



**GRACE COMMUNITY**  
CHURCH  
h u n t s v i l l e

# **Children's Ministry Philosophy of Ministry**

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# Children's Ministry Vision & Philosophy

## Introduction to the Vision

Anything worth doing is worth doing well, and children's ministry is no exception. Our children's ministry exists to come alongside parents in their role of reaching children with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Children are the "generation to come" (Psalm 78:4). They will be the adult ministry of the future. They will be the fathers and mothers of the future. They will be the ambassadors of Christ for the future. They will be the leaders of the church in the future. They will be the ones who proclaim the excellencies of the One who called us out of darkness into His glorious light in the future (1 Peter 2:9). So, our role in the present, as a local church, is to teach, guide, model, pray for, and facilitate their understanding of His excellencies now. Our role is to make disciples now. Our role is to do the work of ministry now so that they can in the future.

Biblically, the church is called to make disciples of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). So, the goal of children's ministry is to be used by the Spirit of God to make disciples of Christ who worship God for who He is: His greatness, power, majesty, love, mercy, grace, knowledge, etc.; and for what He has done: creating the universe, creating us, providing us with salvation, future glory. All of these things are what we as disciples worship God for. Furthermore, true disciples seek to follow all that Christ has commanded—knowing that the way of Christlikeness is good and God glorifying. Children's ministry seeks to apply these same truths at age-appropriate levels from the earliest age all the way to adulthood. To state this succinctly, *disciples love and follow Jesus Christ*. This is the goal of children's ministry, and it is the goal that all the aspects of children's ministry should line up with. This is the vision.

## Explaining the Vision

Children's ministry is an extension of our overall ministry as a local church. We are made up of people from various backgrounds with one main purpose—to glorify God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:11). God does everything for His glory and saves sinners for His own glory (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). In 1 Peter 2:9 we read that we were saved as a people for His own possession, so "that [we] might proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light." As ministers to children we have no less a calling than this. That is the goal of our ministry—to proclaim His excellencies. His "excellencies" is another way of describing His "glory" (Isaiah 42:8, 12; 43:20-21).

Since God does all things for His glory, our philosophy of ministry to children must be God-centered rather than man-centered. If His excellencies, or "glory," is the subject matter that we are to make known to children, then certainly the excellencies of God are discovered in the Word of God. So, the anchor of children's ministry is the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 4:11;). As believers God has opened our eyes to see His glory and fame. In 1 Peter 2:9 He calls it "His marvelous light." As we behold His glory we are stunned, we stand in awe. That's what God does when He saves a people, He lets them see Him for who He is. And now He wants us to turn around and tell others what we see. His excellencies refer to His character (the attributes of God or who He is) and what He has done, is doing, and will do.

In other words, a God centered children's ministry will seek to proclaim to children the person and actions of God (Psalm 78:1-4). The Bible explains that He has done this ultimately through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-3 teaches that Jesus Christ is the climax of all of God's revelation about Himself. Jesus Himself declared that all of the Old Testament pointed to Him and spoke of Him (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46; John 5:39,46). Therefore, in our proclamation of the glory of God to children, it must center on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We are not just about proclaiming objective truths to children about God, but very specifically we want to carry out the mandate of Christ Himself to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). In what must have been some of the last words from Jesus to the apostles, He gave them the purpose or mission of the church, but He prefaced it by a resounding statement that would undergird their pursuit of fulfilling the mission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). This is King Jesus with imperial majesty giving the apostles and the church their marching orders. Essentially, He said, "Since I am the King, and I possess sovereignty over every corner of humanity go make disciples of me." And Jesus promised to be with us as we seek to fulfill this mission (Matthew 28:20).

## **Making Disciples**

### **What Is a Disciple?**

A disciple is someone who has made a conscious choice to follow a person in a master/student relationship with the goal of becoming like the master.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." Luke 6:40

The word "disciple" is a comprehensive term, and it is fitting that Jesus' *commission* of the church is to "make disciples." It includes evangelism, which is presenting the gospel to unbelievers, calling them to repent (turn from sin and turn to God), and trust the work of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sin (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21). Then it is a process of training believers to be followers of Christ, which is why Jesus adds the words, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). A *disciple* is a person convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, who became his/her substitute on the cross and now lives forevermore; and by being thus persuaded has now pledged allegiance to this living Christ—proclaiming, "Jesus is Lord." A disciple is a worshipper of God through Christ and seeks to glorify God by following Christ. Making disciples according to this understanding is what our goal of children's ministry is. We believe that God will do this by His Spirit if we faithfully seek to fulfill this goal.

## **How Is Making Disciples of Children Best Carried Out?<sup>1</sup>**

### The Role of the Church:

We believe that God in His wisdom designed the church as the most effective way to make disciples. His design is seen in the fact that He gifted individuals in the church to carry out the ministry of the local church. Paul describes this reality in Ephesians 4. Christ gave gifts to people (vv. 7-8). The gifts are the extension of His body here on earth, because after He rose from the dead He ascended to heaven. He left His church here on earth to carry out the mission that we have been describing of making disciples. According to verse 10, God wisely orchestrated the church in this fashion in order that Christ might be supreme. In verse 11, Paul gives a sweeping list of the gifting of leadership within the church, then he explains the reason for doing this in verses 12-16. The goal of this process is for leaders to invest in the members of the church so that they mature in the knowledge, love, and worship of Christ so that they in turn can do the work of ministry. This is a key component. The church has to be led by faithful leaders who are used by God to make full grown disciples who will do the work of ministry. Thus, God wants disciples of Christ who are mature and fruitful for His glory (cf. Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:14).

### The Role of Parents:

With that said making disciples of children is a two-fold endeavor in which both parents and the local church play a part. Parents hold the primary responsibility of discipling their children. The New Testament instruction with reference to children places the responsibility of training children on their fathers and mothers in Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20-21. The ultimate burden is placed on fathers. Thus, it is wrong for parents to believe that it is the church's responsibility to disciple their children. The Bible does not shy away from recording the effects of parents who abdicated their role of training their children to follow God (Eli in 1 Samuel 2; David in 2 Samuel 13-18).<sup>2</sup>

However, the church is responsible for discipling/equipping the fathers and the mothers so that they will be able to carry out their responsibilities as parents. Furthermore, God has uniquely gifted other members of the church to come alongside and assist parents. "We have children's ministries in the church to strengthen, confirm, and reinforce what parents are teaching."<sup>3</sup> Properly understood, our goal in children's ministries should be the same as parents. However, our influence should be secondary if parents are following the revealed will of God in Scripture.

In summary, the children's ministry of Grace Community Church exists to proclaim the excellencies of God, by making disciples of Jesus Christ. Although the Scriptures clearly portray parents as having the primary responsibility in this endeavor, we believe that God has uniquely gifted individuals within our church to serve alongside parents in a complementary fashion to help accomplish this goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this section, at least in its subheadings, was informed by Phillip F. Foley, *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology: A Training Manual for Children's Ministry Workers* (Vallejo: Exalting Christ Publishing, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

## **Teaching**

Having laid the foundation of our purpose and vision for children's ministry, it is important that we seek to lay out a Biblically informed method of accomplishing this goal. The Bible is very clear that the primary method God has ordained to affect change and shape human hearts is through teaching.<sup>4</sup> A simple perusal of the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy as well as Titus will prove this point well (1 Tim 1:3; 4:6,11,13; 5:7; 6:2-3; 2 Tim 2:14; 4:1-2; Tit 2:1,3,15). However, in those same books there is an emphasis upon modeling by example as well (1 Tim 4:12,15-16; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:21-26; 3:10-11; Tit 2:7-8,10). So, we see two harmonizing means that God uses to make and grow disciples: teaching and imitation of example.

## **Word-Centered**

We believe that the teaching of God's Word to children is of utmost importance for making disciples of Jesus Christ who worship God. The Spirit of God uses the Word to awaken the hearts of unbelievers to the saving truth found in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:19-23; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). It is the Word of God that the Spirit uses to give understanding to children (Psalm 119:130; 19:7-8). Therefore, the content of our teaching is to be rooted in and faithful to the Word of God. Furthermore, this presupposes that our instruction must be the result of faithful *study* of what He has said (2 Timothy 2:15).

## **Christ-Centered<sup>5</sup>**

Jesus Christ is the message and centerpiece of the Word of God. He is the fulfillment of the Word of God. He is the Living Word. He speaks the very Word of God. Everything that God wants to communicate to people is climaxed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Luke 24:44-46; Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). "The Bible is a book about the glorious person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:44). It is centered in His redemptive work for man. *Thus, when we teach the Bible our goal is to show how it relates to Christ and His glorious work.*"<sup>6</sup> Merely teaching Bible stories that are not connected to God's plan of redeeming sinful people still falls short of faithfully teaching God's Word.

Bryan Chapell wrote:

Just as Paul's preaching involved more than the message of the incarnation and atonement—and yet kept all subjects in proper relation to God's redemption through Christ—so also *Christ-centered [t]eaching rightly understood does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation*

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<sup>4</sup> The use of the term "teaching" as it regards making and nurturing disciples includes a variety of forms that could be generally described as communicating truth in spoken or written form. For our purposes we assume that there will be a formal teaching time that will occur in our ministry where a specific lesson will be taught to communicate biblical truth.

<sup>5</sup> This phrase is not intended to communicate a hermeneutical approach (system of interpretation) which would override the clear teaching of Scripture, but rather to emphasize the need to be aware of the promise and fulfillment of all that God intends for His people being realized and made possible through the person and work of Jesus Christ (e.g., 2 Corinthians 1:19-20).

<sup>6</sup> Emphasis mine, *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 24.

*to Christ.* The grace of God culminating in the person and work of Jesus unfolds in many dimensions throughout the pages of Scripture. The goal of the [t]eacher is not to find novel ways of identifying Christ in every text (or naming Jesus in every [lesson]) but to show how each text manifests God’s grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ. . . . Jesus said that all Scripture is about him. This does not mean that every phrase, punctuation mark, or verse directly reveals Christ but rather that all passages in their context disclose his nature and/or necessity.”<sup>7</sup>

It is very easy for teaching in children’s ministry to descend to moralism— “do this and do that, don’t do this and don’t do that.” Part of this is due to the fact that much of the apparent noticeable problems with children are behavioral. However, failing to adopt a biblical approach in relation to the needs of children is a fatal flaw of the church and detrimental to parents and children. The only remedy that God offers sinful humans regardless of their age is found in the person and work of His Son. The biblical wisdom that reflects the path of blessing for people can only be applied to the new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and that is accessed only through a saving faith in Christ. Furthermore, the ability to obey the commands of God for holiness can only be found through the indwelling Spirit who takes up residence in a true child of God.

### **Heart-Oriented**

Jesus clearly taught that sinful words and actions come from the heart. Therefore, contrary to the thinking of the world, it is not the circumstances that surround a child that cause sinful behavior but rather each child’s own sinful heart (Matthew 15:10-20). That does not mean that circumstances and home environment do not play a role in the development and magnitude of sin in a child. Certainly a home where a child is exposed to rampant sin will provide all sorts of avenues for the sin nature to express itself. However, the primary source of trouble for children lies within each one of them. It is the heart that is in rebellion against God and estranged from Him (Psalm 58:3; Jeremiah 17:9; Colossians 1:21). Therefore, our teaching will not be aimed at the head only but at the heart as well. Mere head knowledge can easily produce a Pharisee but not a follower of Jesus Christ (Matthew 15:8). Rather a new birth must occur for a child to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our hope and prayer is that God would be pleased to accompany the means that we use in teaching our children and produce true conversion and a life of true holiness not simply conformity to external rules (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:25-27).

To reach this goal, we as parents and teachers must model what it means to love God and His word. We cannot teach our children something we have not experienced. We must have a passion for God and obeying His Word. With Paul, we should be able to say to our children, “Join in following my example” (Phil 3:17).<sup>8</sup>

### **Spirit-Empowered**

In John 15:1-8 Jesus taught His disciples that only by abiding in Him would they bear fruit. That applies not only to our own personal growth but fruitfulness in ministry as well. Paul confessed that no good thing dwelled in his flesh (Romans 7:18). In the next chapter, he laid out the key to

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<sup>7</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 279.

<sup>8</sup> *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 17.

living a fruitful life for Christ—life in the Spirit. Our abiding in Christ, living by the Word, and depending on the Spirit are intricately entwined (John 16:13-15). Apart from the Spirit’s work in our lives and ministry through our teaching, we will experience no fruit in our labors. Therefore, we must bathe our preparation and teaching time in prayer for the Spirit to work through us and in our children. The Spirit Himself actually delights in performing the miraculous work of causing people to see the glory of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (2 Corinthians 3:2-18). So, we have much hope as we labor according to His method and His power that He will produce fruit in His timing. We must view our ministry as a long-term commitment to labor for the glory of Christ to be made known in the coming generation (Psalm 22:30-31).

### **Imitating**

Repeatedly in the Gospel Narratives (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) we see Jesus calling people to be His disciples. Inevitably there were two words that Jesus continually used to extend this call: “Follow Me” (e.g. Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21). In the most basic sense following would mean to walk the same path. However, the idea of following a master as a disciple would entail imitating his way of thinking, acting, and prioritizing his life. Jesus certainly has this in mind when He calls individuals to come and follow Him (cf. John 10:27; 12:26). The apostle Paul knew this full well, and he too used this same principal in seeking to call disciples to growth. Often, he called others to join in following his example as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 4:17; 11:1; Philippians 3:17) as well as exhorting believers to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1).

As we minister to children, our pattern should be no different. Our goal is to be used by the Spirit to make disciples of Christ who wholeheartedly worship God and become faithful servants in Christ’s church. So, we will *teach* in such a manner that is consistent with what the Spirit will use to bring this about. However, we must see the importance of living in step with what we are calling children to do. We cannot ask them to follow in us what we ourselves are not experiencing. It is for this reason that it is vital that we regularly experience the power of Christ through His Word (personal study, sitting under sound preaching and teaching), corporate worship through singing, fellowship with His church, and prayer. “Children benefit and learn from the example of the godly people around them.”<sup>9</sup> Biblically, parents have the primary role of modeling this, but this can be greatly reinforced by the frequent interaction of other adults who also model this example. If children are only surrounded by others their own age or adults who are not a faithful representation of disciples of Christ, will this provide the optimum atmosphere to learn how to follow Christ?<sup>10</sup> When children see parents and teachers who consistently live as passionate worshippers of Christ, who love His Word, love His people, and love to serve, it helps to cast a mold for their entire lives to follow. Lord, give us grace to faithfully cast this mold.

### **Training Workers**

Every worker or servant within our ministry to children is important and every worker should be viewed within a discipleship context. We are all on this journey. Leaders have been discipled by

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<sup>9</sup> *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



someone in the past and are still growing in their understanding of Christ as well as their own fruitfulness in ministry. We were all young believers at some point. We all had to learn and develop in our skills of ministry and leadership. With this in mind, we need to cultivate a *mindset of discipleship* among our ministry teams even while we are seeking to make disciples of children. So, the goal for each of us is to seek to invest in other believers by equipping them to serve in a more fruitful manner. This includes nurturing their character and ministry skills. To put it another way, we should always be seeking to develop our replacement: either for someone to literally replace us, should the Lord move us to another ministry role, or to further multiply our ministry to children as the need arises. If we look to the understanding and teaching of the master disciple-maker, Jesus Himself, we see that He modeled this very principle: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). This is what we want to accomplish in our training—fully trained workers and leaders who will be like their teachers. Having obtained this result, what will that fully trained worker then do? The person will then fully train someone else, who will in turn fully train someone else, and the process will continue. This may perhaps be the single greatest reason that Jesus gave the church the mandate to make disciples. How many times have movements started and restarted over the history of the church? Yet the method is simple, timeless, and guaranteed to accomplish the goal of spreading the glory of Jesus Christ across the globe—local churches made up of saved people, who make fully trained disciples, who then reproduce themselves.

Tim Ingram summarizes this well:

...Jesus focused a great deal of his time and attention on gathering and training a select few men. Scripture records Jesus personally calling several of these disciples (Mark 1:16-20; cf. John 1:43; Matt 9:9) ...Though he called all his listeners to come and learn from him (Matt 11:29-30), his ministry was marked by an undeniable emphasis on investing deeply on this small group of twelve disciples.<sup>11</sup>

So, as we minister at a broader level to *many* children, we need to be intentional at investing in *individual* leaders, teachers, and helpers to further develop future disciples.

The idea of multiplying leadership is not novel with Jesus, although He certainly gave the church its mandate in this area. Jethro instructed his son in law, the great leader Moses, to find men who would help him bear the tremendous responsibility of shepherding Israel. He told him to look for *able* men, who *fear God*, who are *trustworthy*, and *honest* (Exodus 18:21-23). These priorities point to a person’s character. In the New Testament, there arose a need for more servant leaders within the church, and their qualifications were that they should be of “*good repute, full of the Spirit, and of wisdom*” (Acts 6:3). Paul told Timothy to practice the very process that Paul had set before him: “entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

The people we want serving in Children’s ministry are to be marked by certain characteristics. Faithfulness, teachable, Christlike, humble, lovers of Jesus Christ, and love for others are among these qualities. Giftedness is greatly appreciated, but even this can be developed (usually) if

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<sup>11</sup> Tim Ingram, "Children’s Ministry as a Disciple-Making Effort" (paper presented for PT 705 Discipleship at The Cornerstone Seminary, Vallejo, California, November 12, 2013), 3.

these others are in place. However, no amount of giftedness can make up for a lack of these other necessary character traits. Although a lack of giftedness *may* contribute to less fruit, a lack of character often *does* contribute to great damage in ministry. So, it is important that we as leaders seek to be proactive and intentional in identifying others whom we can train and develop as ministers to children.

There are a number of things that we can do to facilitate the process of identifying future servants in children's ministry.<sup>12</sup> Prayer is the first place to start. Jesus told His disciples to do this for the monumental task of spreading the announcement that the King and the kingdom were at hand: 'And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest"' (Luke 10:2). This is not just a verse for motivational preaching. It should be an earnest plea that God would grant power to carry out the very thing He already wants to do. Furthermore, we should seek to build relationships with people. Look for those within your community group who need to serve. Seek to build a discipleship relationship with someone, then ask them to come alongside you and serve in children's ministry. Build relationships with parents of the children in your ministry. When we are looking for new workers, try to emphasize that it is an "opportunity to serve" rather than a "need to fill." However, it is important that we stress the need to "choose" those we want to invest in. It is precisely for this reason that we prioritize looking for "qualified" individuals who are growing in Christlikeness. Again, when we speak of "qualified" individuals, we are not primarily referring to exceptional giftedness. Rather we are looking for those who are faithful, teachable, Christ-like, humble, lovers of Jesus, and lovers of others. Finally, Pray. If we have needs, God is the Provider. He provides for our needs, and we need to ask Him to meet these needs.

After identifying someone to train for serving, how can we then develop his or her gifts and encourage growth in maturity? The apostle Paul gave an insightful glance into the power of example, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" (Philippians 3:17). The imitation stage is a process of growth and development. It starts by allowing someone to watch you serve and teach. Then allowing him to serve in the ways you are currently ministering. Allow her to teach a portion of the lesson and later an entire lesson. The final goal is to give people their own class to lead so that they can reproduce what was instilled in them.<sup>13</sup> This is the process of discipleship.

## **Youth Helpers**

Ministering to children, particularly younger children, has many joys, but it also requires a great deal of labor. Overseeing the many necessary practical details of a classroom is necessary for providing an environment which will contribute to children hearing the message we proclaim. In light of this, youth helpers can be a wonderful aid to adults in ministering to children by providing

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<sup>12</sup> Much of this has been adapted from a list compiled by Jeremy Jackson, Children's Ministry Director at Community Bible Church in Vallejo, CA, that he presented to children's ministry leaders.

<sup>13</sup> *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 49.

assistance in many ways.<sup>14</sup> There are certainly cases where they have already experienced the saving grace of God in their lives and know Jesus as Lord and Savior. However, we need to evaluate each potential helper according to a pattern of character that will not undermine the vision we have embraced for ministering to children here at Grace, which includes proclaiming the glory of God, making disciples of Christ, and training ministers who actively serve. We ask that anyone desiring to be a youth helper maintain a pattern of proven character. The character traits to verify before placing a potential youth helper in a rotation of serving should be as follows: they should be teachable, respectful, able to follow instructions, and possess the desire and work ethic to help maintain an atmosphere that will maximize the opportunity to proclaim the gospel and the Word of God. A young person, who fits these qualifications, is at least 12 years of age, and has the consent of his/her parent(s), may serve in our early childhood.

Teachers/adult helpers have the responsibility to encourage and train youth helpers in their role of serving within the class. Given the range of maturity levels, some helpers will need greater guidance than others, so assessment of their abilities is a key component in this process. Give them clear instruction for tasks, and when they master them, give them more responsibilities. Praise them when they are a complement to your role of ministry. Encourage their strengths. If there are areas that need to be developed, gently and graciously encourage them to grow in these areas. Continually affirm them and their importance on your team. If character problems are present and a youth helper is not responding to gracious correction, then communicate with the leader(s) over your class. Again, youth helpers have to be committed to helping the teacher/adult helper carry out our vision of ministering Christ to children. If they detract from our ministry and demonstrate character qualities that are working against our goal of proclaiming the gospel, then they would have to be asked not to serve until adequate growth is demonstrated. In this case, the youth helper's parent(s) would need to be notified and encouraged in this shepherding opportunity.

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<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the opportunity to serve in Children's Ministry is not intended to be a means for young people to avoid the preaching of the Word and corporate worship, but rather an outlet and occasion to serve and develop as a disciple.