with children are future oriented and really have little to do with the present. Helping children understand their need for a relationship with Jesus Christ does not need to be future oriented. Children can accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. Let's examine some questions that can help children understand salvation.

- **What is salvation?**

First and foremost, salvation is the work of God. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that an individual is saved by the grace of God, not of works. Children need to understand that no matter how well they behave, how obedient they are, or whether they make all A's at school, this cannot help them become a Christian.

Salvation is the saving grace of God, through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation is available to everyone who calls on God (Romans 10:13).

A common phrase used by many people is "being saved." However, for a child, the question may arise, from what am I being saved? As we talk with children about salvation, we need to explain that being saved means we are saved from the eternal separation from God, that being hell.

- **How is a person saved?**

Paul is very clear in his letter to the Romans about how a person is saved.

While talking with children, it is important to help them understand who Jesus is, why He came to earth, what He did, and how He can be received.

- **When can a person become a Christian?**

The phrase "age of accountability" has been used many times in reference to when a person can become a Christian. Interestingly, this phrase is not located in the Bible. However, the concept of accountability is. Paul writes in Romans 14:12 that "each of us will give an account of himself to God." Each person is accountable to God for how he lives his life, the decisions he makes, and ultimately whether or not he will accept or reject God's gift of eternal life. The age at which a person reaches accountability differs widely. An important aspect is to realize that when a child begins to ask questions about becoming a Christian, he may be at the early stage of accountability. When a

child asks a question, he may be asking for some simple information that can be used to guide him to a deeper understanding of salvation. We will discuss this more in the next section. The simple answer to when can a person become a Christian is when the person, guided by the Holy Spirit, understands he is a sinner, admits that Jesus is the Son of God Who died on the cross to save him from his sins, was resurrected and is alive today; asks God for forgiveness; and asks Him to come into his life and be his Savior and Lord.

Presenting the Gospel to Children

As we begin this section, let me make two observations—there is only ONE gospel. The same gospel that saves adults saves children. We need to be careful when presenting the gospel to children that we do not water down the message. Watering down or simplifying the gospel to simply get a child to say “yes” to the gospel is not only dangerous, it is disobedience. Secondly, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of children. Our task is to work alongside the Holy Spirit in presenting the gospel to children, and if they are ready to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, lead them in doing so.

One of my favorite verses to use in presenting the gospel to children is John 3:16 (probably one of the first verses children memorize).

*For God loved the world in this way;
He gave his one and only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him
will not perish but have eternal life.*

Notice how you can use this verse to talk with children. Imagine you are having a conversation with a child as you read the following. Pause and imagine how the child would respond to these questions and statements.

For God – Who is God? What did God do? God is the Creator of everything. No one made God. God has always been and He will always be. God created you and made you special. God wants to have a relationship with you. How does it make you feel to know that God loves you so much that He wants to have a relationship with you?

Loved – How did God show His love? Romans 5:8 says that God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world, even while we were still sinners.

The World – Who is the world? The world is every person who has ever lived. God knows each person by name. He cares for everyone, and He cares for you! God even loves the people in the world who do not love Him.

He gave His one and only Son – This one and only Son is Jesus. We celebrate Jesus’ birth at Christmas and His death and resurrection at Easter. God only has one Son. How do you think it made God feel for Jesus to come to earth, live a perfect life, die on

a cross, be buried, and then be resurrected? God gave His best for us.

So that everyone – Who is everyone? Everyone is everyone! Every person who has ever lived and will live has the opportunity to ask Jesus to be his Savior and Lord.

Who believes in Him – What does it mean to believe? What are some things you believe in? Believing is trusting. I trust that Jesus loves me and that He died for me. I trust that the Bible is true.

Will not perish – Perish is a word you probably do not hear very often. It means to become destroyed or ruined. When the Bible talks about a person perishing it means he is separated from God. That means he will be forever in hell.

But have eternal life – What does eternal mean? Eternal means it goes on and on and on and on—forever. If a person has asked Jesus to be his Savior and Lord, when his life on earth ends, it means he will live with Jesus FOREVER!

God loves you and has a great plan for your life. Tell me something that is special about you. God created you special. You are the only you in the whole world. However, there are some things we have in common.

One thing everyone has in common is sin.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

What is sin? Who does the Bible say has sinned? Sin is choosing my way instead of God's way. God has never sinned. When Jesus lived on the earth, He lived a perfect life—He never sinned. Sin is disobeying God. What are some sins (lying, cheating, stealing, disobeying your parents)? What happens because we sin? Sin does not make God happy, in fact; sin breaks our relationship with God. There is a cost of sin.

*For the wages of sin is death,
but the gift of God is eternal life
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23*

The first part of this verse tells us the cost of sin. The cost of sin is death—one day every one of us will die. That means our physical bodies, the part that we see—our hair, arms, legs, eyes, as well as the things inside our bodies that we do not see—lungs, heart, kidneys, and so forth. But look at the middle part of this verse. What does God give us? He gives us a gift of eternal life. Eternal life comes through Jesus Christ. Eternal life means that when our physical bodies die here on earth, people who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord will go to live with God in heaven—FOREVER (that's what eternal means—FOREVER)! God's gift is free. Listen to what God did for us, even though we are sinners.

*But God proves his own love
for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us. Romans 5:8*

God did not wait for us to get rid of the sin in our lives. God knows it is impossible for us to live in ways that will please and honor Him without His help. Some people think they can “be good enough” for God to save them. Some people think they can “work hard enough” to earn salvation. The Bible makes it clear that the only way we can receive salvation is through Jesus Christ. Tell me what you know about Jesus. (Jesus came to earth, He lived a perfect life [He never sinned], He was arrested and crucified [died on a cross] to provide the forgiveness of our sins, He was buried, and God raised Him from the dead. Jesus is alive today!)

While it is important that we know these things about Jesus, we must also confess or admit that we believe them.

*If you confess with your mouth,
“Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart
that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
Romans 10:9*

When you say something, you should speak the truth. When you believe something in your heart, it should be a real sense of belief. You know what you say is true and you want to live your life in ways that show you believe it. This verse tells us that we confess (we admit what we believe is true) and we believe it in our heart. This is more than just understanding something in our brains. We really 100% believe it is true. What does this verse tell us we are to believe? (Jesus is Lord, God raised Him from the dead, you can be saved).

These verses, and many more in the Bible, tell us how a person can receive God’s greatest gift—eternal life. So, what does a person have to do for Jesus to become His Savior and Lord?

Admit to God you are a sinner—Tell God the sins you have done and ask Him to forgive you. God already knows what you have done, so just tell Him. He will forgive you if you ask Him to. After you receive God’s forgiveness, you must repent of your sins. Repent means to stop doing the wrong thing (sin) and start doing the right thing (obey God).

Believe that Jesus is God’s Son, He loves you, He lived a perfect life, died on the cross, was buried, God raised Him from the dead, and He is alive today! To believe means you trust this. You trust what the Bible says about Jesus is true. You trust that God loves you so much He sent Jesus to the world and He died for your sins. You trust that Jesus is alive and that when you die you will go to heaven to be with him. You trust that Jesus will help you live each day of your life in ways that will please and honor Him. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). You trust that Jesus is the only way to eternal life.

Confess your belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord. First John 1:9 states, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Confess means to say you believe something is true. In confessing your faith, you say you believe what the Bible says is true, and you ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins, and to come into your life and be your Savior and Lord. Once you do this, Jesus will! You do not have to ask Jesus to come into your life every day, He comes in when you ask Him the first time and He will never leave you. This does not mean you will never sin again. However, when you do sin, ask Jesus to forgive you—and He will.

APPENDIX 2

Talking with a Child About Salvation

TALKING WITH A CHILD ABOUT SALVATION

Becoming a Christian is the most important decision a person will ever make. Treat the decision as important.

- Talk with each child individually. Allow the child to ask questions and state what he knows about becoming a Christian.
- Ask open-ended questions to discover more about the child's questions. Is the child asking questions because he is under conviction of the Holy Spirit, or has the child heard something that sparked his curiosity and he has questions he would like answered? Use the questions as a time to guide the child in his understanding of the gospel. Be careful to not jump to conclusions as to the child's questions.
- Answer each question honestly and on the child's level of understanding. If a child asks a question you do not know, simply state, "I don't know the answer to that question. I will have to find out the answer."
- Speak in terms the child can understand. Be sensitive to the child's attention span and understanding. Do not give more information than the child is ready to receive.
- Limit the use of "yes/no" questions. Open-ended questions allow you to gain a better understanding of the child's questions. A question such as "Do you want Jesus to be your Savior and Lord" is a "yes/no" question. A better question would be "Why do you want to ask Jesus to be your Savior and Lord?" You can also ask questions such as "What does it mean to be a Christian" or "How does a person become a Christian?"
- Pay close attention to what the child states. Encourage the child to express his ideas and feelings. Seek to understand how the Holy Spirit is working in the child's life as you talk with the child. Carefully correct any incorrect understanding regarding Jesus, His life, and salvation.
- Call attention to Scripture. God's instructions on salvation are included in the Bible. Use the Bible to show the children verses used in the gospel presentation. If possible, use the child's Bible. Place self-stick notes at the verses so the child can read the verses again.
- Guide the child to understand the difference in becoming a Christian and baptism. Many children think being baptized makes a person a Christian. Help the child to understand baptism is a sign of obedience and comes after a person becomes a Christian.
- Pray! Pray before you begin talking with a child. Pray during the conversation for clarity. Pray afterwards that God will continue to work in the child's life.

- Offer to talk with the child again. If the child accepts Jesus as Savior and Lord, offer to talk with him about what comes next and how he can grow in his faith. If the child is not ready to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, offer to talk with him or answer additional questions at another time.
- Follow up with the child and his family. Matthew 28:19-20 states “make disciples.” These verses do not say “make converts.” There is a difference in “making disciples” and “converts.” Disciples are trained and equipped to follow Jesus. Children need to learn to follow Jesus as they learn to pray, read, and study the Bible, share their faith, and live in ways that please and honor God. Every person who makes a decision to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord deserves followup and discipleship.
- Allow God to be in charge of the conversation, the child’s response, and the miracle of a child becoming a Christian.

Two Major Things to Avoid in Presenting the Gospel to Children

- Avoid manipulating a child to make a decision he is not ready to make. The child may simply want information on what it means to be a Christian. You are not the Holy Spirit and it is not your task to convict a child of his sins. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in the child’s life.
- Avoid scaring a child into accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord. Avoid statements such as “If you do not accept Jesus, you will spend eternity in hell” or “If you don’t do this right now, you could die today...” While these statements are true, do not manipulate the child’s emotions in accepting Jesus.

What’s Next After Accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord

Accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord is the beginning of an amazing journey with Jesus. After a child accepts Jesus, the task of discipleship really takes on a new understanding. Which of these topics would have helped you the most after you received Jesus?

- Learning to read the Bible
- Learning to pray
- Learning to tell people about Jesus
- Learning to live in ways that please and honor God
- Learning to worship
- Learning to make decisions that please and honor God
- Learning to _____ (you fill in the blank)

Honestly, all of these aspects are vital to growth in the Christian life. This process is called sanctification (growing in Christlikeness). Guiding a child to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is not the end. It is only the beginning, the beginning of eternity! Let’s make sure we begin well and finish strong.

APPENDIX 3

Childhood Resources

Scan code for Available Childhood Resources



or visit tnbaptist.org/children

