

# discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership  
Leader's Guide

## PASTORAL BASICS

### LESSON 5: MINISTRY TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Pastoral Basics. This module will be helpful for untrained leaders who are serving as pastors, for churches who are looking for a pastor, and for those pursuing a pastoral role. It will outline the many duties a pastor may have in a local church, and what church members should expect from their pastor. Some specific challenges are also included, such as ministry to different age groups as well as considerations for church growth.

#### INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God sincerely. The lessons will also benefit church leaders who wish to encourage people in their Christian service, and identify spiritual gifts in those they are discipling.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

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# PASTORAL BASICS

## LESSON 5: MINISTRY TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

### PURPOSE

This lesson looks at the importance of ministries specifically designed for children and youth, and a Biblical basis for a focus on young people.

### LEADER'S NOTE

Church is not for adults only! Every healthy church will include people of all ages. And yet equal time and attention are not always given to every demographic. Youth often leave the Church once they are old enough to make their own decisions, and churches should be concerned about this. This lesson is not about keeping young people in our churches through entertainment or competing with the world. Instead, it deals with making children and youth a meaningful part of the Church today, not simply preparing them to be the Church of tomorrow! Many churches support parents in the discipleship of their children. And they see great results when they participate in child evangelism. In teaching this lesson, you may invite local church leaders who have a successful ministry to children or youth to talk about their work. The case study portion of this lesson will also be helpful.

## INTRODUCTION

*Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.*

- ❖ What adults were important influences on you as a child? What adults were important influences on you in your youth?
- ❖ If you came to the Christian faith as a child, who taught you about God? What was the role of the Church in your spiritual formation?
- ❖ How are children viewed in your culture? Are they ignored? Are they revered? Are they loved for who they are now, and for what they will become someday?
- ❖ What are the ministries your church spends the most time and energy on? Is it one particular demographic or type of person, or do they minister to all stages of life and people with different needs?
- ❖ If you wanted to help a child or youth to know how much God loves them and how important they are to Him, what would you do or say? How could you demonstrate this truth to them?



## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

## TEACH

- ❖ **What is Children's Ministry?** : Our churches often reflect the attitudes of our surrounding culture, for better or for worse. In many parts of the world, children are considered unimportant and of little value. In others, children are revered and society revolves around their needs. Neither of these extremes reflects God's desires.
  - **The Heart of Children's Ministry:** Simply put, children matter enormously to God, not just for their potential to be adults who serve and love Him, but for who they are today – His precious creation. Children matter to God, so they should matter to us. Every single child is important in the Kingdom of God. Church activities that give them opportunity to hear the Gospel, grow in their faith, and become welcomed members of the Church are core components of children's ministry.
  - **The Place of Children's Ministry:** While parents have the primary responsibility in the discipleship of their children, the Church should:
    - o encourage and support parents in the task of discipleship.
    - o provide opportunities for children to worship and serve within the Church.
    - o disciple children who have no Christian influence.
    - o evangelize children who do not yet know God.
  - **The Power of Children's Ministry:** Evangelism and discipleship of children have a powerful influence on them. The health of the future Church depends on our children keeping the faith. In working with children we shape the future of the Church. When we show children that they matter to us, they will realize how much they matter to God.
  - **The Importance of Children's Ministry:** God's Word teaches us that children are important. Jesus modeled a great love for children. One time when His disciples wanted to push children away so that Jesus could spend time with more important people, Jesus rebuked the disciples.
    - o Jesus said, *"Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God"* ([Mark 10:13-16](#)).
    - o Jesus said children are not to be despised ([Matthew 18:10](#)).
    - o Jesus said children are an example to us ([Matthew 18:3](#)).
    - o Causing children to sin, or to remain in sin, is an offence to God ([Luke 17:2](#)).
    - o God has ordained that children and infants will praise Him ([Matthew 21:16](#)).
- ❖ **Why Children's Ministry Matters:** When churches take seriously the work of evangelism and discipleship, they will include a focus on children. Children's ministry is more than simply adding another program, or building a room for children to be entertained during a Sunday morning worship service.



- **Children are sinners and need the Gospel:** Children may look cute and innocent, but they have hearts set on themselves rather than God, and need the Gospel just as much as adults (Romans 3:23).
- **Children are receptive to the Gospel:** Worldwide research demonstrates that people are most likely to respond to the Gospel between the ages of 4-13. Child Evangelism Fellowship states that 19 out of 20 Christians came to faith before the age of 25. Barna Research Group found that only 6% of these came to faith after the age of 13.
- **Children are capable of repentance and faith:** Jesus used children as an example of living faith; He knew they were capable of responding to the Gospel. Even from a young age, children can express faith and repent. They are often more capable than adults of admitting their need for help and receiving salvation. They do not have to comprehend all of the mysteries of the faith in order to trust in God!
- **Children need moral direction:** Psychological research demonstrates that a child's moral development is complete before the age of 9. What a child considers good and bad, along with their desire for righteousness and obedience, are all formed in early childhood. When we teach them God's law and God's love, they can live lives that honour Him.
- **Children have their lives ahead of them:** Even children can share the Gospel and build God's Kingdom! When they come to faith at a young age, they have many more years to serve God. They may decide to devote their lives to Christian ministry, not merely to accumulate wealth.
- **Children have unique learning needs:** If children do not witness real faith or feel that Church is a place where they belong, they may decide to leave the faith. We must consider that the methods used to disciple an adult are not the best for children. This does not mean children should be separated in every instance from adults, but there are benefits of focusing specifically on children in some of our ministry activities. This would be similar to having a women's Bible study, or time of prayer just for men.
- **Children's minds and hearts are targeted by the world:** The world wants to gain a young child's heart. Influences don't wait until a child is grown. When young children start school, they learn to think, read and write. Advertisers target children with appealing packaging and products. Greed, power and lust begin to take over the minds of our young people. We should pray that the hearts and minds of our children will be protected, and that they will decide to follow Jesus before the world takes hold of them.
- **Children are the Church now and the Church of the future:** Ministry to children and youth matters because they are not just the future Church, they are the Church today. If they have made a profession of faith and belong to God, they are in His Kingdom today and can worship, serve, learn, and love just as adults do. They are also the future leaders of our church. When we influence them, we influence the future of the Kingdom of God.



- ❖ **The Unique Needs of Children and Youth:** Programs, services and activities of the Church that target children and youth must consider the unique learning and community needs of this age group. Children and youth need:
  - **Truth:** Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Children need Jesus; they need to be challenged to believe, to be taught God's Word, not just to be kept occupied while the adults learn in another room.
  - **Fun:** Young people are drawn to fun! Any program aimed at children must have an element of joy and must allow for laughter, games, wonder and expression of delight. God's Word can be taught in a manner that is lively and engaging without being irreverent. Games, dramatizations, engaging storytelling, visual aids, costumes, puppetry, and visual art are often employed in children's ministry.
  - **Specific Learning Environment:** Like oral learners or those with a low level of literacy, children overwhelmingly prefer to hear and see information rather than merely read it. They require simple language, and clear explanations. They also benefit from being able to respond with movement or tactile experiences. Creating a piece of artwork as a response to a story, acting out the story with others, using toys or manipulatives to play out what they have learned, games that involve movement, and environments that allow for a variety of experiences help children and youth learn and connect with one another.
  - **Immediate Application:** Because a child's brain and literacy is still developing, we must make immediate application to what they are being taught. Children and youth live in the moment and may not be able to think long term. They may need to have the lesson or idea of a story identified and repeated in new ways.
  - **Connection:** Perhaps even more than adults, children and youth long for connection and belonging. They will identify strongly with their leaders and want to be in close proximity to them. Children's programs should offer good role models and the opportunity to play and connect with one another.
  - **Security:** Children are unable to protect themselves, and may find new environments frightening. Children need to feel secure in a safe place and with safe people. Adult leaders must have the best interests of the children and youth in mind at all times. Mandatory supervision is required to ensure a leader never has the opportunity to harm a child or youth in any way.
  - **Recognition:** Children have a deep need to be noticed, and youth long for belonging and recognition. They both need to be recognized as individuals who can make positive contributions to their community. When we acknowledge the gifts God has given our children and encourage them to use them, the Church participates in the discipleship of that child, and the entire community is blessed by those gifts.
- ❖ **Healthy Children's Ministry:** There are many ways in which a church can choose to minister to children and youth, just as there are many gifts given to each church and different ways they



can be used. There are also some common failures in ministry to children which we must be aware of and avoid:

<b>Healthy Children’s Ministry</b>	<b>Unhealthy Children’s Ministry</b>
<b>Values and Trains Leaders</b>	<b>Least Skilled People Lead Children</b>
When we value ministry to children, we will value those who serve them in the Church. We should provide training and resources for them.	Sending those who are not gifted to lead children can be disastrous. Children’s ministry is not the place to send those who are inexperienced, or are weak in faith or character.
<b>Provides Meaningful Worship</b>	<b>Focuses Only on Fun</b>
Give children a chance to participate in worship and meaningful learning alongside adults and in age-appropriate classes. Acknowledge that children can have faith and worship authentically.	Children’s programs focus on fun activities and teach little of God’s truth. They falsely believe children cannot understand the things of God at a young age, so we must attract them to church by other means.
<b>Supports Parents</b>	<b>Takes Spiritual Responsibility from Parents</b>
Church expects and equips parents to be the primary spiritual influence in a child’s life. It provides parents with mentoring, training and resources when needed. The Church also discipled children who don’t have Christian influence at home.	Parents believe the Church is the expert at evangelism and discipleship, and leaves Christian education to the Church. God is talked about rarely at home. The Church has many programs for teaching and training children and youth.
<b>Encourages Multi-Generational Worship</b>	<b>Always Separates Generations at Church</b>
Allows children to worship alongside adults, and provides special opportunities for all ages to meet, worship and learn together. Intentional mentoring relationships or multi-generational activities encourage the growth of a healthy church.	Parents and children are always taught in separate classes. Children may never see their parents worship. Youth, adults and seniors never have the opportunity to learn from one another.
<b>Children are Active in the Church</b>	<b>Keeps Kids Entertained so Adults can Worship</b>
Children are given meaningful ways to serve the Church and participate in all that the Church does. They are welcome in worship and may have special roles such as singing in choirs, setting up chairs, or greeting visiting children.	The attitude that children must be separated from parents, kept quiet and occupied so that adults can do the real work of the Church, is unhealthy. Children’s Ministry is not a child-care service. Programs for children must be of spiritual benefit to them.
<b>Full Gospel Preached to All Ages</b>	<b>Preaches only God’s Love to Children</b>
Understanding that children need the Gospel too, the full message is taught to them, as well as age appropriate doctrines, Bible stories and patterns for Christian living. These truths are not hidden from them, but taught in a way they can understand.	Fearing that children cannot understand the Gospel or that it would be too frightening to talk about sin, only God’s love is taught, or specific stories told as moral fables. In an attempt to be well thought of by young people, they may falsely represent God.

❖ **Strategies for Evangelism and Discipleship of Children:** When a church decides that ministry to children and youth is important, it can maximize its outreach to the community, connect with adults through their children, and thereby build God’s Kingdom. This ministry requires specific



strategies, but these will differ depending on the needs of the community and the abilities (gifts) of those serving in the Church.

- **Use gifted people:** Because of the importance of child evangelism and discipleship, some of the Church's most gifted leaders should serve in children's ministry! Take great care in selecting leaders and volunteers for this ministry. Ideal qualities for a leader of children and youth are that they:
  - o Love God
  - o Love His people
  - o Are compassionate
  - o Are good communicators
  - o Are creative
  - o Are patient
  - o Are well-liked by young people
- **Create space that welcomes young people:** A space that welcomes children from the community will likely look different than an adult classroom. Consider places for youth to sit together, to engage in sports, and where children can play and create. If you can provide dedicated space to children's and youth ministry, young people will feel at home there.
- **Think beyond Sundays:** While Sunday morning may be the time the Church gathers for worship, children's ministry can happen throughout the week! Consider mid-week clubs, camps during school holidays, events or presentations that take place in the community as well as at the Church, school Bible clubs or ministry at church members' homes! Consider how you can reach children where they are.
- **Serve your community:** Look for the needs of children, youth, and families in your community. How can your church demonstrate God's love for children? How can you demonstrate to families how being a part of a church family can benefit them?

### TASK:

Divide participants into groups of 5-7. Assign each group 2 of the case studies provided at the end of this lesson in order that each case study is covered. Add your own case studies to these if you desire. Have each group answer the following questions.

*How did this church effectively evangelize and disciple children and youth?*

*How did this church support parents in discipling children, or equip adult leaders to disciple those without Christian influence?*

*How did this church equip children to be the leaders of the future and use their gifts today?*

*How did ministry to children enrich the Church or extend the reach of the Gospel into the community?*

Ask the class what they discovered about effective ministry to children and youth. You may wish to further discuss ideas that would work well in your community.



## TEACH:

- ❖ **Conclusion:** There are many means of reaching children with the Gospel. When the Good News is carefully presented in a way they can understand, they are able to express belief in Jesus at a young age. Children are the single most fruitful audience for evangelism, and this narrow window is the most likely time for a person to make a life-long commitment to Jesus. Consider how targeted ministry to children and youth can be a part of your church's strategy to see God's Kingdom grow and His greatness made known.

## DISCUSSION

- ❖ What groups of people are least reached by your church and may need the attention of spiritual leaders? (Consider the elderly, different language or people groups, women, students, or low literacy groups.)
- ❖ Have you been involved in ministry to children and youth before? What was done right? What could have been improved on?
- ❖ When did you first make a decision to follow Jesus? What must a child know before they can express faith?
- ❖ What are some of the reasons why youth leave the Church? How can churches keep young people? What is the danger of entertaining youth in order to keep them interested?

## PRAYER

*Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that God will provide leaders who are passionate about evangelism of children and youth, and that young people will hear the Gospel and be saved. Pray that churches will value children, and support families in their ministries. Pray that God will be glorified through the lives of children and youth, and that the whole multi-generational church would be blessed and drawn into worship.*



### Children's Ministry Case Study #1

Kate was hired as a director of children's ministries for a medium sized church comprised of many young families. After identifying people in the congregation with a passion and gift for working with children, she began to develop a team. She provided training for them to excel in teaching Sunday school classes, providing exciting mid-week kids' club opportunities and starting a summer camp. One of her projects was to create ways in which children could worship and serve in the Church, rather than just observe. She formed teams of interested children led by caring adults to learn instruments, to lead worship, to present dramatized Bible stories and puppets. Together these teams put on events for families in the community where the children would participate in teaching their peers about God. The support they received from Kate and her team allowed the children to not just be passive members of the Church, but learn about how God had uniquely gifted them, and see their friends come to know Jesus. The Church gained a positive reputation in the community and many families began to attend.

### Children's Ministry Case Study #2

Mina and Lee were missionaries stationed in an area with few Christians. After a year, they were unsuccessful at gaining any new believers, so they began to shift their focus. They built soccer pitches in the fields behind the church property, offered free computer classes and language classes. They also provided tutoring after school for neighbourhood children. After a few months, many children were coming to play soccer, learn, and have fun with one another. Mina and Lee had not made any positive connection with adults in the area until the children began to come to their programs. After a time, children were invited to Bible classes, and after a year, many people were worshipping together on Sunday mornings and some were baptized. The Church was primarily composed of young people and children, but parents were coming with their children. Because the programs directed at children were such a large part of the ministry, youth were used as leaders and taught to present the Gospel as they befriended children. Mina and Lee were not disheartened. They had hope for this church, and in God's good timing, He was building this church in an unconventional way!

### Children's Ministry Case Study #3

Daniel was a pastor of a large church that followed a typical format for Sunday mornings. Adults went into a large room to worship together, and children were separated by age into different classrooms to be instructed in the Word of God. Daniel saw that families were weakening, and generations were not able to learn from one another. While they had many successful programs for children, such as camps, after-school clubs and youth groups, children and youth felt uncomfortable in the adult worship space. Daniel and his elders decided a radical change was necessary. He stopped all separate children's programs, and adjusted his sermon to include stories that engaged children and then expanded on them for adults. Children were encouraged to draw pictures or move around during the sermon as needed. Instead of a camp held at the Church, Daniel had his children's ministry team develop materials that individual families could use to create home-based Bible clubs during school holidays. They also trained parents to evangelize and disciple children in the community with the help of their own children.



#### Children's Ministry Case Study #4

Alexander was given the role of pastor to youth in his church inside a large city. As he got to know them, he found one of their greatest struggles was facing a future of unemployment and inability to care for their future families. They were turning from God to illegal activity just for survival. Families were broken and youth had few positive role models. So Alexander began a new program. He trained youth to be ready for employment, and encouraged Christian business owners to give them practical work experiences. The youth were given resources to begin small businesses: painting signs, preparing food, delivering packages on bicycles, and even working in automotive repair shops and alongside carpenters. There were numerous discipleship opportunities as Alexander showed them how God's Word applies to every situation in life, and what it means to work hard. The Church began to catch the vision for believing in the youth and their potential. Some in the Church gathered funds for several to go on to higher education. Businesses from the community began to hire youth from the Church because they were responsible and trustworthy. Alexander and other leaders took them on adventure trips to help them learn teamwork, communication, leadership and confidence. Others from outside the church were drawn to these programs and were introduced to Jesus. As a result, many youth stayed connected to the Church, and went on to be leaders and raise their families to know God.

#### Children's Ministry Case Study #5

In a small rural church, there were few children and no specific programs for them. Those who did come to the Church often played outside during worship services. If they were in the worship service they were sometimes perceived as unruly and disruptive. Edith was a widow who was concerned for these children. She began to sit outside with them and tell them Bible stories. The children were interested and quickly warmed up to this 'grandma' they grew to love. When the Church saw how a loving woman could help the problem of noisy children, they encouraged her further. Edith taught a couple of younger women to tell Bible Stories also. Together they explained the Gospel which had been so long neglected. The young women received training in leadership, and children made confessions of faith. As the Church began to expand, so did its ministry to children. Eventually separate Bible classes for children were held before the worship services. Kids memorized Bible verses, learned about Jesus, and began to follow Christ. Parents observed that their children were interested in the Bible and started reading it at home, grateful that Edith had shown their children such love.



### Children's Ministry Case Study #6

Eloise and Eric were a young couple with small children who were passionate about families serving and learning together. Their church had a traditional system of Sunday school classes for various ages, but they felt it could do more. Most of the adults in the Church did not grow up in Christian families, and did not know how to instruct their families in spiritual matters. So Eric began a family ministry at the church. He offered classes for parents in how to disciple children. They started family events where parents and children could try activities or learn skills together, and invite their friends along. Workshops were taught by members of the church and included woodworking, candy making, music lessons, and sports; they concluded with a short Bible lesson relevant to the activity. The church began to see how this ministry was helping families in the church. As a result they set up family prayer and worship nights, even sending 6 families a year on a short-term missions trip together. On these trips, children learned Gospel dramas to present and songs to sing, while parents would do work locally and engage in evangelism. Eric and Eloise mentored families in having times of worship at home, and helped several through times of crisis. The result was stronger families who were equipped to engage in evangelism and discipleship. New families came to the Church, and several youth went into full-time missions work funded by the Church.