

Leaders  
Teachers  
Parents

# Build Lifelong Disciples

A PLEA TO DEVELOP CHRIST-LIKE CHILDREN

## Where are today's Christian kids?

Once upon a time, Christian parents asked their children after church, "What did you learn about God?" Today the question is often, "Did you have fun?"

Not too long ago, churches offered Bible training for all ages—wanting to fully equip children to serve Christ. Today, many churches offer high-energy, entertainment-based programs—wanting to keep kids happy and to make recruiting easy. Children rarely use their Bibles.

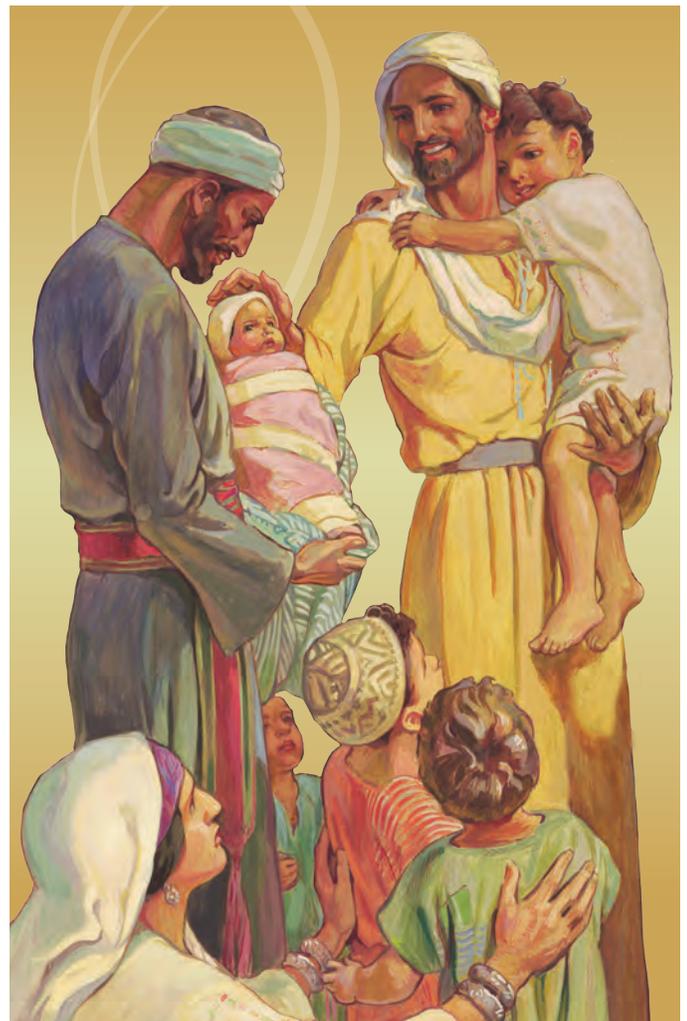
As a result, children today:

- ...**KNOW** more about video games than they know about God.
- ...**LOVE** peer approval more than they love Jesus.
- ...**SERVE** themselves before they consider the needs of others.

In this generation as never before, cultural gravity relentlessly pulls Christian children down—and they are drowning. Statistics warn us that eight of every ten Christian kids are drinking in the world's value system. Nearly 80% of our children leave the church by the time they complete high school.

This problem is magnified today because the world's value system is "post-Christian." Fifty years ago, the church and western culture were sailing in the same direction. The Ten Commandments were respected and cherished across our society. Lying, cheating, stealing, and infidelity were universally recognized as wrong. Nations possessed a code of values that were based on solid moral footings. This, of course, is said to be passé! Our society no longer reflects a Biblical world-view. Western culture has reversed its direction, charting a course that openly opposes Christian interests.

Now, as churches and parents, we have lost sight of our educational moorings. We're adrift at sea and not sure which harbor is home. As a direct result, most Christian kids today have no foundation. We're raising a generation of children who have missed out on essential Bible training. When the world comes calling, many fall prey to dubious activities and deceptive philosophies. It is only natural that children who have routinely swallowed teaching about relativism and tolerance have little regard for moral absolutes. They turn away from their Christian roots and step off the gangplank into uncertain seas.



DiscipleLand  
Children's Ministry  
Tools

by Mark Steiner,  
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## What does Christ call His Church to do?

Jesus' Great Commission "Make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20) is the church's primary mandate. Through 20 centuries, Christ's final challenge has stirred His followers to action. Discipleship is much more than "part-time Christianity." Jesus' preeminent passion, the focus of His ministry, His earthly delight—was His twelve disciples. It is certainly true that He ministered to the masses, but Christ poured His life into those twelve diverse men.

Jesus modeled discipleship to His select band of followers. The Lord knew that if He failed to effectively train the twelve, His mission would ultimately fall short of its global objective. Jesus really loved His disciples—and they knew it! Discipleship was Christ's sole weapon to win the world. He never mentioned "Plan B."

After Jesus' ascension into heaven, His disciples knew what Jesus expected them to do. They were to go and repeat with other believers what Christ had done with them. Did His followers succeed? Absolutely! Not too many years later, antagonists to the Gospel reported that Jesus' disciples had "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). First and foremost, Jesus Christ calls the Church and every believer in the Church to follow His example and "make disciples."

## What do disciples look like today?

Discipleship is the ongoing process whereby Christians grow in Biblical knowledge, Christlike character, and faithful conduct—to the glory of God. Walking in Jesus' steps and being His disciple is the Christian's highest privilege! When we examine the lives of dynamic disciples throughout history, we consistently find three components:

- **KNOWLEDGE:** Growing disciples KNOW God intimately. They develop a reservoir of KNOWLEDGE based on a Biblical worldview.
- **CHARACTER:** Growing disciples LOVE God passionately. They display Christlike CHARACTER in every area of life.
- **CONDUCT:** Growing disciples SERVE God selflessly. They demonstrate faithful CONDUCT that honors God and helps people.

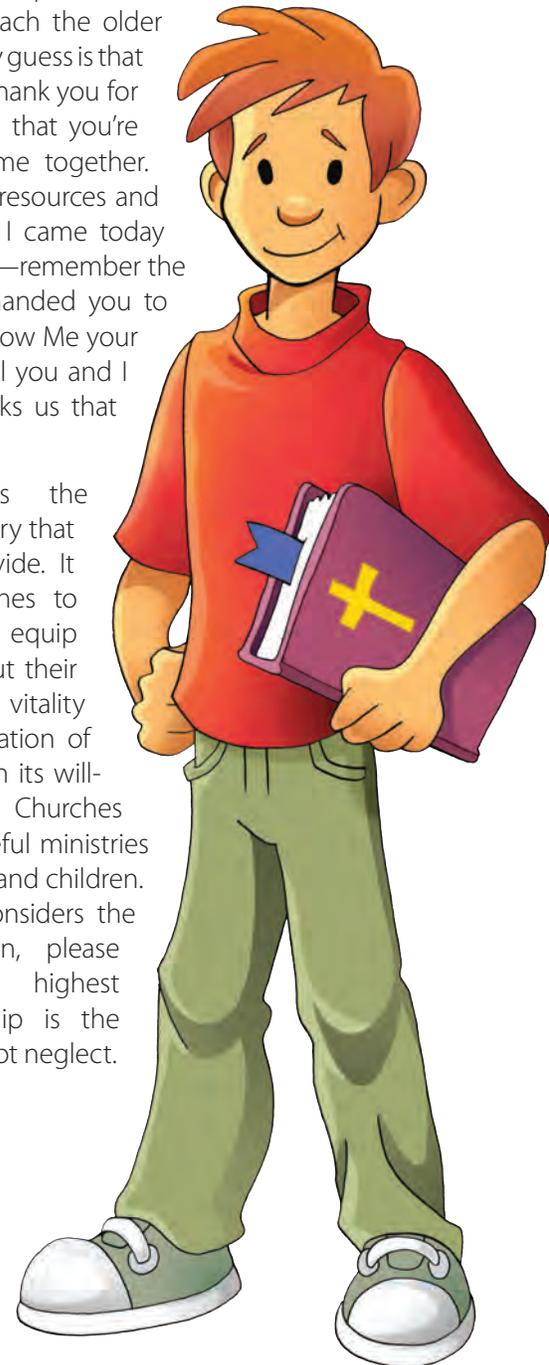
The Bible illumines a finite number of "must know" topics to understand, "must be" traits to exhibit, and "must do" activities to experience. When a child's developmental process includes that knowledge, those traits, and those experiences, we can be reasonably assured that we have done our part to build a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ. Effective discipleship interweaves these three dimensions—**knowledge + character + conduct**.

## Why disciple children?

In his book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, George Barna wrote, "...ministry to children is the single most strategic ministry in God's kingdom" (p. 14). God has given parents primary responsibility for the spiritual training of their children. But many parents don't know where to begin. They feel overwhelmed with this responsibility. So, parents often entrust this task to the Church, or to chance.

Jesus Christ commissioned the Church with only one task—"make disciples." Regarding children, most churches today are doing a poor job discharging that responsibility. If Jesus paid us a surprise visit, we would show Him our nice classrooms and resource centers. We might introduce Him to our teaching staff, invite Him to share snacks with preschoolers, and ask Him to teach the older kids. Afterwards, my guess is that Jesus might say: "Thank you for the tour. I can see that you're having a good time together. You've invested in resources and environments. But I came today for another reason—remember the one thing I commanded you to do? Now, please show Me your disciples." What will you and I say when Jesus asks us that question?

Disciplemaking is the most pivotal ministry that churches can provide. It is time for churches to encourage and equip parents to carry out their responsibility. The vitality of the next generation of Christians pivots on its willingness to do so. Churches must plan purposeful ministries to disciple parents and children. As your church considers the needs of children, please remember Jesus' highest priority. Discipleship is the one thing we cannot neglect.



## How can we motivate kids?

Many kids have lost interest in spiritual matters. They are discouraged about trying to please God. From their perspective, it is not “cool” to be godly. So they focus on their own desires and let the world guide them. The number one challenge in churches today is to overcome mediocrity. Christian kids are satisfied with lukewarmness.

To counteract this trend, some churches have replaced content-rich children’s ministries with high-energy programs. This may keep kids from being bored and it may reduce the need to recruit volunteers, but it also severs teacher-learner relationships that foster discipleship. If we routinely motivate kids with flashy events, we are doomed to the “bigger and better” cycle. Each new program must offer more energy, excitement, and “wow” than the previous one.

Instead, we must move kids from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. Throughout the Bible, God uses a variety of cause-effect techniques to motivate His people. Some are positive and some are punitive; some are fascinating and some are frightening; some are earthly and some are eternal. Remind children that every human being will someday meet the Creator face-to-face—and give an account to Him.

Every child can be motivated—though not every child responds to the same stimuli. Find ways to lift your child’s eyes from self to God. Help him or her realize that our omnipresent God is both loving and just. Establish an appropriate system of rules and rewards. Reinforce attitudes and behaviors that honor God. Show how faith is relevant to life. Always encourage. Always affirm. Always model. Always pray.

## Summary

Unless a force greater than the influence of gravity is exerted on an object, it will fall to the earth. Unless Christianity exerts a stronger influence than the world, the enemy’s persuasive tactics will pull our kids from the truth and ultimately cause them to fall away. The Great Commission hinges on the effectiveness of the church’s educational ministries.

*“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:14-16)*

**Discipleship is the one thing that kids REALLY need. To navigate the turbulent seas and reach the spiritual harbors that God intends, kids need a firm foundation in God’s Word. They need help to grow into solid disciples of Jesus Christ. They need our help. Children’s discipleship is the hope of the world!**

# How Does DiscipleLand Build Disciples?

Here's how DiscipleLand helps you equip kids to reach their peak potential as Jesus' disciples. DiscipleLand's family of resources forms a complete Children's Discipleship System™ with five components:



## **DISCIPLELAND PRESCHOOL**

launches children ages 2-5 to begin walking with God.

Preschoolers establish a solid foundation through 200 different Bible stories.



## **DISCIPLELAND KINDERGARTEN**

inspires kids ages 5-6 to follow amazing Bible heroes.

Children grasp God's plan and purpose as they overview the entire Bible.



## **DISCIPLELAND CORE BIBLE**

challenges children in grades 1-6 to become victorious disciples.

Kids are equipped for Christian service through 24 quarters of sequential Bible curriculum.



## **DISCIPLETOWN**

equips kids in grades 1-6 with essential discipleship skills.

Children enjoy group learning in a creative Kids Church format.



## **DISCIPLELAND ADVENTURE**

motivates kids in grades 1-6 to pursue their discipleship journey.

Children travel to exciting locations around the world to experience topical Bible adventures.

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**DiscipleLand**—Children's ministry curriculum, ideas, and discipleship resources for life.

This free Children's Ministry tool is provided for parents, teachers, and others who want to help make disciples for life!

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