

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Developing Children's Ministry



SESSION 20
Ready to Minister

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Ready to Minister

SESSION OVERVIEW

Philosophy of Ministry

Children and Discipleship

Discipleship Study and Vision

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand what is needed in fashioning a philosophy of ministry.
- understand the basic relationship between children and discipleship.
- know how to disciple both others and yourself as you shape your vision for ministry.

Ready to Minister

INTRODUCTION



Henrietta Mears was an influential Christian educator who instilled vision in the minds of the youth in her church. One of these young men was Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusades, whose ministry has affected millions of people around the world. He kept a photo of Miss Mears on his desk throughout his ministry. Why? Was it because she was a good teacher? No, it was because she instilled in him a great vision. She helped him see what nobody else could see, that he could reach an entire world with the gospel. How can we instill a vision in the children to whom we minister?

We have learned together about children and their importance to the church. We have discussed the many ways children can be active participants in the church. We have discussed children's needs and ways to meet these needs. We've shared ideas for programming, discipline, budgets, special events, and safety issues. Readings discussed spiritual formation and ways to help children grow in their faith and minister in their own right. Our lessons discussed the pros and cons of conducting children's worship, evangelization strategies, pastoral care, even appropriate ways children might minister to each other. We can incorporate this knowledge into a vision and plan for ministry. As we begin, what do we need to bring to this conversation from our own personal perspective? If we want to create a ministry we can personally own, one that people will believe is our passion, what else must we offer?

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY



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As we think about our duties as children's leaders, we have to fashion personal as well as ministry-oriented goals that provide our vision. A philosophy helps us line up the pieces of wisdom that we have accumulated in a way that people can understand. A philosophy describes an attitude toward life or a specific part of life. The term captures how we understand that things should be. When we hear someone say, "I have a philosophical problem with that statement," they are saying that something violates the way they believe things should be. In this case, we are creating a philosophy of children's ministry. The philosophy doesn't describe what we actually do; it describes ideas that we value. The things we value then dictate the things we do. A philosophy of ministry combines equally our learning and context with our convictions and passions.

For example, if we value time with God, we ensure that our schedules allow for this time. In reality, we know that many things can interfere with our schedules and get in the way of our values. We can become so busy, we lose track of our values. If we regularly reexamine our values, it can help us to get back on track. A philosophy serves the same purpose. It reminds us of details that we might lose track of in the business of ministry.

A philosophy takes a snapshot of where we are at a particular point in time; it puts our attitude toward life into a written document. We will continue to grow in wisdom as long as we live. As long as we are growing, our philosophy will grow with us. Some points will remain the same and will anchor ministry to what we believe is most important. Consider the following categories. As we summarize our thoughts around these issues, we have a sound beginning for a philosophy of ministry. Try to keep key ideas as concise as possible (or else plan on writing a book!).

Personal Basis

Looking at questions related to personal experience,

- What are the major forces that have shaped your life?
- What do you notice about what you have learned about life so far?
- What has God done for you? How is He changing your life?
- How do you take care of yourself so that you can minister effectively to others?



- How will you continue learning so you can lead others?
- What are some influential resources (books, thoughts, people, experts, experiences) that have shaped your thoughts?

Look for quotes that express your own thoughts and feelings well.

Theological Basis

These questions reflect your understanding of God and God's plans:

- What do you believe about God? What is God's nature; what characteristics dominate God's interaction with humanity? (Don't forget that God exists in three persons, and each has a role in your ministry.)
- What do you believe about humans? What are they like? What do they need or long for?
- What do you believe about sin and salvation?
- What do you believe about Scripture and how it should be used?
- What do you believe about the church?
- What does God want from His people? How do you believe God wants us to live?

Human Development (Developmental Basis)

The following questions are about the characteristics of childhood and their developmental stages:

- What are children like physically, cognitively, emotionally, socially, spiritually?
- What do they need from adults?
- How should we understand and work with their changing needs?
- What are some key characteristics that help us understand what they need for spiritual formation?
- What role does family play in children's lives?
- What role does the church play in children's lives?



Cultural Basis

The church does not exist in a vacuum. We are called to be God's people in the midst of a larger culture. If we only understand where Christianity has come from and do not understand the world we are ministering within, we can't be an effective evangelist or train others to be effective.

- What do you understand about the world you live in? What is the world like?
- What trends or forces do you recognize that may influence children and the church?
- What should be the church's role in interacting with cultural forces?
- Are there historical events that influence how you see the world today?

Ministry Basis

In addition to our biblical and theological understanding of ministry, there are also dynamics in place that are unique to our work in the Church of the Nazarene. We must examine our theology about the church.

- What do you understand about how the church works in practical terms (universal, denominational, local)?
- How do you understand your role in the church?
- What responsibilities do the church and children have to each other? The church and families?
- What attitudes should the church have toward children?
- What social roles and responsibilities does the church have toward children?
- What should the church NOT do in relation to children?
- What should you always keep in mind when working with children in the church?

Education/Learning Basis

We are learning much from research into the human brain. We've spent a great deal of time in this course looking at how people learn and what we can do to help them learn.



- How do you think people learn? What are specific characteristics of how children learn?
- What is the relationship between content knowledge and wisdom for life?
- What specifically do you want children to learn (content, attitudes, behaviors, skills)?
- What conditions or attitudes need to be present for children to learn?
- What are the roles of the teacher, the pastor, and the parent?
- What teaching skills or behaviors promote learning?

Administrative Basis

Much of your responsibility as a children's leader will be in the area of administration.

- How should the children's ministry function?
- Are there standards for conducting ministry to children?
- What should be the standards for planning?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your ministry to children?

Ultimate Outcomes

These questions help you understand why your philosophy matters.

- What should happen for children, parents, and the church as a result of children's ministry?
- How does God see your efforts?
- How does this ministry fit into God's plans?

The little things we don't spend a lot of time thinking about form a framework for everything that consumes our lives. If we are unaware of the significance of the little things, we often arrive at the end and wonder, "What went wrong?"

Early on, we discussed both the need for a vision and goals consistent with our context of ministry. Creating consistent goals remains the primary challenge. However, we can acknowledge some timeless goals that most congregations share, such as that children:

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- Desire a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Become lifelong disciples.
- Develop a biblical perspective on all of life.
- Be a part of and participate in Christian community.
- Develop skills to do their part in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Goals like these prove beneficial in assessing our progress, which would be easier if every child entered into our ministry at birth and continued in the church through the elementary years. We know that this long-standing relationship with a given children's ministry doesn't always happen. Children enter and leave at different stages. However, basic goals provide a standard for which we can strive. As we look at the goals for each age-level, we need to also keep in mind the varying abilities and backgrounds of children. Those who come from Christian homes with parents who take a serious interest in their children's spiritual formation may require different goals than children who do not have these advantages. One might summarize these goals in the desire to make children lifelong disciples.

CHILDREN AND DISCIPLESHIP



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Obviously we should desire for children become lifelong disciples. Children need help in attaining that goal. Matthew 28:19-20 says:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of 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.”

We call this the Great Commission. Built on these verses is the mission statement for the Church of the Nazarene: *To make Christlike disciples in the nations*. To carry out the Great Commission and the mission statement of our denomination, we need to understand what discipleship is and how children can be disciples and be taught to disciple others.

A disciple accepts and assists in spreading the doctrine or beliefs of another person. For Christians, we accept the teachings of Jesus and share those teachings with others. Too often, Christians have believed discipleship remained strictly the duty of the pastoral staff, especially the minister or director of outreach. However, the words from Matthew 28 were directed to all of Jesus' followers and all who would “follow” after them. It is an ongoing command, and no believer is exempt. How do adults disciple? They tell their story. Often, this is through one-on-one conversations about how God has intervened in our lives. Discipleship starts with a relationship, then a sharing of experiences and knowledge, and then encouragement to join us on a spiritual journey. Disciples should be disciplined by others and, at the same time, be discipling others. In other words: Who is discipling you? Who are you discipling?

As children's leaders, we possess the awesome privilege of discipling children. We can tell them about God's love and His plan of salvation. We can help them understand how Jesus came to show us God's love and teach us how God wants us to live. We can teach them about Jesus' death and resurrection—God's plan to restore a right relationship with Him. We can be a part of teaching children and helping them to become established in the Christian life. Children need help to establish their faith. The goal is to produce lifelong disciples. This includes helping children learn regular habits of Bible reading, prayer, and church attendance. It includes helping them know how to resist temptation and obey God's commands. It includes guidance in knowing how to share their faith with others. Children learn quickly from adults who model an attitude or habit that needs to be learned. If the church leadership is modeling discipleship and telling the exciting results, children will grasp the excitement and want to be a part of it.

DISCIPLESHIP STUDY AND VISION



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Of course, discipleship incorporates our personal journey, the journey of children, and the journey of other volunteer workers. One cannot disciple unless one is willing to follow as a disciple. Discipleship requires ongoing study and common commitment. Understanding this key principle requires study and deep reflection. Let's look at a discipleship study that we can use with our children's ministry volunteers and with the older children.

1. Who is a disciple? A disciple is a person who follows the teachings and example of another person. Jesus called people to become His followers. His followers loved Him, learned from Him, and obeyed Him. They lived their lives the way Jesus lived His life.
2. What is discipleship? Discipleship involves information and transformation. As disciples of Jesus, we learn about and obey His teachings. Our lives are transformed as we live by and obey His teachings. There are three kinds of discipleship:
 - Classic discipleship involves curriculum such as Sunday school, children's worship, or mid-week classes. This form of discipleship brings children into contact with others in the faith. Classic discipleship provides a solid information foundation.
 - Christian spiritual formation focuses on spiritual disciplines as children grow in their relationship with God. These spiritual disciplines include: prayer, Bible reading, baptism, communion, and membership. These disciplines help children develop habits of faith that foster their spiritual maturity.
 - Community involves the church. Discipleship does not happen in isolation. The church is a source for wholesome relationships for children. The church is designed to help us bear each other's burdens, find comfort and support, and confess our needs.
3. Who has discipled you? Take time to think of at least six people who have discipled you. In what role and in what way did these people support you in your Christian life?


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4. Who are some New Testament examples of disciplers? Briefly explain how the first person disciplined the second person.
- Ananias—Saul
 - Barnabas—Saul
 - Philip—the Ethiopian
 - Aquila and Priscilla—Apollos
 - Paul—Timothy
 - Paul—Lydia
5. What would be some benefits of being a disciple-maker? Being a disciple-maker can be rewarding and challenging. There are benefits to discipleship and there are roadblocks for the disciple and the disciple-maker. Have the students read the Scripture and tell the benefit.
- John 13:35—Love is a benefit. We love and are loved by others.
 - Romans 15:14—Disciple-makers have a unique relationship with God that allows them to teach others. They have goodness, knowledge, and competence. When we don't know the exact words to say, we trust the Holy Spirit to lead us in what to say.
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:11—We can depend on others to help us.
 - James 5:16—We have friends to whom we can express our needs and confess our wrongdoing.
- Disciples pray for one another.
6. What roadblocks keep us from being disciple-makers?
- Galatians 6:9—Discouragement. Christians may become discouraged. Not everyone wants to become a disciple, and some people may not want to hear about Jesus. Friends may tease or make fun of our attempts. Results do not always happen immediately. We have to be patient.
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:13. Bad choices may cause you to lose credibility with others. Bad choices hurt our attempts to be a disciple, and these choices reflect wrongly on all Christians. Don't get tired of doing what is right.
 - Hebrews 10:25—Being alone. Being a Christian is not a solitary life. Christians can attend and participate in church events to help them learn, grow, and worship God. The fellowship of others keeps us encouraged.


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7. How can I be a disciple-maker? One of the best ways to be a disciple-maker is to share with others how you became a disciple. Share your story with others. Take about five minutes to write your story or tell it to someone. Another way to be a disciple-maker is to tell others what God is doing in your life right now! Take a few minutes to write or tell someone how God has helped you recently. For kids, this may be: God's healing a friend or relative who was sick; keeping the child calm when he or she faced an important test at school; courage to stand up to peers who tempt the child to do wrong; and strength to obey God when others are doing wrong. A third way to be a disciple-maker is to start a small group or participate in a small group. A Sunday school class is a great example of a small group. In class, children or adults study the Bible, pray together, and grow closer to God.
8. Who can I disciple? Disciples of Jesus are called to be disciple-makers. List three people whom you could disciple.
9. How do I disciple those people?
 - Pray for the people on your list. Ask God to help you find ways to disciple them.
 - Share with them your story about becoming a disciple.
 - Get together with them. Share the Bible with them and pray for them.
 - Keep growing as a disciple. You need to continue growing as a Christian, so you can be a good example for those whom you want to become disciples.
10. How long can I be a disciple? Discipleship is a lifelong journey. One of the greatest joys for a children's pastor or parent is to be the catalyst for a child's choice to begin the lifelong journey of discipleship.

Our study in discipleship should remind us of the great responsibilities we have as leaders in children's ministry. Dean G. Blevins and Mark A. Maddix, in their book *Discovering Discipleship*, remind us of an orienting principle that may well define all we do in children's ministry. They write:

Undoubtedly faithful discipleship begins with the importance of providing a formative community where children learn, grow, and ultimately embrace the faith of Christ as previous generations before them. As such children often find themselves at the center of God's covenant relationship with God's people, whether in the person of Isaac (Genesis 15-22) in establishing Abraham's hope and faith before God or in the simple act of Jesus placing a child in the midst of the disciples and announcing the kingdom of God below to children like these (Matthew 18:2-5, Luke 9:47-48, Mark 10:13-16.

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Beyond the traditional approaches to children's ministry, many quite valid to this day, newer strategies emerge that embrace a ministry that works "with" children. Often this approach begins with a renewed recognition of the role of the child within the church.

Children remain our first priority in ministry, both "for" kids and "with" kids. Their families are also important to us. We have a wonderful privilege and awesome responsibility. We can only pray for God to bless us and keep us, for God to give us the strength and energy we will need, for God to give us the wisdom and discernment to aid in our tasks, and for God to keep us motivated as we lead children into God's kingdom and give them the skills to be lifelong disciples. We pray this for one reason, because we know God is faithful and capable of doing far more than we can hope or imagine, when our trust lies in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, now and always. Ephesians 3:14-21:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

1. Interview a children's pastor or a pastor with responsibilities to children. Ask them for their philosophy of ministry. Listen for the various elements in their explanation.
2. Write out your own philosophy of ministry. Try to limit the writing to no more than a page and begin with a summary first paragraph, one that you can explain to anyone in three minutes or less.
3. Plan a lesson on discipleship to be shared with children's volunteers. What would you include?

EXAM



NOTES

1. Our vision of ministry comes primarily from our learning and context, not personal convictions and passion.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. A good philosophy of ministry remains fixed; it does not change.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. To know our philosophy of ministry, we need to look carefully at our beliefs about theology and people, but less so at how we administer and teach.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. We need a philosophy of ministry because:
 - A. We do not live in a vacuum.
 - B. Snapshots of our ministry are not that important.
 - C. Our role in the church influences it.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.
5. The little things we do not spend a lot of time thinking about form a framework for everything that comes in our lives.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Discipleship starts with a relationship, followed by sharing and encouraging.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. Discipleship incorporates:
 - A. Children.
 - B. Volunteer workers.
 - C. Our personal journey.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.



8. Discipleship entails answering:
 - A. "What is discipleship?"
 - B. "Who disciplined you?"
 - C. Biblical answers of discipleship.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

9. The only way to be a disciple-maker is to share our personal conversion story.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. Newer ministry strategies embrace a focus on working "with" children in ministry.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. How important is it to establish a philosophy of ministry and, if important, how often should we rethink and perhaps revise it?
2. Why should we include not only theology but also various aspects of ministry practice in our philosophy of ministry (remember back to the first lesson on practical theology)?
3. How can we stress the role of discipleship even more in our local ministry setting?
4. How can children's ministry incorporate both a ministry "for" and a ministry "with" children?

Review your answers with your mentor, then respond to the following:

How many responses focus on supporting children (particularly in areas where they are not yet fully self-reliant), and how many answers focus on empowering children?

Which of these answers support the goal of living Christlike relationships? Why?

What do we need to add to our list to make our approach more comprehensive, more faithful? Which do we need to incorporate into the role of the children's leader as one who both supports and empowers Christlike relationships with children?