



# *Children's Ministry* **101**

A Covenantal Approach to  
***Next-Generation*** Ministry

Based on the work of **John C. Kwasny, PhD**

*Edited and expanded by members of the Children's Ministry Team of Christian Discipleship Ministries (CDM)*



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# ESTABLISHED

## *Children's Ministry 101*

### FORWARD

*"I just wish someone would write the book, Children's Ministry for Dummies, so I would know where to start!"*

This wistful statement by a new children's ministry director attending her first training conference summarized the thoughts of many. When I heard her comment, it occurred to me the book already existed. John Kwasny of the CDM Children's Ministry Team had been blogging and writing "Children's Ministry 101" articles for some time. All his work needed was a few minor additions such as resource lists and more examples of practical application. After some months of collaboration, you now have the finished product!

Christian Discipleship Ministries (CDM) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) does not have a large staff or many in-house publishing tools to make a project like this possible. However, John's heart for the Church and her covenant children made it easy for him to hand over this great resource so CDM could make it available to all who are serving the children of their local congregations.

**Established...** is the theme of this work, remembering the admonition of the psalmist: "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God" (Psalm 78:5-7 ESV). Another word is **continue**, remembering Paul's words to Timothy: "But as for you, **continue** in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15 ESV). Paul's words not only encourage us to continue teaching God's story to our children, but also remind us of their need to know the Word in order to continue after us.

#### **How best to use this resource:**

- Read or skim through the entire book.
- Plan to develop a leadership team in your church (details in Lesson 5) and then, together, study through all the material, one lesson at a time. You may want to begin with Chapter 8, "Grounded;" it is foundational to all you will do.
- Review the applications, discuss the resources that would be helpful for your particular church, and brainstorm based on the families and children God has given you to serve.

Our desire is to add resources as you give us feedback. We love to share new ideas and lessons we learn from others. See what is available on the CDM website at [pcacdm.org](http://pcacdm.org). Please partner with us to strengthen local churches by connecting people to people and people to resources.

— Sue Jakes  
CDM Children's Ministry Coordinator

# Acknowledgments

Children's ministry is a team effort. So is this book. It was my pleasure to serve as the general editor for *Children's Ministry 101*. **John Kwasny** provided the foundation, structure, and most of the content. He is the Director of Christian Education and Children's Ministry at Pear Orchard Presbyterian Church in Ridgeland, MS. He also is a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary and a member of the Permanent Committee and Children's Ministry Team of Christian Discipleship Ministries (CDM). His "other job" is Director of One Story Ministries, which publishes curriculum for children and families.

As CDM Children's Ministry Coordinator, **Sue Jakes** had the vision to create a resource that truly helps those who serve in children's ministry. Many thanks to the other members of the CDM Children's Ministry Team who took John's content and added their own special flavor, including stories from their context:

- **Bethany Belue** has been a children's director in New York City and Birmingham, AL. She now is part of the CDM team in Atlanta. She helped edit Chapter 3.
- **Jimmy Brock** was a former math teacher in inner-city Los Angeles. He has been the Pastor of Family Ministry at Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, GA. He helped on Chapter 5.
- **Jeremy Case** is the Director of Children's Ministry at Perimeter Church in Atlanta, GA.
- **Anna Johnson** is a former school teacher who transitioned to the role of a children's ministry director, first in Tucson, AZ, and now in St. Louis, MO. She helped on Chapter 4.
- **Sherry Kendrick** has over 30 years experience in children's ministry and has the unique habit of collecting children's curriculum. She helped on Chapter 8 and the resource lists.
- **Joseph Parker** is the Director of Next Generation Ministries at ChristChurch Atlanta. He is a transplanted Southern California native. He worked on Chapter 2.
- **Barksdale Pullen** has a PhD in education and has been a children's pastor for over 25 years in Nashville, TN, St. Louis, MO, and Tallahassee, FL. He helped with Chapter 7 and the appendices.
- **Lisa Updike** has served children in a variety of roles over the last 30 years. Currently, she is a director in Harrisonburg, VA. She helped on many of the lessons, especially Chapter 6.

We greatly appreciate the artistic talent of Chip Evans, the support of B. A. Snider of Great Commission Publications (GCP), and the original artwork by Stacey Van Voorhis.

**Who is CDM?** We are a committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Our mission is to strengthen local churches as they make disciples in the community of the congregation, particularly through ministry to children, youth, and adults. We strive to connect people to people and people to resources.

— Stephen Estock  
*CDM Coordinator*

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## *Children's Ministry 101*

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*<sup>6</sup>And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*

— Deuteronomy 6:6-7 ESV

# Children's Ministry 101

## CHAPTER 1: *Begin*

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You've been called to lead your church's children's ministry. Congratulations! You are entering the vital work of telling "the next generation the glorious deeds of our LORD" (Psalm 78:4). What a privilege you have to direct a ministry which points children to Jesus! Where to begin? Maybe you have inherited a ministry that has a well-established vision, philosophy, and program, or maybe you are building from the ground up. Whatever the case (and even if you have been doing this for a long time), it's essential to build a ministry to children on a biblical foundation. Let's get started!

### LESSON 1: *Begin with Parents*

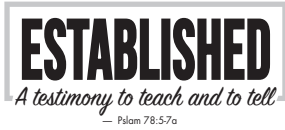
In a sense, children's ministry is a "population ministry"--the church ministering to the age group we call "children." It makes sense that we begin by figuring out what children (our target population) need, and then give it to them, right? In a way, yes. The church has a responsibility to evangelize and educate children, just like it does with youth and adults. A better way to think about children's ministry in the local church, however, is that it *begins with parents*. God has given the children to the parents, along with the command to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Since parents have the *primary* responsibility for their own children, what is the role of the local church? A careful look at Scripture will demonstrate that the children's ministry of the local church is called to a dual purpose of:

- **Leading parents in their task of raising their children.**
- **Assisting parents in their task of raising their children.**

How do we LEAD parents in the task of raising their children? That's an essential first question and should drive your planning.

How do we LEAD parents in the task of raising their children? That's an essential first question and should drive your planning. But before we answer that, consider how this question connects children's ministry with your congregation's adult education/discipleship ministry. *The strength (or weakness) of the education and discipleship of your adults directly impacts the children's ministry!* When adults are growing in their knowledge of Christ and the application of God's Word to their lives, they will be equipped to teach and train the next generation. However, if the adults of the congregation are struggling in their relationship with Christ, spiritually immature, or absent from the life of the church, the children will be impacted negatively as well.

Back to answering the first question: How do we LEAD parents in their work of training their children to know and serve the LORD? To get you started, here are just a few ideas of what your



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congregation, including your children’s ministry, can do:

- Encourage parents to participate regularly in the congregation’s adult discipleship/ education ministry, including learning from the pulpit ministry, adult Sunday school, small groups, etc.
- Offer biblical counseling for parents to help them deal with individual parenting issues.
- Offer periodic marriage and parenting studies, conferences, and retreats.
- Choose children’s curricula that also offer parents the tools to teach their children the Bible at home.
- Regularly advertise resources/books/blogs that can help parents raise/teach their children.

A second purpose for the children’s ministry of a local church is to ASSIST parents in the task of raising their children in the discipline and instruction of the LORD. Members of the local church, parents AND their children, are part of what is called the “covenant community.” No one should be left alone in this vital work of raising children to serve the LORD. It takes a church to raise its covenant children! In light of this, what are things a children’s ministry can do to come alongside parents as they raise their children? Here are a few more ideas:

- Develop a safe, secure, and loving nursery ministry to care for and make disciples of the littlest lambs while parents are being trained and equipped.
- Train, equip, and encourage committed “covenant parents” who will teach Sunday school, lead discipleship groups, help with catechism, children’s choirs, etc.
- Choose children’s curricula that teach all of God’s Word, regardless of whether parents are teaching their children at home.
- Never merely offer “childcare” while parents are being taught/trained/equipped. Use these opportunities to teach, train, and equip their children!
- Provide opportunities for children to serve IN and WITH the congregation.
- Provide opportunities for children to nurture covenant relationships with one another.
- Assist parents in training their children to worship God in the context of congregational worship.

These components of children’s ministry will be covered as you go through the lessons of this book, but here’s a way to summarize the starting point (especially if you are a Presbyterian): *Children’s ministry is driven by our covenant baptismal vows.* For those who baptize covenant children (i.e., the children of professed believers), there’s typically a point in the sacrament where the pastor asks the congregation if each member will commit to “assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child.” Of course (since the child is so cute), the entire congregation enthusiastically says “YES!” In making this commitment, the adults of the congregation affirm they are “covenant parents” to the children who are baptized. **Children’s ministry is the natural and biblical outgrowth of this commitment.** Children’s ministry exists to both LEAD and ASSIST parents in the education and discipline of their children.

In Lesson Two, we address another “starting point” question: *What about orphans and the unchurched children of our community?* Don’t we have a responsibility to them? Yes we do!



## Questions for Application

- In what ways does your congregation educate, equip, and encourage the adults? What training does your children's ministry offer to the parents in your church?
- What setting would work best in your church community? A Sunday morning on-going class? A weekend conference? A monthly home study? You may want to survey the parents to understand better what would work best. Plan training in the near future.
- Evaluate your nursery at every point. In what ways can you do better? (Consider ordering *Nursery Smart Pages* by Gospel Light to help you evaluate.)
- Is the curriculum you use encouraging follow-up by the parents at home? Consider sending weekly e-mails to remind parents to review take-home materials from the children's lessons.



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## Ideas to Help Begin with Parents



- Post the lesson focus for each week in an area where parents can easily see it when they pick up/drop off their children (e.g., the hallway outside the classrooms). Include a short follow-up question for parents to discuss with the children on the way home.
- Post the scope and sequence of your curriculum on your church's website. Periodically remind parents where they can view the plan so they better understand what their child is learning now and will be learning in the coming weeks.
- At least once a quarter send a brief e-mail to parents informing them about the topics their children will be covering in Sunday school. Include suggestions about Bible passages they might want to read as a family, along with a few discussion questions.



## Sample e-mail to parents:

*Hi, Parents!*

*We are so excited to be exploring the 10 Commandments and growth in Christian character this quarter. This will be a great time for you as a family to read through Exodus 20:1-17. You might take one night this week at dinner to read one of the commandments from the passage. Talk about what it means for us today. Share with your kids where you may have struggled with obeying the commandment. Remind them (and yourself) to turn to Jesus for forgiveness when we fail and help when we struggle with temptation. Close by praying for each other.*

*Look at that—you now have a lesson plan for 10 weeks of family worship! Please know, we're praying for you as you shepherd your kids on this important topic.*



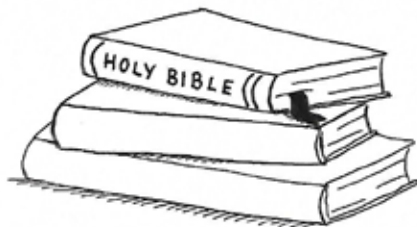
A short e-mail like this serves a few purposes. It informs parents what their children will be studying. Without condemning or shaming parents, it communicates the expectation that they are the shepherds responsible for leading their children in learning about Jesus. And finally, it gently instructs parents how to incorporate family worship into the daily flow of life.

## Resources

- **Gospel-Powered Parenting** by William P. Farley
- **Shepherding a Child's Heart** and **Instructing a Child's Heart** by Tedd Tripp
- **Parenting** by Paul David Tripp
- **Heart of the Home** (study on CD) by Priscilla Stewart and Sue Jakes
- **Parenting by God's Promises** by Joel Beeke
- **Heirs of the Covenant** by Susan Hunt
- **Becoming a Spiritually Healthy Family** by Michelle Anthony
- **World-Proof Your Kids** and **Of Such Is the Kingdom** by Timothy A. Sisemore
- **Parenting in the Pew** by Robbie Castleman
- **VIDEO SERIES: Shepherding a Child's Heart** by Tedd Tripp;  
**Parenting** by Paul David Tripp
- **CONFERENCES:** Contact CDM and arrange to host a Connect Parenting Conference

## Resources for Family Devotions

- **Hymns for a Kid's Heart** series by Bobbie Wolgemuth and Joni Earekson Tada
- **The Jesus Storybook Bible** by Sally Lloyd-Jones
- **Read-Aloud Bible Stories** by Ella K. Lindvall (all volumes)
- **The Child's Story Bible** by Catherine F. Vos
- **My ABC Bible Verses Curriculum** by Susan Hunt
- **God's Story Bible Coloring Book** by Great Commission Publications
- **Pilgrim's Progress** adapted by Great Commission Publications
- **One Year of Dinner Table Devotions** by Nancy Guthrie
- **Training Hearts, Teaching Minds** by Starr Meade
- **God's Names and God's Promises** by Sally Michael



# LESSON 2: *Begin with Outreach*

No, there's not a typo in the title. Yes, Lesson 1 was entitled "Begin with Parents." Is it possible to have TWO starting points in children's ministry? It's not only possible; it is *essential!* To begin only with church members and covenant children will potentially turn our focus inward rather than outward. Choosing to minister to our own children first, and then reach out to children of the community at some point "later on" keeps us from obeying the Great Commission. Jesus commands his followers to "make disciples of all nations." The church of Jesus Christ must always, and at the same time, be UPWARD (worshipping God), INWARD (educating and equipping the covenant community), and OUTWARD (evangelizing and making disciples of those outside the covenant community). This goes for children's ministry as well: under the umbrella of the UPWARD "worship of God," we have the *dual starting points* of ministry to our covenant families AND ministry to the children of our community.

When you hear the word "outreach" in the context of children's ministry, what comes to your mind? Do you think about the church bus picking up children in the neighborhood? Or maybe door-to-door invitations to VBS or Sunday school? Before we jump to process and programs like that, we must first consider vision, philosophy, and attitudes:

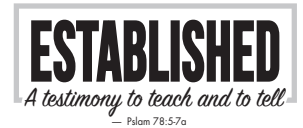
- Does your ministry communicate a desire to see unchurched and unconverted children brought to Christ?
- Does your church leadership have a vision for reaching your community?
- Who lives in your community? What is your attitude toward the people God has placed around you?
- What does it mean to be "outward" regarding the children in your community?

These are just some of the questions that must be answered through prayerful conversation and deliberation. As Christians, we know we are commissioned to *go into the world and make disciples* (Matthew 28:19), but what does that look like for YOUR church, and specifically YOUR children's ministry? In other words, how can you set your children's ministry on a path to be covenantal AND missional?

Once you answer those questions and determine that your children's ministry SHOULD begin with outreach to the community, what do you do next? In developing your action plan, it is helpful to think about two categories of children's ministry outreach: *Relational Outreach* and *Intentional Outreach*..

## *Relational Outreach*

Relational outreach is the most natural way to be missional, and therefore, a great way for most churches to begin. This type of outreach focuses on the hearts of your covenant children, training the children of your church to reach out to neighbors, schoolmates, friends, and even those they may consider "enemies!" It fulfills the first words of Matthew 28:19, literally translated "*In your going.*" As the children of your congregation live and play in your community, they should build relationships with other children, including the unchurched.



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Here are some suggestions of what relational outreach looks like:

- Lead your children/Sunday school classes to pray for their neighbors.
- Encourage children to invite neighbors to Sunday school, choir, or other weekly activities.
- Challenge children to invite neighbors to Vacation Bible School.
- Train children to share the gospel with their neighbors.

Of course, the adults of your church must lead and exemplify these efforts at relational outreach, but an emphasis of your children's ministry is to nurture a lifestyle of "*children reaching children for the sake of Jesus.*"

## *Intentional* Outreach

Yes, I know what you're thinking: "being relational IS intentional." Yet, there is more to it. The label "intentional outreach" means *adults reaching children*. It's the "make disciples" command of Matthew 28:19. This involves adults developing specific plans and programs to reach the children in your community. Whereas relational outreach is similar in most churches, the nature of intentional outreach depends on your specific context. You need to know the demographics of the families of your community in order to make good decisions concerning outreach programs. At the same time, you need to understand the gifts, skills, and commitments of your own church members for the programs to materialize and succeed. Here are some programs congregations have used in their attempts at intentional outreach:

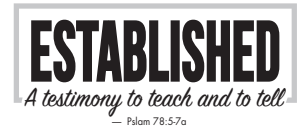
- After school programs, such as tutoring, mentoring, etc.
- Backyard Bible clubs during the summer
- Sports programs designed for outreach in the community
- Academic enrichment programs during the year
- English as a Second Language ministries that include children's Bible classes while the parents are learning English
- Respite care nights for parents of children with disabilities

Again, effective outreach requires you know your community AND your congregation. It is more than simply learning what other churches do and then replicating their programs. Mere imitation without careful reflection on your context will usually lead to frustration. This is especially true if the children's ministry launches an outreach program that does not have the support of the leadership, the manpower (people and abilities) to execute the program, and/or the passion to carry it through. In short, you must be INTENTIONAL about your intentional outreach!

We will address more practical issues and challenges later, but here are a few summary thoughts:

- Beginning with outreach keeps the hearts of your covenant children focused on others, particularly those who do not know Jesus.

- Reaching children means reaching families, even if those families do not immediately join the church.
- Outreach is all about the Great Commission: “As you are going ... make disciples.”
- Outreach begins relationally, and then continues to be relational in an intentional way.



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### Questions for Application

- Who lives in your community?
- In what ways are you currently reaching out?
- Is your ministry reaching out to the children of your community? In what ways are the children of your congregation involved in reaching out?
- Do the children in your ministry know how to present the gospel clearly? In what ways are you training parents and teachers to help the children proclaim the gospel?
- How is your ministry encouraging parents and teachers to lead the children in praying for those who need to hear about Jesus and receive the ministry of your church?
- In what ways do you encourage prayer that asks God to guide your efforts in beginning and nurturing an intentional outreach ministry?

### Resources

- The PCA’s Mission to North America “**Engaging Disability with the Gospel**” ministry offers training and consultation for churches seeking to reach out to individuals and families with special needs. Their web site [engagingdisability.org](http://engagingdisability.org) can connect you to those who can help.
- **Evangelism Explosion International** ([evangelismexplosion.org/ministries/kids-ee/](http://evangelismexplosion.org/ministries/kids-ee/)) may be a good place to begin when training your children in gospel ministry.
- **ESL KidStuff** ([www.eslkidstuff.com/](http://www.eslkidstuff.com/)) is a great place for resources designed to reach children cross-culturally, regardless of whether you have an English as Second Language program for adults.
- **The Mission-Minded Child** and **The Mission-Minded Family** by Ann Dunagan
- **Hand in Hand: Helping Children Celebrate Diversity** - CRC Publication pdf ([dwell.faithaliveresources.org](http://dwell.faithaliveresources.org))



**CHAPTER**

## Field Notes

— Lisa Updike, Harrisonburg, VA

We have many Muslims in our area, who will not send their children on a Sunday morning, even if their child is invited by a friend. However, these parents will allow their children to attend “secular” social events at our church. This means we have become more creative in the events we offer. For example, our children’s ministry has hosted a *Finding Nemo* movie night. Before the movie begins, we review themes and things to look for in the movie (e.g., “Raise your hand when Nemo disobeys. Does the father stop loving Nemo when he disobeys or does the father lovingly seek and save what is lost?”). Before distributing a “thanks for coming” gift bag, we quickly share how these themes remind us of God, who always loves us and goes after us to bring us to himself. Through these movie nights, we often begin to develop relationships with these families, who appreciate a free fun night out. Over time, they are willing to let their children attend VBS and Bible clubs in the neighborhood.

One mother wanted her child to come to our Bible club because she appreciated the fun activities and the care her child received. But, she was concerned about us sharing the Bible

One mother wanted her child to come to our Bible club because she appreciated the fun activities and the care her child received. But, she was concerned about us sharing the Bible with her child.

with her child. We certainly understood her concerns, so we asked if she would like to come also. That way, she could talk to her child about anything we taught. It wasn’t long before we were setting up times to meet with her, as she had many questions about the Bible. Today, she owns her own Bible and is reading it daily.

In some contexts, a great big Easter egg hunt every year may not be conducive to significant outreach.

Instead, consider asking your families to organize neighborhood egg hunts where they open with prayer and review the story of Jesus by using Resurrection Eggs (<http://www.familylife.com/resurrectioneggs>). Or you can use any of a variety of activities you create with ideas from members of your congregation or even from good ol’ Pinterest!

One of our single young ladies has invited several families to a neighborhood egg hunt. All of the eggs she hides are “empty tomb” eggs (unfilled), which the children turn in for candy. This saves time (she doesn’t fill the eggs), and she has an opportunity to tell about the empty tomb. After the egg hunt, she squeezes dozens of kids into her tiny home to show the *Jesus* film. For many of the children, it is their first time to hear the story of Jesus. Also, this young lady (with the help of a few others from the church) brings about 20 children to church each Sunday. Over time, the people in her neighborhood have grown to love, respect, and trust her as she weekly plans activities for their children.