

# discipleship essentials

## Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study 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.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).



# PASTORAL BASICS

## LESSON 5: MINISTRY TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

### WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

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

### JUST SO YOU KNOW...

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! Vital to the health of the Church is that the Gospel is preached and lived out by people of every demographic – men, women, and children.

## GETTING STARTED

1. What adults were important influences on you as a child? What adults were important influences on you in your youth?

2. How are children viewed in your culture? Are they ignored? Are they revered? Are they valued for who they are now, and for what they will become someday?



# STUDY

❖ **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. 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:
  - encourage and support parents in the task of discipleship.
  - provide opportunities for children to worship and serve within the Church.
  - disciple children who have no Christian influence.
  - 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 know that 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. Read the following verses and write down what Jesus said about children:

Mark 10:13-16	
Matthew 18:10	
Matthew 18:3	
Luke 17:2	
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.
- **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!
- Are the energies and evangelism efforts of your church aimed primarily at adults or children? What do the previous points suggest about the importance of child evangelism?

- **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.



- Consider that educating a child in school is different from educating an adult. In what ways do these teaching methods differ? What unique learning needs do children have?

- **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 them 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.
- What would you add to this list of needs that children have? If you are involved already in ministry to youth, do you think your programs or ministries reflect these needs well? What is one area in which you could improve?

❖ **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?

❖ **CASE STUDIES:** It is helpful to apply these ideas to actual church ministry situations. Read the following stories and answer the questions for each.

Children’s Ministry Case Study #1	
<p>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 musical instruments, to lead worship, to present dramatized Bible stories (including the use of 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 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.</p>	
<p>How did this church effectively evangelize and disciple children and youth?</p>	
<p>How did this church equip children to be the leaders of the future and use their gifts today?</p>	
<p>How did ministry to children enrich the Church and extend the Gospel into the community?</p>	



<b>Children's Ministry Case Study #2</b>	
<p>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!</p>	
<p>How did this church effectively evangelize and disciple children and youth?</p>	
<p>How did this church equip children to be the leaders of the future and use their gifts today?</p>	
<p>How did ministry to children enrich the Church and extend the Gospel into the community?</p>	



**Children's Ministry Case Study #3**

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.

How did this church effectively evangelize and disciple children and youth?	
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 and extend the Gospel into the community?	



### ❖ SUMMARY

- Children’s ministry is an important component of a healthy church.
- Children matter enormously to God – not just for what they may become, but for who they are today. They can play a vital role in the Church, but have unique needs.
- Children are in need of the Gospel just like all of us. Early in their life, they are most receptive to receiving its message.
- It's important to children that the message be true, come across in a fun and interesting way, and have immediate application.
- Children require a secure environment, connection to loving mentors, and they need to be recognized for who they are.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1.

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.)

2.

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?