

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## PASTORAL BASICS

### LESSON 5: MINISTRY TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Does the thought of teaching young children thrill you or fill you with dread? Perhaps it is time for you to renew your vision for children's ministry by seeing, in part, how the Lord means to use children in His kingdom.

The disciples tried to chase the children away, but the Lord Jesus welcomed them, carried them in His arms, and blessed them. Which opinion of children in the church do you more consistently demonstrate?

Too many churches ignore one very large segment of society – our children

The Lord tells us that He uses the weakest among us to frustrate the strong, and that He uses the foolish among us to shame the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). Why should we be surprised that the Lord means to use our children to build His kingdom, too?

In evangelical churches, we believe that no one is out of the reach of God's grace. The gospel is to be taught to all people, and evangelism and discipleship ought to be extended to all the people that the Lord brings into our lives. In practice, however, too many churches ignore one very large segment of society – our children. Instead of investing in the faith of our children while they are young, many churches wait until the children 'grow up' and are ready to be productive members of the church.

As a result, too many churches have an unreasonably low impression of the importance of children's ministry. From nursery to Sunday school, rooms are often understaffed, or are managed by people merely aiming to babysit for the duration of the 'real' church service. This is a great tragedy! The church is for all ages, and every person has a role to fulfill in the kingdom of God! Jesus Himself welcomed the little children to come to Him, and so we too ought to hold these precious little ones in high esteem and seek to equip them for work in the Kingdom.

Scripture has high praise for the role of children in the kingdom. Psalm 8 contains a frequently quoted, and most often misapplied, verse. The psalm begins with wild praise for the majesty of the Lord. Then the psalmist acknowledges that, "Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger" (Psalm 8:2).

Some translations word the verse to say that out of the mouth of nursing babes He has ordained praise. That, too, is a high calling. To be ordained for the praise of the Lord – this majestic Lord – is no small feat. But that second phrase is what should highlight for us the amazing influence our youngest members can have. The passage says that the praise of these babies will silence the enemy! Imagine: our nurseries, our Sunday school, and our children's choirs can silence and still our enemy with their praise!

This should not surprise us. Elsewhere in the scriptures, the Lord tells us that He uses the weakest among us to frustrate the strong, and that He uses the foolish among us to shame the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). Why should we be surprised that the Lord means to use our children to build His kingdom, too?

If this is the case, then children will need to be taught and trained so that they know who they are praising! Obviously, parents carry the bulk of this responsibility and must be teaching their children to love the Lord their God at home. But on a Sunday morning, or at a mid-week program, it is imperative that the church supports the good work the parents are doing and add their voice and example to complete the good work the Lord is doing in and through these children.

Very often we worry about our children walking away from the church as they get older. We want to teach them well now so that the foundation of faith is well-laid. This way they are more likely to continue on in their faith as they grow and mature. That is a very good plan! However, we need to also teach them now, not only so that they are strong godly adults, but also to strengthen their child-like faith now! Their influence in the kingdom of God begins now, so we ought to train them for now!

By casting a vision like this for children's ministry, hopefully it will no longer be difficult to find help to serve and to teach in those programs. However, it really is critical that children's ministry not be run by those who do not want to be there, or by those who underestimate the role of children in the kingdom of God.

While children do need to be taught with different methods than the adults do, the urgency of the message is no less in the children's rooms. These youngest members need to know who God is, who we are in relation to Him, what He has done for us, and what He expects of us in return. They need to know who they are praising before they silence the enemy with their praises. And so, we must be intentional in our instruction of these little ones

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## IN REVIEW

- The children in our churches is a most-often underestimated demographic.
- The Lord uses the praise of His littlest ones to silence His enemy. He uses the weak to defeat the strong! This shows us the importance of training our children well in the ways of scripture.
- While having a goal of keeping our kids in the church and deep in their faith as they become adults is a good thing, we must also see the training as equipping for good works now.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- Do you have a children's program at your church? Are the children kept in the main service with their parents? Either way, seek to understand the best way to communicate to these children (and their parents) the precepts of the Bible in a way that they can understand and apply to their lives.
  
- Do you value children? Try to honestly assess your opinion on the role of children in the kingdom. Have you ever thought that they might be able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to silence the enemies against you as you preach the Word on a Sunday morning? Pray and ask the Lord to give you a heart and a vision for the children in your church.
  
- If you have a children's ministry program at your church currently, review training resources available for your workers, and be sure to thank and to honour them for this very important work that they are doing.

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