

what  
matters  
NOW  
in childrens  
ministry

CPC EDITION





what  
matters  
**NOW**  
in childrens  
ministry

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



INTERNATIONAL  
NETWORK OF  
CHILDREN'S  
MINISTRY



*To our amazing kidmin co-conspirators around  
the world—the faithful, brave, and generous  
children’s and family ministry leaders behind  
everything we do at INCM.*

What Matters Now in Children's Ministry: CPC Edition

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# welcome

PICTURE THIS: IT is early, far too early to be awake, but your mind is racing, ticking down a mental checklist of what needs to be done for this weekend and the shifts you need to make so ministry runs as smoothly as possible. You glance at the clock and are reaffirmed that the time is indeed far too early to be awake.

You get up anyway.

What is it that wakes us up early in the morning? We are answering the question: What Matters Now in Children's Ministry?

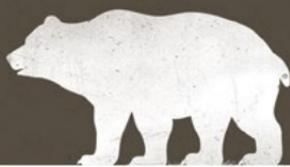
As kidmin, we answer this question every day we engage with the families we guide, the children we teach, the volunteers we lead, and the team we serve alongside. Children's ministry is fluid—we adapt and respond to our changing volunteer schedule, the supply requirements for this week's curriculum, the length of the adult worship service, or the unique needs of children that week.

How much time are these types of tasks and adjustments requiring of you?

Are these the things in ministry that give you energy and bring kids to a deeper place with God?

So what really matters now in children's ministry?

At INCM, we gather hundreds of leaders every year at events like the Children's Pastors Conference and throughout the year through



webinars and online events with the goal to bring greater clarity, vision, purpose, discipleship growth, training, and resources to you as a leader and to your children's ministry. Our vision is to inspire radical transformation in discipleship for every child and family served by current and future kidmin. So this year we asked our speakers at CPC to step back from the task list, the volunteer schedule, and the supply closet long to answer the question: what matters right now in children's ministry? I invite you to read through their responses and see what resonates in your heart. Then reach out to those leaders—each speaker has included information for you to connect.

Together our prayer for you echoes Paul's prayer for the Philippians: "I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God." (Philippians 1:9-11).

*With you for HIM,*

**Matt Guevara**

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assurance



ASSURANCE IS DEFINED as “a positive declaration intended to give confidence.” Assurance is a critical element in reaching kids and their families. It’s no secret that children connect better with Jesus when they feel safe, and families return more often to the environments that provide security and protection.

Life today moves at lightning speed. Issues facing children’s and family ministry include abuse, stress, bullying, hunger, and the possible threat of a multiple causality shooting, just to name a few. Children and families are seeking assurance like never before – assurance that the authenticity of each ministry understands and includes the need to provide safety.

At KidCheck, we believe every child has the right to grow and learn in a safe environment and every parent should have peace-of-mind about the safety of their children. The first step in reaching parents is through protecting their children

To learn more about improving child safety overall, or the benefits of using a secure children’s check-in system, we encourage you to reach out to KidCheck for security tips, additional resources, and best practice suggestions.

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*authenticity*



NO OTHER GENERATION has cried out for authenticity like this one. We live in a world full of “instant” and “reality” and yet most of it is far from real. Our world is desperately seeking something of substance that matters, that is real. Hey church, we’ve got Who they’re searching for.

Authenticity matters in our leaders. Authenticity is always returned with authenticity. Leaders, if you want a ministry that facilitates real conversation and real spiritual growth, you have to lead by living that out in your own life.

Authenticity matters in our volunteers. Kids today don’t want to know what Dick and Jane did at school, they want to know how Jesus has changed Mr. Phil’s life. They want to know that the Jesus they are hearing about has impacted their leaders’ lives. Recruit volunteers who are authentically in love with Jesus and want to share that with others.

Authenticity matters in our families. If we want families to live “on mission” for Jesus it starts by living out the good, the bad, and the ugly of following Jesus in front of each other. Encourage families to talk openly with each other.

Authenticity always reaps authenticity. Let’s minister authentically.

---

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awakened



ONE WORD - **Awakened.**

What matters now more than ever in children's ministry? We believe it is to see families, children and church leaders, spiritually **awakened**.

**Families' greatest need:** Moms and dads, foster parents, grandparents, etc. all need to be awakened as spiritual parents. God has ordained them as the primary nurturers of their children's faith—and eternity is at stake! What can we do about this? We can cultivate environments for our children's faith to grow by providing opportunities to know God's Word, to learn to recognize His voice, and to respond to Him thru the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Children's greatest need:** The temptation is to make ministry all about the content—celebrating the number of Scripture passages memorized and expecting kids to meet behavioral expectations that Scripture reserves for elders and pastors. What kids need is a strong foundation of biblical knowledge in an environment where they can encounter the living God and be awakened to having a relationship with Him!

**Ministry leaders greatest need:** As leaders you can't give away something that you don't have. Our leaders need to be awakened spiritually so that they can minister to children from the overflow of their own spiritual lives and be willing to live out an authentic faith journey in relationship with those they minister to.

---

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*boldness*



WHEN MY HUSBAND, Todd and I were in Sardis, Turkey this last fall, we learned about the temple to Artemis, the fertility god. Her worship incorporated practices that were cruel, demeaning, wild and empty. People eventually get tired of counterfeit gods, and it's the Church's job to be available and bold in that moment, so the first person they see is expressing Christ-like love. The brick building in this picture below is a 4th century evangelical church, parked right up against the chaos. I love this. They weren't afraid of the darkness, and they didn't run away and isolate themselves. They stepped right up and engaged.

We need a fresh boldness in the church as we wage battle for families and community. Only Jesus can conquer death, only Jesus can open grave doors, only Jesus heals and resurrects. We celebrate that victory every time we love boldly in his name. I am thinking these days about where and how to express God's love, hoping to get as close to the chaos as the believers of Sardis once were.



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*commitment*



I HAVE SERVED in children's ministry for the past 18 years. The longer I serve in children's ministry the more I realize commitment is the key to everything we do.

Commitment is the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or activity. Commitment is dedication, devotion, allegiance, loyalty, and faithfulness.

As the leaders in children's and family ministry, we must be committed to the Lord, committed to equipping our families, and committed to reaching and teaching the kids God has blessed us with in our ministry. Our volunteers must be committed to faithfully teaching our kids. Our moms and dads must be committed to bringing their children to church and supporting the efforts of the children's ministry. The kids must be committed to learning and growing in Christ. Commitment is vital to reaching the next generation for Christ.

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# connection



YOU AND I want it. You and I need it. But for the next generation, connection isn't just something they want and need - it's simply woven into every part of their lives. They can't *not* be connected.

This is the most connected generation to ever walk the planet. They are connected to everything...all the time. Social media. Texting. Video chats. Everything is about connection.

If something - or someONE - is important to them, they want to connect. Sadly, too often we talk about faith, church, youth group, or the Bible in a very *disconnected* way.

Rather than weave conversations about faith into our dinner conversations, we reserve them for Sunday mornings. Rather than chatting about a section of the Bible as we're driving in the car, we save those discussions for family devotions, small group, or Sunday school.

Don't get me wrong. Having intentional "set apart" time for faith and Bible discussions is important. Vitaly important! But it can't be our *only* approach.

What if you taped an encouraging verse to the bathroom mirror a couple times a week? What if walk-to-school-time became pray-for-the-day-time? What if "Highs & Lows" at the dinner table became "God Sightings?"

What if faith was...well...connected?

---

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*consistency*



“DAD, I DON’T trust him.” When my son said this about his children’s ministry leader at church I was concerned. My parental dashboard warning lights all went off. Is the leader playing favorites or unprepared each week? Did he say or do something lacking integrity? I probed deeper only to discover that my son really meant, “I just don’t know him.” Apparently his group has a revolving door of leaders. My son is learning the value of relational consistency and its impact on personally trusting God and His people.

It’s hard to find, train, and retain weekly children’s and family ministry leaders. Putting people on a once-a-month rotation is tempting. Kids see a familiar face and volunteers avoid burnout, right? Unfortunately, consistent curriculum in the hands of infrequent leaders can’t make up for inconsistent relational connections. For children and families to increasingly trust Christ and the church family, relational consistency between leaders and kids is key. Not sure this is possible? Check out Jeremiah 3:15: “Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.” Strategically, prayerfully, and confidently ask Him to send you consistent leaders for the sake of kids and families.

---

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creed



AT CHURCH I recently heard, ‘In this day and age, it’s becoming increasingly important that we not only know what we believe but that we be able to say it, with confidence & conviction.’

Kids need words and belief and we can help them find both, but the future shifting transformation comes when we, their leaders and pastors, infuse them with the confidence and conviction to express those beliefs.

A creed is a statement of a set of guiding rules or beliefs. Guiding rules. Ponder that. In this day of uncertainty, there are solid, unchanging truths our kids can hold to put their deepest trust in. As we teach the Word of God, let’s be intentional to give them the basic foundation they can cling to. We have a Heavenly Father who will not fail us. We have risen Savior who redeems us. We have a Holy Spirit who comforts & guides us. We have new life. We have hope. And He is coming back!

Think of The Apostles’ Creed or the song popularized by the Newsboys, “We Believe.” When we pour Biblical truth into the footings of a child’s heart, we lay a strong foundation for lifetime faith. As they continue to learn and understand who God is and what Jesus did for them, those words and truths will have lasting meaning and impact.

---

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# decluttering



FAMILIES LIVE LIVES that are both full and empty. Their lives are full because parents are building careers and running their kids from one activity to the next. Their lives are empty because the connections families make along the way tend to be superficial at best. The time to invest in people and relationships at a deep level is simply unavailable in the modern family schedule. Parents are desperately trying to find that life-work balance in the midst of so many good options and opportunities.

Within this framework, church is just another option for the calendar. The decision to attend church tends to be made by the calendar and not by conviction. This is reflected in the statistic that shows the average church attendance is 2 out of 5 Sundays per month.

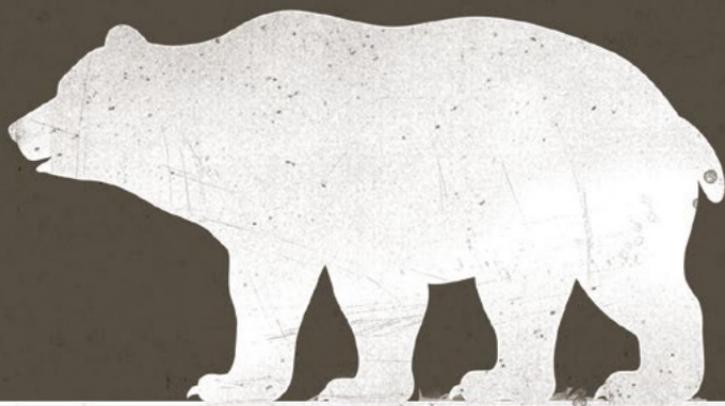
When we declutter our lives, we allow God the space to be first in our lives. We must teach families how to declutter, reset, reprioritize and feel safe in the process so family life is not a frenzied marathon from one day to the next. We must teach them to live with purpose and on purpose in order to see the bigger, eternal picture. As leaders, we can challenge families to cultivate their own relationship with God and model it for one another in the home.

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*deep-rooted*



THE BIBLE IS “living and active” (Heb. 4:12, ESV) and “sharper than a two-edged sword” in its ability to “discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.” We all agree with this, don’t we? Then why do children in our ministries spend so little time reading the Bible while in our care? We have this fundamental purpose to “make disciples,” and yet the actual use of the Bible in the church classroom is too often set aside. We spend much time teaching about the Bible, or instructing from our Bible but somehow miss getting children in their own Bible.

Years ago the seminal work of Flanders (1970)<sup>1</sup> found that in low performing classrooms, a teacher spends nearly 70 to 80 percent of the time talking, but in high performing classrooms it is only 50 percent. This is—regrettably—still the norm (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, p. 10).<sup>2</sup> While “achievement” may not be our goal, just precisely what does a “worker who has no need to be ashamed” (2 Tim. 2:15, ESV) look like?

Unfortunately, high teacher-talk is typical of most children’s ministries where the standard dogma is “teaching is telling and learning is listening.” But if the Bible truly is “living and active,” we should trust this content to work in the hearts of children. Otherwise our disciples are no more than attentive listeners who never resemble what the parable of the sower says should be: people rooted in the word of God.

---

1 Flanders, N. (1970). *Analyzing teaching behavior*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

2 Fisher, D., Frey, N. & Rothenberg, C. (2008). *Content-Area Conversations: how to plan discussion-based lessons for diverse language learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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empathy



Empathy.

*noun*

noun: **empathy**

- 1 the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

When I reflect on the most important ministry tool out there, it is more than a book or a new blog of advice—it's empathy. We need to cultivate empathy for parents, empathy for kids. Empathy for God. Empathy for the community you serve and the church you work for.

Empathy is the quality of the heart; it is the way we understand what it feels like to stand in someone else's shoes—and then, to love them for who they are. Families are stressed and pressed on every side: academically, relationally, and culturally. When we empathize families, we learn how to equip, love and serve them well.

I think we should also wonder, “What is God's view, feeling, perspective of me, the ministry I'm called to, and families I serve?” Pray for His view. It's always when I meditate on God's love that I can take a deep sigh and know that my performance never earns His love. His love is a gift one I can share as I approach others as a mirror, showing them that His love is immense and vast—not rigid or limited. I believe empathy is the beginning of “love one another.”

---

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frequency,



I MEAN *ATTENDANCE* frequency—of the children. It is a rarely-measured factor of our effectiveness in discipling children. Let's face it; we focus lots on what we teach and how we teach it. We look often at what we put out, but rarely at what the kids *receive*.

What if we had a good handle on how often little Sara (a random child in our ministry) attended? What if we knew she missed five of the eight-lesson series we taught? What if we knew she was *typical* of our group, not the exception? What if Sara—and others like her—are only in church 12-18 hours *per year*? Would we reasonably expect that attendance pattern to give us the opportunity to adequately disciple her?

If we had an accurate picture of attendance frequency, what would change? Our message to parents? Our approach to scope and sequence of content? Our strategy to develop relationships? Our teaching and reviewing methods? The events we plan? The programs we offer?

Do *you* know *your* attendance-frequency numbers? I'm sure you track *attendance*; start tracking attendance *frequency*. Why? Because...

Frequency matters.

It matters to relationship-building; it matters to learning; it *matters* to discipleship.

---

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God-spiration



WHEN WE THINK about what matters most in our ministries, too often we think “if I just had a bigger budget” or “if I only had a better facility” or “if only I were at a larger church” then I could really make an impact in my ministry. The reality is that what we need the most is not money, programs, facilities or “stuff.”

Our church and family ministries are desperately in need of the “God” given ideas and inspiration that propels us to innovation. All of those huge facilities and groundbreaking ministries started with God-given creativity and a lot of hard work. Most of the impact and difference we are longing to make can be made right NOW with the tools God has already put into our hands. Let’s ask God to give us HIS great ideas, and the courage, energy and passion to step out for His kids and His families!

---

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heartbeat



## WHAT DOES YOUR heart beat for?

David from the Bible is known as a man after God's own heart. He's one of the greatest examples we have of worship, surrender and praising God with all your life. David learned that his hiding place, shelter and refuge from the storms of life was found in the presence of the Lord. I believe we can help kids learn the same thing from a young age, preparing them even for adulthood. I want to help kids understand their purpose in this world is to bring glory and praise to God. Through their life each day, in their choices, words, and actions they choose whether to shine their light bright or dim.

Our hearts beat to testify of the good news of Jesus Christ. As we sing songs and direct our attention to the One who made us and rescued us through salvation we are aligning our heart with His. Every child was made in the image of God. May the generation we minister to be known as a generation after God's own heart. I believe the doorway is found in the obedience of our heart to worship in every season.

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honor



I WONDER WHAT would happen if “big church” ministry looked just like children’s ministry? Imagine if you arrive to church on time, but wait to go inside the building because the greeters have not shown up yet. At last, you are led to a seat, but are not allowed to sit with your family because you “talked too much last Sunday.” During worship, an usher comes up behind you, lifts your arms, and “helps” you dance along.

Next, you wait some more while the pastor quickly studies the sermon for the first time. While he preaches, he calls on you because he senses you might be daydreaming. When your nerves keep you from answering, he looks at you sternly and says, “Next time, you need to pay attention.”

Most people would agree that we would never attend a church like this. Yet so often as children’s ministers, we suffer from a bit of amnesia when it comes to remembering that kids are people too. We need to put the same kind of effort into ministering to children as we do for adults. That means we treat our “congregation” the way we would like to be treated. We must honor their time and their hearts by being reliable, gracious, and respectful.

---

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identity



NOW MORE THAN ever children are struggling to find out who they are and how they fit into their world. We shouldn't be surprised. Satan is still using the same method that confused Adam and Eve in the garden: lying to them about their true God-given purpose here on earth and questioning their Father's loving intentions for them. Television, music, Internet, school and friends influence and shape every child's identity. As much as parents work and pray to protect their kids, Satan's influence is ubiquitous in our world.

In children's ministry and family ministry we must pay special attention to building a Biblical identity for children based upon who they are in Christ. Providing tools for them to actively declare their position and privileges as God's child and learn to stand up to the enemy and his tactics.

I have 104 Hope Identity Declarations that I have given out to my family. We review a few on a daily basis and declare them in prayer to the Father and to each other throughout the day. These declarations provide our family a chance to declare our true identity to one another and set a strong foundation to stand strong in God's words over us.

*imagination*



*'ALL THE WORLD is made of is Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust.'*

- **JM BARRIE**

Would you be offended if I told you I believed the author of Peter Pan when I discovered this quote?

Mike Yaconelli, in his book *Dangerous Wonder*, writes, "the greatest enemy of Christianity may be people who say they believe in Jesus but who are no longer astonished and amazed. Somewhere along the way we had the child chased out of us ..."

The child inside  
Bright-eyed  
Overflowing with imagination  
Open to the mystery  
Full of belief and hope  
Beautifully vulnerable  
... it felt scared, and no longer welcome.

Imagination.

I would suggest it's a key part of what the Apostle Paul introduced as gospel 'ways of knowing.' Faith. Hope. Love.

Imagination is the fuel of hope, the sound of belief. The output of a heart set alight by purpose. Imagination is vital to the life of the church, and therefore needs to be fostered within children's ministry.

Without imagination you cannot truly believe. You cannot envisage. You cannot engage. We must not 'chase the child away' but nurture the creative power, the ability to create new things within them. Imagine that future!

Imagination - it's the pixie dust, let them fly.

*inclusion*



THE BODY OF Christ is made up of individuals with a variety of abilities and disabilities that each bring unique gifts and needs to the church. God has arranged each individual to work together to use their gifts for the benefit of the entire body and to support one another in their areas of need. In order to allow each person to use their gifts to God's service and to grow in their relationship with God, ministry leaders may need to unpack an individual's areas of struggle and accommodate for areas of difference and disability. When we do this in our churches and schools, the result is inclusive worship and interdependent community. We invite you to live out the call in 1 Corinthians 12 to be a church body that recognizes and celebrates the gifts of each individual—regardless of their ability level—and creates opportunities for meaningful service in the Kingdom.

---

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margin



THE MOST IMPORTANT thing in children's and family ministry is margin.

*“Various departments in the church may schedule a sermon series on family, a mother-daughter tea, a father-son camping trip, a fall festival, or a host of other things in an attempt to be family-friendly. The reality is that those things can actually overload a church's schedule and create competing systems. Over time, the hectic schedule they cause may even compete with the family relationships you are trying to encourage. Maybe the most strategic and effective thing you can do for your families is to stop doing something. Doing more for the family may mean that you actually do fewer programs for kids.”*

**-REGGIE JOINER, THINK ORANGE P. 83, 93**

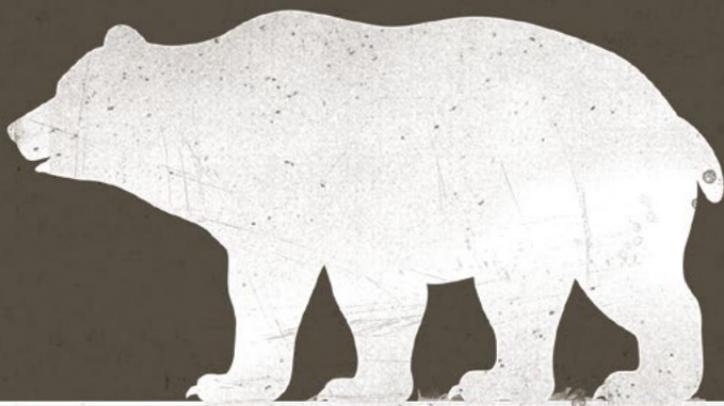
We need to be asking ourselves what we should quit to make room for God - in our own lives and the lives of the families we serve. In our frenetic culture we can be duped into thinking that more is better - more programs, more events for our families, more on the calendar. But what if we are only adding to the noise? Bob Goff says you should quit something every Thursday. What are you quitting this week?

---

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marvel



WHEN WAS THE last time you were filled with *marvel* - wonder or astonishment - because of Christ?

Society begs a culture of busy. We race from one place to another task, filling every second of every day. Technology allows us to make productive the minutes we wait at the grocery store, doctor's office, and in the car.

How easy for children to embrace this as normalcy, when they see the model everywhere. School to church to program to practice; we encourage diversity and breadth of experiences in life.

As we enjoy abundance, we too often forget to stop and *marvel* at the abundance giver. It's not a new struggle. Looking back at Mary and Martha we see how long we've wrestled with making time to take in everything that Jesus is. He reminds us "...you're getting worried and upset about too many things. Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will never be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42, ICB).

Intentionally pass on to our children the One that will never be taken away. Stop to *marvel*. Declare the wonders of the Creator. Stand in awe at His works. Model a lifestyle of marveling in Christ!

---

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*men*



THE STATISTICS REGARDING this generation of ‘lost boys’ are overwhelming. The church is losing the battle for the souls of boys for a variety of reasons, but most notably the absence of men assuming their Biblical roles in the family. I might also suggest this is true of men’s responsibilities in ministry and their place in the church.

The maternal nature of children’s ministry speaks to young boys about the church and spiritual formation. Already up against political correctness and cultural mores, it’s hard to paint the Christian life in a way that appeals to boys. We tend to do it in pastels, while the spirit in a boy is crying out for bold, bright colors.

The call of Christ to “come and see” is the cry to a life of adventure. We need men in children’s ministry not to change the message but the tone and the environment in which we share it. Only a man can affirm a boy. Only a man can lead a boy into manhood. There is an incentive for the ladies too: If you get the boys, you get the girls!

---

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nones



A NEW GENERATION will soon have a fresh encounter with the living God, free from damaging cultural influences.

In a recent Pew study, those with no religious affiliation, the “nones,” rose 6% while **every expression of Christianity declined**. The church will soon face a generation of children and families who have no tangible faith experience.

This new generation will experience God *ex nihilo*, from nothing. God does beautiful things with nothing.

To reach the “nones” the church needs to be an active presence in both the physical and digital communities.

The church can lead the charge in meeting the physical needs of the community. Church families can be an active presence in social, athletic, and artistic endeavours in their cities and towns.

Churches should require new digital tools do more than passively deliver content, but help them seek out and reach those who are not yet seeking them.

Many will begin their journey of faith not with a friend, family member, or pastor, but on their mobile device. The church has to be an active presence, moving people from a place of skepticism to a living faith community.

*Lord, bless us as we reach places we have not yet reached.*

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nothing



WHAT MATTERS NOW in children's and family ministry?

Nothing :)

After 15 years of children's ministry, I learned that I was looking at the wrong thing: at children's ministry. But how much of Jesus' time was spent at the church (okay, the synagogues), compared to the outside?

Jesus served everywhere, but *mostly* outside the church.

Are we trusting programs to do the ministry for us? Do we feel God will work if we just "get kids in"? Are we creating the illusion that friendships are built, when they really are not? If you removed all the programs from your life, how many families would you still be serving? That's your true, non-paid, highly effective ministry.

That's your "outside".

For three years now, I've made the outside my first priority. The programs are second. I've trained shepherd-leaders who go from kid to kid, void of any programming tasks. The stories they come back with are incredible. The friendships are so much deeper, and the ministry grows. Even the programming rose in quality because it was not the number one priority (take a look at KidsWantAnswers.com if you're looking for what we're doing). We built our curriculum to help kids focus on the outside, like Jesus did. Sure we make it as high quality and innovative as possible, but we built it with the sneaky plan to keep us as "lazy" as possible. Why? Because we're Mary, not Martha.

Everybody can set up a program. Let them. Train them, even. But you "go and make disciples".

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now



NOW TELL! IN Deuteronomy 6, God commands His people to tell God's story to the children. In His story, children learn who God is and begin to understand what it means to be the people of God.

Now Live! Today, we all are living in God's story, and we have roles to play in God's redemption plan. And what does God call us to be? He calls us to be Servant Workers, Justice Seekers, Earth Keepers, and Community Builders. He calls us to be Creation Enjoyers, Idolatry Discerners, Order Discoverers, and Beauty Creators. And in all of these, He calls every disciple to be a God Worshipper and an Image Reflector.

Now Show! Children need to meet church leaders today who are calling out against injustice and serve with them. They need to witness family members conserving local parks and join them praising the Lord outside. Adults must help children discover their gifts, give them service opportunities, and intentionally help them define their role in God's story, because children must do the work now and serve their God and their neighbors too. Waiting for children to grow up will be too late.

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online



OUR WORLD IS moving online, shopping, banking, doctor appointments, even church. At Elevation Church our online audience exceeds that of our largest campus by nearly two hundred percent. Those that tune in to the Elevation Network will experience high-energy worship, gain pertinent information, and hear a relevant message from God.

But what about their kids?

While mom and dad are tuning in online, their sons and daughters are in the next room watching Sponge Bob or playing video games. We have to find a way to provide quality, interactive, faith-building experiences online to kids, and it has to be attractive. We're competing with the likes of Disney, Nickelodeon, YouTube, Sony, Spotify, and Snapchat. The next generation isn't waiting for us to figure it out. They've already moved on. If we play it safe, avoid the issue, and treat technology like it's taboo, they will move beyond our reach.

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owners



I AM CONVINCED the best thing we can do for a child or a family is to own our discipleship. We can build an impressive program. We can design award-winning stages. We can execute brilliant strategies. But if we do not own our discipleship – the spiritual discipline to grow closer to God and the investment of time, effort, and energy to the development of a relationship with our Father – then anything we attempt to do in ministry might look amazing but it will be devoid of any power or transformation (outside of God's grace).

The truth of the matter is we can build the program, design the stage, and execute the strategy on our own. We do not need God or His Word to make those things happen. And far too often in children's and family ministry, we neglect our discipleship in favor of getting stuff done.

If we desire to teach children the truth of God's Word, if we hope to instill a love for Christ and a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, if we want to see the beliefs of childhood mature into vibrant adult faith – we must be committed, radical, desperate disciples of Jesus Christ.

Friends, you cannot export what you do not own.

You cannot model what you do not embody.

You cannot give away what you do not possess.

Today's kids need owners, men and women who will own their discipleship so they can model, embody, and pass on a life-giving faith to the next generation.

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partner



A PARTNER SHARES responsibilities, ideas, workload and ownership with other team members and works collaboratively for a common goal. That rules out “lone rangers”, even THE Lone Ranger had a partner, Tonto, who brought needed wisdom and special abilities to the team.

The challenge for children’s ministry leaders is to **build bridges** and **collaborate** with volunteers, parents and the complete church staff to provide kids with faith forming, life changing Biblical education. **Relationships** are the bridges to collaboration. Volunteers, parents and staff get on board the vision and mission of a leader who knows them personally, listens, equips and values each one. While some equip, others encourage, teach or hug. They all serve!

Every partner’s **responsibilities** bolster the others and provide each kid with age appropriate lessons, resources and relationships. With partners like these, kids hear and see the Word of God in life affirming ways that point them to faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.... Philippians 1:3-5*

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*prayer*



IN A DAY when masses of young people are walking away from their faith, it is more important than ever that we as the church do everything we can to help them stay connected and rooted in their faith. Prayer is the most important and powerful tool we have to do so.

We want to see churches rallying around the next generation with prayer as the catalyst, and we've designed the Pray for Me Campaign to that end. The Pray for Me Campaign equips students to invite three adults from three different generations to pray Scripture over them every day for a school year. Prayer creates relationships like nothing else can, and it gives young people the intergenerational support they need to flourish in their faith.

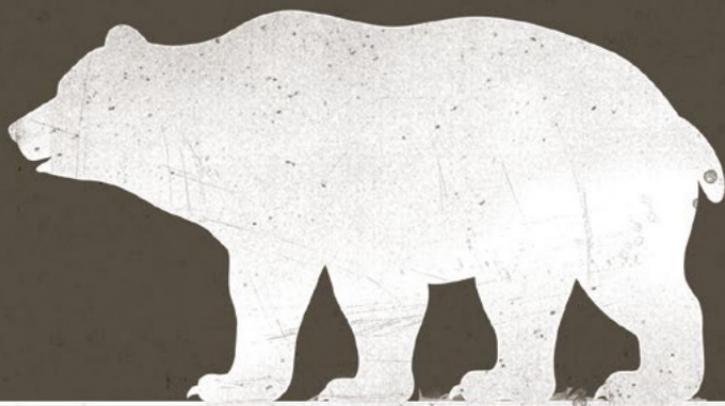
The Pray for Me Campaign is about hope, specifically the hope that young people can find in the greatness of God. Every generation needs to find their greatest hope, satisfaction, and enjoyment in God. May we rally together and call out to God for his loving provision, protection, presence, and purpose in the lives of the next generation.

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relationship



AS A CHILDREN'S Minister for over 20 years and now an Executive Minister overseeing all ministries of the church, I have discovered that the best we can ever offer is ourselves. When we are willing to be transparent, to come alongside, and to see ourselves in partnership with our ministry leaders and families, we will begin to see and feel a difference in our ministries. I try never to talk at people (whether that be a parent, a teacher or a child) but to make sure I am in active conversation *with* those around me. A relationship is formed when I care about you and you care about me. Together we care about the church.

At Ten Mile Christian we consider our volunteers to be ministry partners. We are going to work and serve alongside each other in relationship to serve God and our church. The same happens when I spend time getting to know my children and the parents of my children. We see over 350 children a week so it is a challenge to know them all but I never stop trying and I challenge my partners in ministry to do the same. If you want true discipleship, committed ministry partners and engaged parents think, "How can I build a RELATIONSHIP with them?" Do I really care about them or just the spot I need to fill on Sunday? Do I care about each of these children and their families or just the numbers on paper? Are you more interested in programs or people?

Relationship is key.

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rhythms



THE NEXT GENERATION will be marked by its search for stability; it will thrive on the firm foundation of Christ expressed consistently and dependably through his Church.

Ideas are evolving faster than ever—90% of the world’s data was created in the past 12 months.

Families are facing increasing pressure. According to historian Lawrence Tone, “The scale of marital breakdowns in the West since 1960 has no historical precedent that I know of. There has been nothing like it for the last 2,000 years, and probably longer.”

Even education is constantly changing curricula, teaching philosophy, and testing styles.

Research shows children need consistency and structure—rhythms—in order to flourish. The community of Christ can stand a sanctuary of stability in a culture of constant change.

Family ministries can express the faithfulness of the gospel through programming:

Worship and teaching that extend into the home.

Regular social events to foster community.

Equipping classes for parents (moral and spiritual development, internet safety, etc.).

Most importantly, churches can reimagine family involvement in sports, clubs, and vacations as opportunities for evangelism and discipleship. This will not only empower families, but extend a gospel foundation into every facet of their lives.

*Lord, may the rhythms of our ministries resound with the melody of your grace.*

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sacrifice



A CAR WITHOUT a motor...a computer without memory...a marriage without passion-situations where the form exists but an internal mechanism is missing. Children's Ministry is missing SACRIFICE. We give our children some great programs, but we seldom ask them to give anything of themselves other than a few coins in the offering or a few adult-led service projects. Our children are falling into a consumer-based Christianity where their faith consists more of evaluating the quality of their Sunday morning experience rather than taking up their cross to follow Him! And that's just not compelling! Maybe that's why we're losing them...

So how do we teach sacrifice without destroying their innocence? We begin by telling stories of Christians throughout the ages who have made tremendous impact just by standing for the truth. We lead them in praying for Christians who even now are jailed for their faith. We equip children with the tools they will need to endure suffering as a soldier of Christ. And we call them - yes, even as children - to begin to make genuine sacrifices for the sake of the Kingdom of God. How much change might occur in our children's ministries if we moved from "I surrender some" to "I surrender all" ...

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survival



HAVE YOU EVER felt like you were fighting to survive? Have you ever felt discouragement or a desire to quit?

**This happens to all of us.**

Ministry to kids and families is a fight for survival. It is a battle, constantly waging in our lives, minds, hearts, and culture. We face a relentless enemy, who is doing everything possible and using every possible avenue to discourage us, shift our focus away from God's vision and purpose, and get us to quit.

To survive in the wilderness, you need the right tools and skills. As a children's and family ministry leaders, we must be disciplined in prayer and in our relationship with God. The apostle Paul knew the fight for survival well. Paul described this fight in spiritual terms in the familiar passage of Ephesians 6. He faced constant persecution, physical beatings, a "thorn in the flesh," and more. Even after all he faced, Paul encourages and instructs us in Galatians 6:9, "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing, if we don't give up."

I believe a great harvest is just around the corner and we **must not give up the fight!!**

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*transformation*



FOR TOO LONG, we have thought of Christianity as a set of beliefs to which one must ascribe. While Biblical truths are important (love the Lord your God with all your mind), knowledge alone does not transform a person into the image of Christ (no matter what her age is).

It is time for us to stop teaching kids about Jesus and start connecting them with Jesus. Kids need to know truth, and they also need to experience a personal relationship with God. As children's and family ministry leaders, we need to help teachers and parents know how to listen to God's voice and obey it. We need to model what it means to practice spiritual disciplines that provide space for the Holy Spirit to work his transformative power within our souls. Adults who have heard God's voice and been transformed by it are the only ones truly ready to introduce their students/children to the God who will do the same for them.

When our children's and family ministry is focused on transformation, children, families and whole churches will be changed. God's children of all ages will begin loving God with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind, and all their strength. And then we will be ready to love our neighbors as ourselves.

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tweens



THIS TRANSITIONAL LIFE-STAGE has always been around.

The ages may vary due to the cultural context (rural, urban, suburban). It is likely accelerating in this digital age. It may represent a different name for you but it symbolizes the transition from childhood to youth.

Big things are happening morally, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually with this age group. Kids are going from forming these to being formed. In fact George Barna says, “what we believe at 13 we will likely die believing.”

Marketers spend millions to drive messages straight to them. Educational institutions research them and adjust their approaches to this changing demographic. Untold amounts of media are available at their fingertips. The world is adjusting and speaking to these tweens, perhaps as the dominant voice in their lives.

So how is your church doing?

Are you understanding them better through reading, research and observation?

Do you plan or organize your ministry differently?

Do you work in partnership with your youth pastor for a unified strategy for this transition?

Are you equipping their parents who see the changes and need help in leading their families well?

We need to stand in this gap. Identify a next step and take it.

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