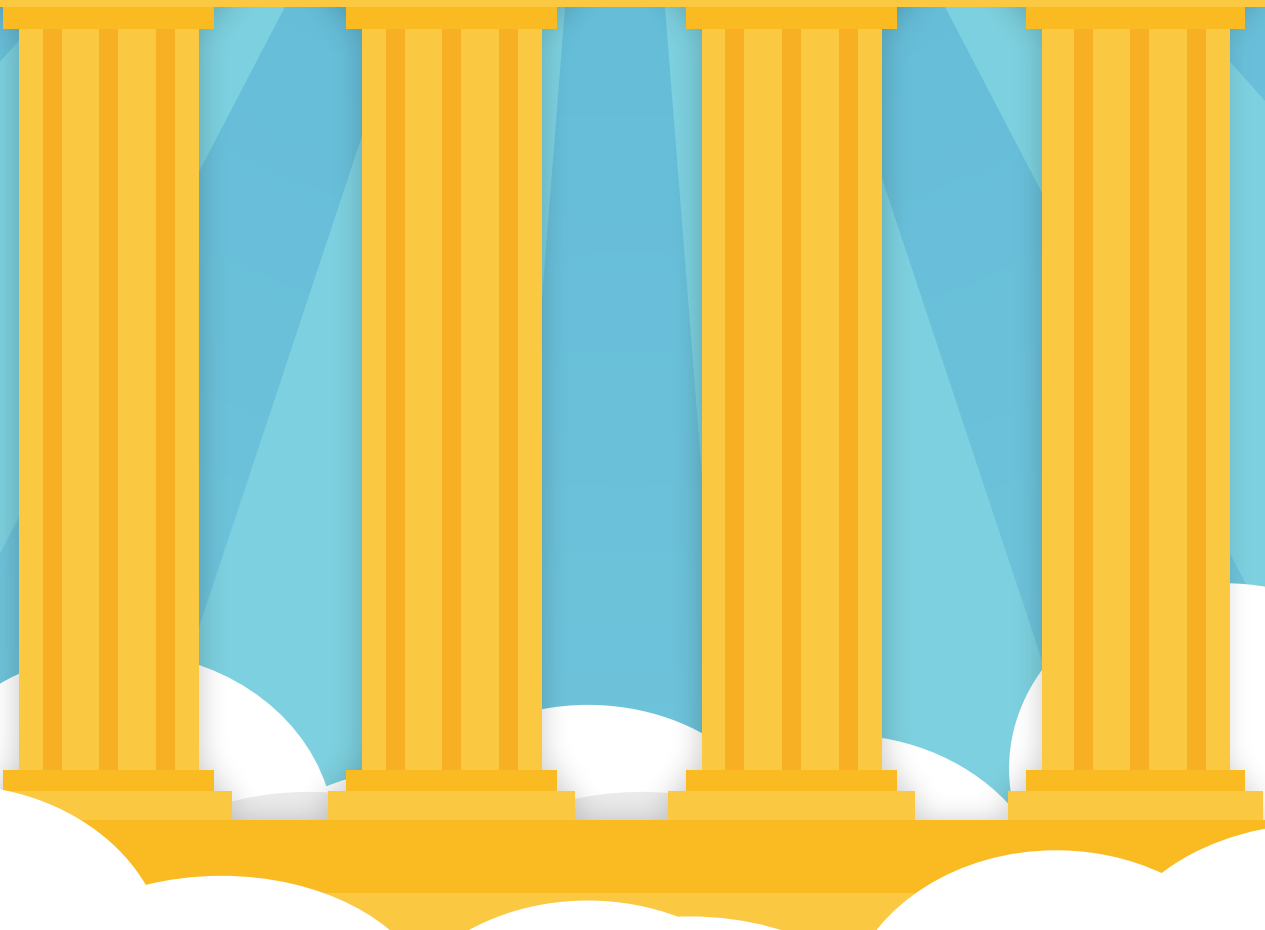




The Four Pillars of Children's Ministry

**TIME TESTED PRINCIPLES FOR MINISTRY REGARDLESS
OF DENOMINATION, CURRICULUM OR PROGRAM**



By Karl Bastian, the Kidologist

The Kidology Way

By Karl Bastian, the Kidologist

Kidology - the "Study of Kids"

Kidology.org - the children's ministry website

The Kidology Way is a philosophy of ministry developed by **Pastor Karl Bastian** while a he was a Bible student at [Moody Bible Institute](#) in his 20's, and it has guided his life and ministry for over twenty years.

After completing his Bible Theology degree at MBI, Karl went on to earn a Master's in Children's Ministry from [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School](#). While serving as a children's pastor for nearly twenty years, he was named one of the [Top 20 Most Influential People in Children's Ministry](#) by Children's Ministry Magazine (2011). In addition to creating [Kidology.org](#), Karl is the host of a weekly podcast, [KidminTalk.com](#), and is the creator of [Yosemite Summit](#), a retreat for men in ministry. He is also known by thousands of children in churches across America as the creator of [ToyBoxTales.com](#), where he playfully brings toys to life to teach Bible stories. He is the creator of the [My Awesome Adventure](#) discipleship series as well as the [DiscipleTown](#) children's church curriculum and enjoys creating and contributing to other children's ministry resources and participating in training events where he can pursue his lifelong mission: *To Reach and Teach as many children as possible with the Good News of Jesus Christ and in the process to Enlist, Equip and Encourage others to do the same.*

You can follow him on his blog: [Kidologist.com](#), on Twitter [@Kidologist](#) or on Facebook: [facebook.com/karl.bastian](#)

This book is an invitation to discover the philosophy of ministry behind the website - a philosophy of ministry that has the power to change *your* ministry!

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The Kidology Way

by Karl Bastian, aka "The Kidologist"

While Kidology may be known best for the vast resources on its website, Kidology.org, "Kidology" is much more than a catchy phrase or the name of a resource provider. Kidology is first and foremost a philosophy of ministry that I developed as a young children's pastor in Bible college, long before the website that bears its name grew to be what it is today. In fact, the growth of Kidology.org has occurred in part *because* of the philosophy behind all the training, resources, and ministry assistance provided on the website by myself and those who serve alongside me.



There are many trends in children's ministry – perhaps all of them are good to one degree or another, and most likely they are all born of a love for children and a desire to reach or teach them for God. Some "kidmin" trends and products come for a season and then soon fade into distant memory. Others have already been forgotten completely by many today. Still others remain hugely popular as they meet a specific niche need in the church, and therefore enjoy more longevity.

Yet Kidology has enjoyed a consistent and steadily growing following of leaders and volunteers for nearly twenty years, even while never becoming wildly popular or trendy. I believe we have enjoyed a steady and stable following because of our consistent adherence to some core beliefs. That is also why I believe Kidology, as a ministry and a philosophy, will continue to be strong and healthy for decades to come.

We don't follow trends, positive as they may be. At our core are time tested principles of children's ministry rooted in Scripture, which match up with the weekly realities of children's ministry as experienced by those in the trenches week in and week out. The Kidology Way doesn't offer shortcuts, easy solutions, or prepackaged ministry. However, as its Mission declares, it does seek *"To Equip and Encourage Those in Children's Ministry,"* while upholding some principles that are the underpinnings of a solid, biblical children's ministry.

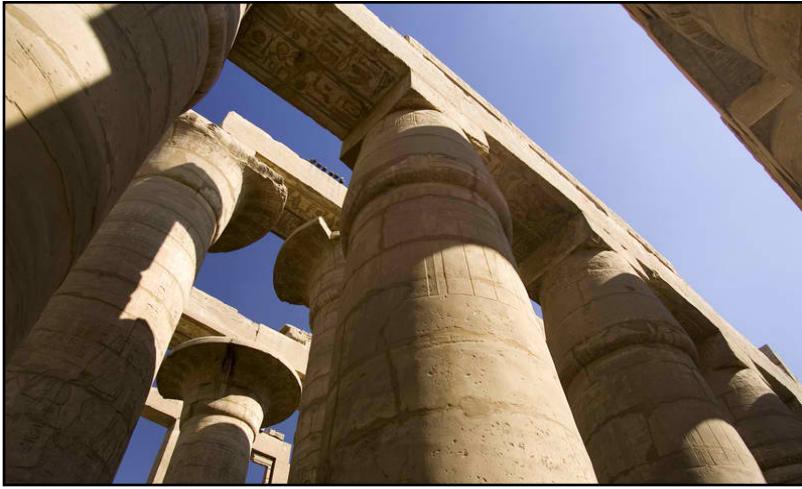
So what IS the "Kidology Way?"

Obviously, the word Kidology literally means "the study of kids." I coined and trademarked this term before it was in any other use to capture the need to lead child-centered children's ministries that are always learning about kids and their world. But Kidology goes beyond that. The Kidology Way seeks to help develop creative child-centered ministries that are highly relational and Gospel focused and that are intentionally developing disciples of Jesus, all upon a foundation that is solidly biblical. Throughout our products, articles, podcasts, and answers in the forums, you will see these themes trumpeted over and over – like a broken record or a prophet who is crying in the wilderness that the only way to have long term results in the lives of children is to lead such a ministry. Anything less may be quality Christian education, but it isn't going to produce lifelong followers of Christ who can endure the tempestuous teenage years and intellectually challenging college years or establish adults whose lives and families are built upon a solid, biblical worldview.

Below are the Four Pillars of the Kidology Way. Together they are the secret to a ministry that will reap long term results. It is not a formula that I invented, but one that is clearly found in Scripture. It is a way of ministry that is often missed by those who are buried in the administration of ministry or distracted by chasing after trends, and who never get rooted in a long term strategy that actually works. Trends can compliment and enhance a ministry, but they must not be the foundation of a ministry.

The rest of this short book will explain the importance of the biblical foundation and what it looks like in practice (since few would argue this). Then it will unfold in more detail to show how these Pillars can be erected so that a ministry can be built upon them.

The Four Pillars of the Kidology Way



A Successful Children's Ministry Must Be:

Child Centered. God loves every child, and therefore we accept them and love them, just the way they are. Children who need special attention are lovingly welcomed. Our environments are kid-friendly, engaging, and educational. Our volunteers strive to understand a child's perspective and to make the message of Christianity relevant to the life of a child. We have fun, but it is fun with a *purpose!* Therefore, our teaching is creative and engaging and connects with the world of kids in order to help them connect with God.

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22

Highly Relational. We strive to be relational, not just informational. While we creatively teach important spiritual truths to our children, we understand that building *relationships* with children is the most effective tool. Throughout all of our programs, we seek to connect children with loving adults who know and love Jesus, understanding that this will be more effective than any program, product, or lesson ever will be.

"As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;" Luke 24:15

Gospel Focused. We believe that children are important and matter to God. Not only can children come to faith in Jesus Christ, but God commands *adults* to come to Him with the simple faith of a child. We present the Good News of salvation through Jesus often and clearly, providing opportunities for children to invite Him into their life as their Savior and Friend. If resources lack the Gospel message, we will be sure to include it ourselves, for we believe that without saving faith in Christ, no other Bible lesson truly is applicable nor has eternal consequence.

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” Matthew 19:14

Discipleship Driven. We recognize that Jesus gave one primary command when He returned to heaven: Go and make disciples. However, we believe that making disciples is not something that happens haphazardly in the course of church attendance. It should be approached with intentionality and strategy and with a focus on the individual. After the Gospel is accepted, children need a solid biblical foundation laid that will enable them to grow in wisdom and knowledge and character in a manner that will last a lifetime. Empowering parents and others to intentionally disciple children is a critical component of developing lifelong devoted followers of Jesus.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
Matthew 28:19-20

An Invitation To You

The Kidology Way:

1. *Child Centered*
2. *Highly Relational*
3. *Gospel Focused*
4. *Discipleship Driven*

Built upon a solid biblical foundation.

These are the Pillars of the Kidology Way. If they become the foundation of your ministry, you will find success in your calling...if by success you mean long-term results and not merely short-term numbers. These pillars are not easy. You will have to wrestle with each of them, evaluating how to implement them into your specific ministry environment. Effective ministry is challenging. While these may be difficult to implement, they do produce real results. Real, effective, biblical ministry can't be sold in a box, but real ministry IS the most rewarding, every time.

You probably noticed two things missing from the descriptions above. There was no mention of anything related to administration, and there were no specifics describing how to implement these principles into your ministry.

Administration is critically important to a successful ministry, it is how we get things done, but it is not what we are *called* to do. Kidology.org offers a great deal of help in the area of administration, from Kidology Online Training to personal coaches that guide you and train you as a leader and much more. I often write and speak about developing a Leadership Team to free up ministry leaders from administration as much as possible, so they can stay focused on these Pillars. All of us are wired differently, and we must find what works for us. In the end, mastering administration is necessary – not for its own sake, but in order to have margin in your life and ministry to focus on the Four Pillars: **A Child-Centered Ministry that is Highly Relational, Gospel Focused, and Discipleship Driven, each standing upon a solid biblical foundation.**

Likewise, while I will offer many suggestions on how to implement each of the pillars further in this book and on Kidology.org, ultimately the resources are not the solution, the Pillars are. There *are* many helpful products and resources available to children's ministry leaders that can help implement these principles. The Kidology Handbook is a manual on Relational Ministry. The Kid's Church Cookbook is an extensive manual on creating an engaging environment, teaching creatively, and writing solid biblical lessons so that you are both effective and child centered in your approach. My wife, Sara, and I wrote a discipleship workbook called Awesome Adventure to address the need for a kid-friendly, biblically rich tool for discipling children. Not only do I write solid biblical curriculum, like DiscipleTown, but Kidology.org has an online store where many other providers offer helpful resources that can be a great help to you. *But again*, at the end of the day, *it is not the resources that are key*. It is the implementation of these Pillars. These principles existed before any of the products and resources, and should Christ tarry, they will still be true 100 years from now, long after Kidology.org is gone and other's resources are forgotten.

Never mistake the resource for the solution!

These Children's Ministry Pillars are not a trend. They are not a fad. They are not beholden or dependent upon any person or website or product. They are the biblical mandate for children's ministry, and they have and will stand the test of time.

The sooner you begin to wrestle with how to implement these into your ministry, the sooner you will begin to see dramatic results in the lives of your children. Even better, decades from now, you will still be seeing results.

The twofold purpose of this eBook is to challenge you to wrestle with these Pillars and to offer you practical suggestions, so that you don't have to start from scratch. Before you begin to look at any resource or idea, though, you must decide: Do you agree with these principles? Are you willing to do the hard work of implementing them into your ministry? Will you stand up and be more than an administrator of programs and instead be a leader of a revolution to make disciples?

Will You Join the "Kidology Way?"

If you agree with these **Four Pillars of Children's Ministry**, I invite you to post the graphic below on your church website or blog and link to a short description of The Four Pillars. Those who click on it will see the short description of the Four Pillars and a statement that your church follows the Kidology Way of ministry. Let's start a movement to lead others back to these principles.

Let's encourage others to join us and spread the word about the Kidology Way and the Four Pillars of Children's Ministry.



Link it to: www.kidology.org/4pillars

What follows is a fuller description of what we mean by a biblical foundation and a broader explanation of each of these principles, followed by some practical steps you can consider as you seek to implement them in your ministry.

They are not answers, they are suggestions. They are possibilities to explore. To lay out a challenge and not provide guidance is not very helpful. For nearly two decades, I have been applying these principles in my ministry in a variety of contexts, while at the same time creating resources to help others do the same thing – often because there was a vacuum of available tools to do so.

My goal is to challenge, inspire, and point you in the right direction, whether or not any of the specifics described herein end up being the solutions that help you implement these principles into your ministry.

Likewise, if you write resources or create tools that help in the implementation of these principles in the context of your ministry, don't keep them to yourself. Consider sharing them on Kidology.org. You can be a part of helping to invest in the future of children beyond your own church!



The FOUNDATION Beneath the Pillars

For Pillars to stand strong, they must be standing on a solid foundation. If the foundation isn't strong, the pillars will be shaky and in danger of falling. What is our foundation in ministry?

The foundation ought to be the Word of God. While few would argue this, what does it look like in practice? How do you tell the difference between a ministry whose foundation is Scripture, and a ministry whose foundation is something else?

Obviously, no church would claim a foundation other than God's Word, but what about in practice? If Scripture is absent, or if the principles and decisions of their ministry are not based upon Scripture or as a result of the study of Scripture or verified by Scripture, then the foundation could very likely be something else. Like what?

- Business Principles?
- Marketing Strategies?
- Latest Leadership Book?
- Latest Popular Pastor's Book?

While any of these may be helpful and beneficial – and can complement a biblical strategy of ministry – they **MUST NOT** be the foundation of ministry if truly spiritual results are desired.

Our ministry strategy and the decisions we make need to be based upon Scripture. When our leaders, volunteers, and even children ask us, "Why?" regarding a decision we've made, a policy we've implemented, or a new idea we are seeking to promote, can we answer with some Scripture to support what we are doing?

The explosive growth we've seen in churches hiring children's ministry pastors and leaders over the past several years has been exciting and certainly a blessing to children. However, as the need has grown, many churches have had to hire lay people or professionals from non-ministry backgrounds. This is fantastic! However, most often they do not come with any formal biblical training. If that is you, it is not a reason to be intimidated or to feel inferior to those who have had that benefit, but rather it comes with a challenge to become an earnest student of the Word of God. Give it as much attention as you do children's ministry leadership principles and the kidmin resource marketplace.

A few critical questions for you:

1. Have you developed a theology of children's ministry?

That very sentence will intimidate many. "Theology" sounds like something for seminary professors, right? However, theology is simply *what you believe about God and everything else related to Him*. Perhaps you've never even heard of a theology of children's ministry. It's OK if you haven't! But let me ask you a few questions that help reveal why it is important.

- What happens when a parent tells you they don't believe that a child can accept Christ?
- What do you say to a pastor who says he won't allow children to be baptized until they are 12, because before that they can't possibly know what they are doing?
- How do you answer a parent who would like to have their infant baptized so that they can go to heaven?
- What will you tell the youth pastor who says that the salvation decisions of children "don't count," as he invites teenagers to come to Christ after the "age of accountability?"
- What would you say to an adult who wants to be baptized because he isn't sure if he was sincere enough when he came to Christ (or was baptized) as a child?
- What will you decide when a family asks you to do a pet funeral? Just kidding! (Though I was asked this question.)

These are just a few of the theological questions that I've had to deal with as a children's pastor. I'm not going to answer them here. My point is that they aren't answered with opinion; they are answered with the Word of God. Knowing ahead of time what you believe, what the Bible teaches (and where), and how you will stand on various issues is important. It is especially important to determine these things when you are objective, so that your study of Scripture is not influenced by what you'd like the answer to be. I remember as a young man in Bible college being challenged by a professor to determine my biblical position on divorce before I was married. He said if you wait until you want out of a marriage to study the Bible, you are likely to come to a

different conclusion, based upon what you want the answer to be. Likewise, your love of people (or pressure from them) can influence your decisions if you don't determine ahead of time a biblical framework for how you will run your ministry. Invest the time to study Scripture and develop your theology of children's ministry. It is critical.

2. Are your policies, procedures, and guidelines backed up with Scripture?

Let's assume you have established a secure ministry. (If you haven't, Kidology can help!) You have safety procedures in place, ministry policies, volunteer guidelines, and many other rules. These are helpful and important for a smoothly running children's ministry. Even Paul said, "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." (I Corinthians 14:40) But have you backed up those policies, procedures, guidelines, and rules with Scripture? If your ministry is based on the Word of God, you should be able to demonstrate that you aren't pulling things out of a hat. You are trying to establish a ministry built upon principles found in the Bible. We tell our children it is our "guidebook for life," but we need to demonstrate this to our adult leaders as well. In other words, walk the talk.

If you look up my "[Ten Standards of Excellence](#)" on Kidology.org, which are ten expectations I set up for all the leaders and volunteers in my ministry, you will find that each standard is backed up with Scripture. When I needed to confront a worker, it was not just that they broke one of "Karl's rules," but that they were not conducting themselves in a manner that lined up with what God expects of us. I am expected to follow those Standards of Excellence as much as my volunteers, because they didn't come from me, they came from the Word of God. There is a higher authority when our guidelines are based on Scripture. It's not very motivating to "obey the pastor," but all sincere Christians want to honor the Lord to the best of their ability.

Back your statements up with Scripture. Be in the Word, and as you read and study Scripture, you should have a secondary filter always running. Along with asking, "what is God teaching me?" you need to always ask, "What does this passage say about my ministry?"

Be willing to have fun with this principle!

In your nursery you might have a sign that reads, "*We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.*" I Corinthians 15:51

If you want the children to walk in the hallways, you can post some signs that say:

"What does the Lord your God ask of you, but to...WALK..." Deuteronomy 10:12

"Shouldn't you WALK...to avoid reproach?" Nehemiah 5:9

"Blessed are those who...WALK." Psalm 128:1

3. Is your curriculum rich in Scripture, and does it properly use the Bible?

A plethora of children's ministry resources are available today! It seems something new and exciting is coming out every month. This is as much a blessing as it is a danger. With resources so readily at our fingertips, we can become lazy in evaluating them – especially when they are easy to use and visually appealing. We can be so caught up in a new thing that will engage the kids, that we completely skip investigating its use of Scripture.

Choosing *flash* over *foundation* is never an acceptable trade. Here are a few things that are important to investigate:

How much Scripture is there?

Sometimes an entire "fun" unit contains only one Bible verse. Granted, there may be one theme verse or memory verse, but it's pretty weak to fill an hour of time with only one short passage, when Scripture usually has a lot to say on a topic.

How is Scripture used?

Allow me to get theologically technical with you. There are two basic forms of Bible study: exegesis and eisegesis.. *Exegetical* The first, exegesis, means to start with the text and "exegete" or, like an archeologist, "excavate" what the meaning of the passage is from the text. In other words, what did the *author* intend to communicate? The alternative is the exact opposite. While spelled with an "e," it sounds like an "i" and so the easiest way to remember *eisegesis* is that it sounds like "I" – it is where the *reader* starts with an idea and then goes to Scripture to look for support. My humorous examples above about the nursery and walking at church are perfect examples. It's obvious that's not what those verses are about, but they can be taken out of context to look like it. Those may be obvious, and thus they are humorous, but many times it isn't so obvious. Unfortunately, there are pastors who do it from the pulpit all the

time – often because they want to preach something true and look for a Bible verse to support it. One example is 2 Corinthians 10:55, which is commonly used to address purity, especially at men's retreats, since it says, "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." The speaker will point to that verse and conclude that when a man has a lustful thought, he needs to "take it captive" and then make his thought life "obedient to Christ." While this may be true, it isn't what the passage is talking about. A study of the entire passage will reveal that it addresses false teachers and false doctrine, not our thought life. But when you just use your iPhone or BibleGateway.com to look up "thoughts," you may find this verse and think, "Wow! That's a great verse on thoughts!"

Curriculums do this very same thing. Often they are intended to teach children a virtue or some other principle. However, while the principle may be true, the writer will pluck a Bible story or passage out of the Bible and force it to teach something that it wasn't intended to teach. The original author would be surprised to see the use of his words, since they have been applied in a way he never intended.

Why is this dangerous? The way we use Scripture is the way our children will. When we misuse Scripture to prove a point and they accept it, without learning how to properly study the Bible, we set them up to be led astray by others. When they are older, another teacher may also use Scripture the very same way – incorrectly – to lead them away from Jesus!

Consider teaching your kids my units, [How to Use Your Bible](#) and [How to Study My Bible](#), so that they aren't just receiving lessons, but making the Bible their own!

How much of the Bible does it cover?

Does the curriculum have a thorough scope and sequence that takes your students through the Bible, or does it focus on topics or simply use the Bible for proof-texting without any strategic overview of the Bible?

Do kids need their Bibles?

We teach children that the Bible is important with our words, but what do our actions say? Do your children need to bring their Bibles to church? Does your curriculum or your teaching require the children to use their Bibles?

Going a step farther, do your lower elementary children know the books of the Bible by memory? Can your upper elementary children look up a Bible verse without help or the table of contents? Do you have any children who have marked up, underlined, and well worn Bibles? (worn from use, not abuse!)

In summary, your curriculum can be part of the solution or part of the problem. If you are using a curriculum you like but it is weak biblically, the good news is that you have a Bible! You can fill that deficiency. Add a "Bible Drill" of related Scriptures or "beef up" the lesson (a biblical reference: Hebrews 5:13-14) with more solid teaching even as you enjoy the related creative elements that may have come with the materials.

Firming Up Your Biblical Foundation

Children learn more by what they see than by what we say. If we say the Bible is important, but they rarely see Bibles, they get a message that doesn't match our words. God's Word needs to be the FUNDAMENTAL BASIS of our teaching. We may use puppets, object lessons, media clips, illusions, and you-name-it, to creatively teach and engage children, but these must never become a replacement or substitute for teaching with and out of a Bible. ONLY THE BIBLE HAS GOD'S PROMISE OF EFFECTIVENESS. Yet, the Bible itself has become a rare object in many children's ministries today.

While the Bible may be quoted in PowerPoints, illustrated in videos, taught through object lessons, and acted out in puppet shows or skits, the Bible itself is mysteriously MIA in many churches! (Missing IN ACTION!) Some do not even have them available in state-of-the-art resource centers. Don't let this be your church.

No matter how attractive your ministry facility is, how innovative your program, how creative your teaching, if you are neglecting to teach kids the value of God's Word by example (teaching with it and from it) *you are teaching them a lesson*: that the Bible really isn't that important.

Kids learn by what they *see* – they need to see teachers who are teaching with and from an *actual* Bible. In addition, children learn by what they *do* – reading in and from an *actual* Bible.

If the only Bible they see is in PowerPoint slides and cartoon reenactments, it is no wonder that when they outgrow children's ministry, they outgrow the Bible too.

STEPS FOR ACTION:

- Start reading your own Bible regularly, outside of lesson prep (if you don't already). As it impacts your own life, you will have a passion to share its wisdom and insights and power with those you teach! Talk about things God taught you through the Word in your quiet time.
- Teach with and from a Bible when you teach. You can even print your lesson plan on a half sheet and keep it in the Bible so the children constantly see you picking up and looking into the Bible. Even if you are reading notes, the visual message is that the Bible is guiding your lesson.
- Encourage kids to bring their Bible to church. Reward them occasionally with a treat – not every week – but occasionally so they know that bringing the Bible is important.
- **HAVE KIDS USE THEIR BIBLES** as part of your teaching. Don't put every verse on the screen, just the reference or first half of the verse. Have them look it up. The awkward silence or pause in your "momentum" is worth it!
- Have kids stand up and read passages for you. Have someone there with a microphone if you have a large group.
- Do Sword Drills on the topic of your lesson. If you have a very large group, choose 8-10 kids to come on stage to participate. This not only gives them practical experience looking up verses, it shows them that the Bible has a lot to say on the topic. You can give 4-5 sentence teaching moments after each verse read.
- Give Bibles to visitors or to any child who doesn't own one. Personalize it with a message from you about the importance of this book.
- Encourage kids to ask you questions about the Bible as they read.
- Provide reading plans or bookmarks to the children; reward progress as they read.
- **PRAY** and ask God to give you creative ideas on how you can make the Bible more central to your teaching and programming.

God's promises if you build your ministry on a foundation of His Word:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:10-11

The best way to get God into the hearts of kids is to get His Word into their hearts!

"Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"" Jeremiah 23:29

If you truly want God's power in your teaching, don't just quote His Word – USE His Word!

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

We live in a day and age when there is no end to the new and innovative resources for children's ministry (and that's a good thing!), but it just may be that the *next* best thing for your children's ministry is to return to an emphasis on the Word of God – in practice, not just in word.



PILLAR ONE: A Child-Centered Ministry

Child Centered. God loves every child, and therefore we accept them and love them, just the way they are. Children who need special attention are lovingly welcomed. Our environments are kid-friendly, engaging, and educational. Our volunteers strive to understand a child's perspective and to make the message of Christianity relevant to the life of a child. We have fun, but it is fun with a *purpose!* Therefore, our teaching is creative and engaging and connects with the world of kids in order to help them connect with God.

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22

One of the hinderances to Jesus' ministry was that people knew him as "the guy from Nazareth," and being from that little town wasn't exactly something to boast about. In addition, wasn't he that guy whose mom (hushed tone) *got pregnant before they were married?* Yeah, he's that one.

Wouldn't it have been more strategic for the Son of God to just arrive on the scene a little more dramatically? You know, part the sky and come down on a chariot of fire and declare the Plan of Salvation? Why come as a kid, and a poor kid with a questionable back ground on top of it?

Could it be that Jesus' desire to "know our sufferings" included understanding children? Jesus could have made a grand entrance as an adult – much in the same style as when He left for heaven. From one perspective, some might say this could have helped his reception as the Messiah. Instead, He chose to come as a child. Jesus chose to grow up within the culture. No one could say of Jesus that He didn't 'understand' or had never 'walked in our shoes.' The book of Hebrews teaches us that He suffered and was tempted in all ways as we are. He *knew* the people to whom He was ministering, not only as their Creator, but as One who had experienced life first hand as well. Perhaps this made His ministry more difficult, but it certainly made it more effective. Ministry to children is not much different! You need to be willing to get into the culture of children and minister to them from within that culture. Yes, this will make ministry more difficult! Some will even misunderstand and accuse you of untrue things (being immature, childish, a clown, etc.), BUT your ministry WILL be more effective!

Having a child-centered ministry means that, like Jesus, you will minister to felt needs.

The multitudes that Jesus was ministering to were in desperate need of spiritual salvation and freedom from the bondage of superficial religion and the eternal consequences of trying to work themselves into God's favor. However, their focus was more on their temporal aches and pains and political struggles. Jesus could have rebuked them for worrying about the wrong things and tried to redirect them toward the things that truly mattered in the scope of eternity. But instead, He graciously and patiently chose to attend to those temporal concerns, all the while drawing them to the things they should be thinking about. The same is true in a children's ministry! Are kids often thinking about spiritual things? Their eternal destiny? How they can please God in day-to-day life? The salvation of their friends? Probably not. It's more likely that they are thinking about toys, television, or the next time they will get to play outside or some other activity that is fun and eternally irrelevant! That's OK. Let's be honest, are adults much different? It is the children's minister's job to accept those 'less than spiritual' concerns and, while addressing them, continually draw the kids up to the more important eternal concepts they should be thinking about. That is why church needs to be fun, but it is strategic fun with a purpose. It is not merely entertaining, but rather engaging the kids in order to lead them on to more essential concepts.

What Does a Child-Centered Ministry Look Like?

There probably isn't a children's ministry that doesn't desire to be child centered. But what does this mean when it is put into practice? What does "child centered" mean when the 'rubber meets the road' so to speak?

In short, it is a prioritization of what is important for the sake of the children, not the adults. When a decision must be made, the final choice will be determined by what is best for the long term benefit of the children, not the adults. The children's pastor or leader is the advocate for the children. This does not mean that children are making decisions, but that their best interest is always fought for. The children's ministry budget is no longer 1% of the entire church budget, because the return of spiritual investment is 32% according to Church Research done by George Barna.* Children's Ministry enjoys a prominent position in the church because it has grown to become one of the leading ministries. Why? Because the church realizes how central it is to turning around the diminishing Christian world view in our culture – and kids themselves are drawn to the ministry because they find it a place where they are loved and where learning is both fun and life changing.

It is a place where families are surprised and delighted by their experience as they discover that children are important, kept safe, and welcomed no matter what. The ministry is organized, well thought through, and prepared for various situations that naturally arise in every ministry. The touch of children is visible everywhere people look, and kids are seen AND heard throughout the entire ministry, not just off in a children's wing, kept away from where "real ministry" takes place.

A child-centered ministry will even have children serving and in places of leadership in the children's ministry, since real discipleship includes training kids to serve Christ now, not "when they grow up." The reason many adults do not serve in the church is because they were "trained" as young people that serving at church is something other people do, especially the "professionals." Young people who serve learn early on that serving in your local church is just something you do, as naturally as going to church.

** According to the Barna Research Group, there is a 32% greater change of a person coming to Christ between the age of 4-14 than any other age. The percentage drops to 4% during ages 14-18 and climbs to only 6% for the rest of adulthood. Yet churches will invest the bulk of their resources in the areas of ministry that have a return of investment of 4-6%. When senior pastors finally grasp this, they will often increase the children's ministry budget over time. Buy your pastor George Barna's book: [Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions](#) to help win him over to investing in children's ministry.*

Making Your Ministry More Child Centered:

Here are some questions to consider as you seek to make your ministry more child centered:

Is Your Ministry Secure?

No ministry would claim *not* to care about the safety of its children, but how safe are the children at your church? This is a serious issue in our culture today. As secular organizations lock down their programs, child predators have turned their attention to churches, which often have very lax procedures for how children are checked in and out of ministry programs. Even more common are situations in which a parent does not have custody of a child, or even has a restraining order against them, and tries to use the church as a place to acquire access to a child. An innocent child will greet such a parent with, "Daddy!" and an unknowing volunteer might hand over the child, only later to find out from a distraught mother that the father was not to have access to the child. One lawsuit over such a security issue can be devastating to a church. Likewise, an abuse incident, or even an abuse *accusation* that was unfounded, can be devastating to a church and forever damaging to an individual. Churches must take measures to secure their children, screen their volunteers, and put a hedge of protection around their church.

This book's purpose is not to lay out how to secure your ministry, [but Kidology.org can help you greatly in this area](http://www.kidology.org). Search 'child security' on the website, and you will find an [extensive document](#) I put together based on research I compiled while working on my Masters in Children's Ministry. You will also find a sample manual from my past church ministry, which you can use as a template. Kidology.org offers exclusive discounts on background checks and child check-in systems through partnerships we have brokered in order to make these important services more affordable. With a well thought out plan and smart policies in place, a church can make sure that their ministry is safe, not only for the children, but for their volunteers as well. This is an important part of being child centered, as it lays a foundation of safety that protects the children and give parents assurance that the children's ministry values their children.

Is The Facility Kid Friendly?

When children enter the church, what catches their eye that says immediately, "We love kids here"? If the entrance can't be immediately super child friendly, have a banner or "kids information center" that points them to the stuff for kids that is elsewhere in the building.

What do the hallways communicate? School? Storage facility? Prison? Even if you can't do a fun thematic ministry environment, you can make it clean, colorful and child friendly with posters, banners, and other creative elements. Mobile churches or facility renters just need to be creative – try helium balloons on weights leading the way to their rooms!

What do the classrooms communicate? Are there interesting things to catch their eyes? Engaging things to get their hands busy?

Do not make the mistake of thinking you need a million dollar facility to have one that engages kids and is kid friendly. An inner city church can do it just as easily as a spoiled suburban church. Kids aren't impressed with how much things cost. They are impressed with relationships and whether someone is there to enjoy it with them. Stacking cardboard boxes can be just as engaging as the latest video game console, it might even be better!

Is The Teaching Kid-Culture Relevant?

Boring lessons put kids to sleep and communicate that God is no longer relevant. A child-centered ministry is going to have teaching that is fun, creative, and engaging. Kids won't be merely sitting and listening to lectures. They will be laughing while they are learning. In small group settings, they will be doing things with their hands and out of their seats – engaged in the learning process doing skits, making crafts, writing, playing games, and whatever it takes to get them learning by doing. In large group settings, there will be kids brought up on stage to help, kids helping with the worship, kids on service teams, and games that engage the entire audience so that it isn't just kids sitting and watching. While videos can play a part, they should be minimized in preference to live people talking and teaching. Children can't have a relationship with a DVD player. A video can't love them. Media can't introduce them to Christ or model Christian living. Media can complement but not disciple. To be child centered, use human beings as much as possible. No child will ever share that a video made a difference in their life; they will always share the name of a person.



PILLAR TWO: A Highly Relational Ministry

Highly Relational. We strive to be relational, not just informational. While we creatively teach important spiritual truths to our children, we understand that building *relationships* with children is the most effective tool. Throughout all of our programs, we seek to connect children with loving adults who know and love Jesus, understanding that this will be more effective than any program, product, or lesson ever will be.

“As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;” Luke 24:15

Imagine getting a brochure in the mail: *Salvation Conference – O’Hare Hyatt – Jesus, God’s Son, lecturing on God’s Eternal Plan for the Salvation of Mankind. Admission Free. Come ready to study the prophetic Old Testament Scriptures and the Types of Christ that point to the Soteriological Position and Role of Jesus! Woo Hoo!*

Yeah. Right.

Not many people would be drawn to a training seminar on Semitic salvation, and that is why Jesus didn’t come and undertake an educational ministry but rather a relational ministry. Jesus came to this earth, born as a child, grew up within the culture, ministered to felt needs, and made friends whom He then made into disciples to carry on the ministry after His redeeming work on the cross.

Yet, so often we try to minister to children through a primarily educational ministry instead of a relational ministry. Yes, Jesus had a message to communicate and did a great deal of teaching, but He delivered His eternal message within the culture and within a relational context. In Children's Ministry, we must do the same!

Remember the words to the old classic hymn, *"And He walked with me and He talked with me, and He told me I was His own. And the joy we shared as we tarried there. None other has ever known."*

Jesus knew the power of a relational ministry. He "tarried" with people! He spent the bulk of His time *with* people. He didn't create a logo, a brochure, or a website or found a ministry. He simply spent significant time with people, His disciples, pouring into them and training and mentoring them. When His time on earth was done, they were the ones who turned the world upside down. Throughout history, it has been men and women who in turn poured into others who have continued this pattern. Ministries and programs come and go, but relationships are the thread that runs through them all.

The church today spends a great deal of time and energy and money trying to turn out disciples through large group 'events,' and what are the results? We hear over and over how teens and college kids are leaving the church. "The proof is in the pudding," as the saying goes.

If you want to see the solution, you have to look no further than the ministry of Jesus. He did 'large group' ministry too – teaching on the hillsides, right? But what made the difference long term? He spent the majority of His time pouring into a small group of just 12 men. There is a place for fantastic large group events that draw kids and families, yes. However, real, long-term ministry results happen when you pour the bulk of your time and energy into relationships. Specifically, when you disciple a small group of kids and leaders.

Only *relationships* will make a long term difference in kids lives. *No program* will introduce kids to Christ. Let me repeat that: NO PROGRAM, NO PRODUCT, NO CURRICULUM will guide kids into a genuine relationship with Jesus that will last into their teenage years. Only a PERSON can do that.

—> If a child doesn't have a PERSON who PERSONALLY introduces them to Jesus and PERSONALLY guides them into getting to know Him (other than a parent), they will stray from Christ until such a time as a PERSON guides them BACK to Jesus.

It's THAT SIMPLE – and THAT DIFFICULT.

A Highly Relational Ministry Means...What?

If relationships are important, then intentional effort will go into thinking through how to create, foster, and grow them in your ministry. Time must also be allowed for friendships to be made and fostered. Programs can't be so packed with activities that children and leaders never have time for social interaction. Planning needs to include times for interaction and relationship building. Some events need to be designed simply for relationship building and strengthening, and every event ought to allow "down time," when relationships can blossom and grow.

Things as simple as name tags can help people get to know each other, and planned greeting times during classes or services with thoughtful (and fun) questions for kids and leaders to ask each other can help friendships be made and deepened. (See the Connect Time in DiscipleTown for samples.)

Following up with visitors by mail, e-mail, phone, and even in person is highly relational. Birthday cards, e-mails, and home visits are highly relational. Hospital and home visits to kids who are sick or having surgery are highly relational. Attending school, sporting, or theater events of your students – or doing birthday parties – is highly relational. Hosting "[Sack Lunch Sundays](#)," where kids stay after church just to eat and play games and hang out with the pastor and volunteers is highly relational. Sport Stacking with Speed Stacks is highly relational. Overnights are highly relational. Taking over a restaurant with ten families (with kids) after church on a Sunday afternoon and then sitting with all the kids is highly relational. Noticing when kids are absent and calling to see why they were gone is highly relational. Asking for prayer requests, praying for them, and *then following up later* to see what happened is highly relational. Putting important dates like birthdays, anniversaries, or date that a parent died in your smart phone and calling a year later to say that you know what today is, is highly relational.

Being highly relational means noticing the kids and their needs and putting them above the program. When I was offered my first paid ministry position at a large church in downtown Chicago, I was offered the position of "Coordinator of Children's Ministry." I politely said I was not interested in coordinating children. The church had a pastor for adults, youth, singles, seniors, missions, and even for worship – but they wanted to 'coordinate' the children. As graciously as I could, I said I would accept the position if I could be the pastor of the children. I had no interest in coordinating children or

programs. Ministry is about people, not programs. It is about relationships. I became the first Pastor of Children in the history of the church, and one of the first in the country, as children's ministry was taking root across America. In children's ministry, you'll certainly end up doing some coordinating, but that must come second. We coordinate programs only to facilitate an environment where relationships can be fostered and grow. Never let the programs become the end game. If you do, you will lose not only your effectiveness, but also your joy in the ministry.

Relational Ministry Notices Kids

In a highly relational ministry, the focus is on individuals, not groups. This means that systems are put in place to make sure that individual children are treated as individuals and not merely as members of a group.

They are noticed when they are new.

They are noticed when they are missing.

They are regularly contacted.

I use a simple form in my ministry called my "Relational Ministry Contact Sheet," and I simply keep track of every child and the relational ministry contacts I've had with each of them during each quarter. Have they gotten a phone call? A note in the mail? A visit? How have they been contacted or related to beyond "normal ministry impact," understanding that "normal ministry" does not have much impact by itself.

The Lost Art of Home Visitation

I have noticed a "trend" that I think is a great loss for the church. It is the trend away from home visitation. Social networking may have many benefits, but it isn't real or genuine when it comes to relationships. It is a substitute. In some contexts, it is better than no contact, but nothing can replace visiting a home and seeing a family and a child's home experience. The Kidology Handbook covers in detail how to do home visitation, what to do when you are there, and what to observe. One of the greatest and most effective relational tools will always be visiting people in person, whether it is visiting their home or enjoying a meal together. Be one of those rare leaders who spends TIME with people. As someone wisely quipped, "How do you spell love? T.I.M.E."

You Don't Have a Recruiting Problem...

You Have a Relationship Problem.

So You'd Like More Volunteers? A Relational Ministry will also transform your recruiting!

I have some hard news for leaders. This may come as a shock to some. You may need to sit down. Get a coffee or tea or soda...whatever you enjoy. But you need to hear me on this. *There is a Grand Canyon of perception between why you serve in children's ministry and why most volunteers volunteer.*

You? You love kids! You knew long before Barna that there is a 32% greater chance of them coming to Christ if they are reached before the age of 14. You know Jesus said we ought to come as a child, not hinder the children, and that he blessed the children. You feel called to children's ministry. You read Roger Field's *The Calling*, and it gave you goosebumps, and you nearly cried because THAT'S YOU. You would serve if no one asked, no one noticed, and no one said thank you. Sure, you'd have your little pity party when no one was looking, and you'd whine to your spouse a little...but you'd never quit. The kids need you, and lets be honest, you need them too.

But this creates a little problem for you.

You see, you assume that others are this way, too. In fact, you are looking for and hoping to find others like this. I've got news for you. You may be the only one in your church. Actually, you may be the only one for a hundred miles!

Now, before you despair and cry "Woe is me!" – or get prideful – it's OK. I'm not so sure your church could handle two of you anyway...or even the hundred mile radius around your church. God spaced us out for a reason.

What does this have to do with recruiting?

EVERYTHING.

It has so much to do with it. You *have* to get this! So many children's pastors/directors/leaders don't get it, and that is precisely why they have recruiting problems.

Their problem isn't recruiting; they recruit just fine. They just don't *keep* volunteers, so they constantly have to be recruiting, and that gets harder and harder as the pool of potential recruits runs dry. Their problem is misunderstanding what their REAL JOB is and WHY those volunteers volunteered in the first place.

There is a HUGE, and I mean MASSIVE, disconnect between WHY YOU THINK YOU RECRUITED THEM and WHY THEY ACTUALLY VOLUNTEERED.

I know this because I was a full time professional pastor for fifteen years, and now I've been a full time unprofessional volunteer for five years. So now I've lived on the "other side" and discovered the disconnect, and it's startling.

People (let's call volunteers what they really are, PEOPLE) come to church longing for two things that are really the same thing: a connection with God and friendships. They are both *relationships*.

They complain that the church "isn't friendly." Right? So what do the pastors tell them? VOLUNTEER! "If you want friendships, don't just sit in the worship service," they tell these folks, "you must get involved."

So they do!

WHY do they volunteer? Because like you, they want to fulfill the Great Commission and bring little children to Jesus?

Nope. Sorry. 'Fraid not.

They want friends.

Period.

And they will give you MAX three months.

You want volunteers. They want friendships.

If they haven't made friendships, they are done. They will volunteer somewhere else, and somewhere else, and then somewhere else, or visit another church, until they make friends.

People are starving for FRIENDSHIP.

You are looking for VOLUNTEERS

See the DISCONNECT yet?

The secret? Stop looking for volunteers. Start making friends. You'll have all the volunteers you need. I look back over my ministry and now realize why I never lacked for volunteers. I had friends. Tons of them! I took them out to lunch – I used to fill Culver's almost every Sunday. Eventually, the owner gave me a BOX of "20% off on

Sunday” coupon business cards just to make sure I kept coming there. I partied with them. I visited them. I went camping. I played mini-golf. I had movie nights at my house. I forgot they were volunteers. They were my friends.

I hardly recruited. Of course, I had to at times, but I just made friends at every turn, and I had all the volunteers I needed.

Now, I go to church looking for friends. I volunteer to find friends. If I serve and no one talks to me, no one greets me, no one asks me my name, or shakes my hand, or treats me like a person ... if I'm just a volunteer, I lose interest. Even though I'm one of those Special Ops with all this passion and the biggest Kidmin website on the Internet, without a friend, I'm out of there. Sorry, but that's just reality. People need friends like a plant needs water.

If a lack of friendship can make ME lose interest, imagine someone who doesn't have any passion for kids ministry? Someone who is just a normal everyday non-Kidmin wacko?

What is going to keep them around? They'd rather be an usher or fold up chairs after service if it means laughter and friendship and an invitation out to lunch after church.

DON'T MISS THIS: The ministry with the most volunteers will be the ministry where people connect and make friendships. If you don't connect volunteers to yourself and each other, you will always be recruiting, over and over and over, because you won't be meeting the real need.

The need isn't to staff your rooms, it is to help the people who come to your church to connect with God and each other. Do that, and your classrooms will all be staffed by friends. I dare you to try it.



PILLAR THREE: A Gospel-Focused Ministry

Gospel Focused. We believe that children are important and matter to God. Not only can children come to faith in Jesus Christ, but God commands adults to come to Him with the simple faith of a child. We present the Good News of salvation through Jesus often and clearly, providing opportunities for children to invite Him into their life as their Savior and Friend. If resources lack the Gospel message, we will be sure to include it, for we believe that without saving faith in Christ, no other Bible lesson truly is applicable nor has eternal consequence.

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” Matthew 19:14

If indeed children's ministry is the ripest field in the spiritual battle for the hearts and minds of lost people, than we are on the front lines of the Cosmic Battle between God and Satan. Do you believe this?

If children's ministry has the potential to lead the most people to Christ, then it follows that our Enemy's strategy would most likely be to see that we don't share the Gospel! I fear he may be succeeding on many fronts.

While the explosive growth of children's ministry resources is exciting, it seems the growth of the Gospel has not kept up with it. Often, the Gospel can't even be found.

Kids may be singing about God, learning the Bible, and even loving Jesus, but if they do not come into a saving relationship with Jesus, it is all for naught!

I've often used the example of a couple who move in together but never bother to get married. They may share everything – their possessions, their money, even sincere intimacy – but if they never say, "I DO," and make that covenantal commitment to each other, they may appear to all others to be a married couple, but legally they are simply two separate individuals who are extremely friendly with each other. They have never entered into the permanent marriage relationship. Before God (and the court) they lack the benefits of some of its blessings, regardless of how sincere their intentions may be. Either could walk away at any moment.

People who attend church, do "church stuff," and even claim to "love Jesus," but have never said, "I DO," to Jesus, can find themselves in a similar situation with the Bride of the Church. He may someday be saying, "I never knew you." (Matthew 7:23)

We owe it to our children to make sure they have every opportunity to come to know Jesus in a real and personal way. We do them no favor by allowing them to think they are saved just because they attend church, sing church songs, and learn about the Bible. Our goal is not just biblical education, it is to lead kids into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Important Questions to Ask Yourself

- Can you explain the Gospel to children in a clear and simple manner?

The Gospel is not complicated. Too often we make the Good News of Jesus so confusing to kids, it is hard to understand. On the other hand, we do need to make sure that we are giving the complete message. I had an evangelist out to my church once who gave an invitation to our children that was no more than, "Come forward if you want to say 'Yes' to God!" I cringed because James 2:19 says that even the demons believe in God, and shudder! I followed up with each child one on one to make sure they understood the complete Gospel message. The word Gospel means "Good News." A Gospel presentation needs to include the "bad news" too – that we are sinners and deserve punishment for our sins and what Jesus did to pay for our sins.

While there are many presentations for sharing the Gospel, a common one for kids is:

A = Admit you are a sinner (Romans 3:23)

B = Believe that Jesus died for you (Romans 10:9)

C = Commit your life to Him (Philippians 1:21)

- How often do you share the Gospel?

When is the last time you shared the Gospel and gave kids an opportunity to accept Him as their Savior? What about your teachers and volunteers? Do you have a plan or policy on how often this should happen? Do you challenge your teachers to incorporate the Gospel into their lessons whenever possible, and especially when the lesson naturally leads that way? You could set up some guidelines such as a monthly invitation in your midweek club, bimonthly in your children's church service, etc.

- How often do you plan evangelistic events or outreaches?

If your goal is to lead kids to Jesus, do you intentionally plan special events to bring children to Christ? Granted, some events will be "bridge building" events to draw families to the church. While it is true that not every event needs to have an invitation, if every event your church does is now "bridge building," you may have gotten so seeker friendly that no lost person can ever come to Jesus. At some point you do need to share the Gospel.

- Do your materials and resources include the Gospel message?

One disappointing trend in the surge of children's ministry resources is the lack of the Gospel message in kidmin resources on the market today. Part of this is understandable, as publishers desire to appeal to a broader market of various denominations. While it may be a smart business decision that helps their bottom line, it can hurt the Kingdom when church leaders don't recognize the absence of the Gospel and fail to write it back in. This doesn't mean you shouldn't use these materials. They may be very creative and do an excellent job at teaching biblical content and life application. Just be sure that you don't neglect to share the Gospel. Remember, biblical application is intended for followers of Christ. Those who have never accepted Christ may benefit from biblical principles, but they won't enjoy forgiveness of sins or eternal life in heaven. Whose fault will that be? Not the publisher. It will be their pastor.



PILLAR FOUR: A Disciple-Making Ministry

Discipleship Driven. We recognize that Jesus gave one primary command when He returned to heaven: Go and make disciples. However, we believe that making disciples is not something that happens haphazardly in the course of church attendance. It should be approached with intentionality and strategy and with a focus on the individual. After the Gospel is accepted, children need a solid biblical foundation laid that will enable them to grow in wisdom and knowledge and character in a manner that will last a lifetime. Empowering parents and others to intentionally disciple children is a critical component of developing lifelong devoted followers of Jesus.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Matthew 28:19-20

Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus made primarily one command when He left? It was to make disciples. It wasn't to develop programs. It wasn't even to evangelize! Of course, that is the first step of discipleship, but like parenting, having a child only brings them into your family, then you must raise them! You aren't done when you have a kid. Bringing children into the family of God is only the first step. Like parenting,

making disciples is a lifelong process. Jesus made disciples who would carry on the work after He left.

In children's ministry today, you will often see a great focus on programs and special events. There is a place for this, but when you look at the life and ministry of Jesus, you will notice that while Jesus certainly ministered to the multitudes, He focused the majority of His time on a few men we know as the disciples. It was these twelve men and those whom they trained, that turned the world up side down for the rest of history. Without the development of the disciples, Jesus' ministry would have only been a great show for three years, and then it would have been forgotten. Instead, His ministry was the stone that was dropped to start a tidal wave of ministry that has only grown larger over time. His strategy for reaching the world was to pour into a handful of men.

All too often in ministry, you see people who put on a great show for a while – some fantastic kid's program, for example – and then when they are gone, all that remains are great memories of a wonderful time, instead of a lasting ministry. This doesn't need to be the case!

In children's ministry, it is essential that we continually build a team that will outlast us, not only in our particular church, but outlive us in life as well. This means training fellow adults and enlisting and equipping children to serve, too.

Often, leaders consider children's ministry and disciple making as one and the same, but this is a mistake. Children's Ministry is the broad administration of everything that encompasses the ministry to children in the church. It includes discipleship, yes, but it includes many other things as well. Children's Ministry, as you well know, includes the mundane and the seemingly 'unspiritual' – stocking the resource room, changing out the bulletin board, coordinating use of the TV/DVD players, and reordering craft supplies. The list could fill another eBook many megabytes in size.

Discipleship is the intentional process of developing a follower of Jesus Christ. Again, much like parenting, discipleship doesn't happen haphazardly. A child isn't raised merely by living in the home. Parents need to focus on what they want their children to learn, how they want their children to behave, and hopefully what kind of skills and character they want their children to develop. They work on providing a healthy diet, good social opportunities, and a great education, working with the school if not home schooling. In the same way, discipleship is a process of thinking through what a fully developed disciple of Jesus looks like, and then intentionally following a plan that will

guide children toward that outcome. It also involves healthy spiritual nourishment, great social opportunities to interact with other Christians, and providing a great biblical education. In the same way that parents correct and guide their children, through discipline, when they make mistakes, a discipler corrects and guides children as they learn how to follow Jesus. Just as living in the home is not enough to produce a healthy, well balanced, and educated child, so attending church will not produce a disciple.

If you want to have a Children's Ministry that produces disciples, you must have a disciple-making plan. If all you have are children's ministry programs, you may be doing many good things – providing quality child care, biblical education, and a healthy Christian environment – but you may not be developing disciples.

How can you tell the difference?

When they leave the church as teenagers.

If you are concerned with young people leaving the church when they become teenagers, then you had better start thinking seriously about what discipleship looks like. Because discipleship is NOT automatic. Children who come to every program are not automatically becoming disciples of Jesus. Granted, some MAY be, but I'm sorry to say, that is more likely because they are being disciplined in the home, not because of the effectiveness of the church programs. The harsh reality is that children can attend church and not become disciples of Jesus, because the definition of a disciple is a FOLLOWER of Christ, not an ATTENDER of Church.

Will you determine that your Children's Ministry will become a Disciple-Making Ministry?

Beginning with the End in Mind

What does a Disciple-Making Ministry look like? It is a subtle difference, and to the casual observer, it may not be readily apparent from looking at the building, the brochure, or the website. Why? Because it isn't about starting yet another program. (Whew! Right?) It is about having a different perspective on your "end game."

It starts with setting some goals for your ministry. It starts with asking yourself, and your ministry team, "What will a child look like when you are done with them? When we hand them off to the youth department? What will we have accomplished in their life? What will they believe? Know? Be able to do? What experiences will they have had? What spiritual disciplines will be habits?"

Before Jesus commanded us to TEACH, He commanded us to MAKE DISCIPLES. That ought to be our passion. We ought to be consumed with making disciples. We should spend time contemplating how to make disciples. We have a limited amount of time with these kids, and we should be thinking about how to use it to make disciples, not worrying about what we are going to do next week or what series we are going to buy online when our current one is over. We must be concerned with the overall health of our children.

It starts with wondering – actually worrying about – if they are saved, and making sure you present the Gospel often. Then it means asking yourself frequently, "What do I want to accomplish in the lives of the children under my care in the time that I have them?" and, "what kind of kids do I want to hand off to the youth pastor?"

What Does a Disciple Look Like?

Have you ever attempted to define "a disciple of Jesus?" If our goal in children's ministry is to produce disciples, what does one look like? Or rather, if only God truly produces disciples, and if we are to foster an environment where disciples can be formed, how do we know if we have succeeded? Take any business that produces something. Ask them what they produce, and they can show it to you. We are supposedly producing disciples, but can we show you one? Can you point to a kid who is a disciple of Jesus?

Of course, all children are in process, just like us. However, let's consider the ideal "Kid Disciples." You have six years with them in your ministry. I know you want them to accept Jesus as their Savior, but is that all? What do you want them to learn under your

care? What skills do you want them to acquire? What habits do you want them to form? Insofar as you can have an influence, what kind of kids do you want them to be, spiritually speaking, when they leave the kids ministry and head into the youth ministry? Have you ever asked these questions? A leader of a children's ministry who is also a leader of a disciple-making ministry lies awake at night thinking about these things. Anytime he looks at a new curriculum or resource, he looks at it beside a grid he has already created that answers these questions and then determines where it fits in, *because he has a MASTER PLAN for his children*. No, it isn't perfect, but it is a PLAN. It has holes, and it is constantly in flux. In fact, often the new resources and ideas he hears at conferences or reads in a new book or finds on the Internet are just what he was looking for to fit into a gap that he has in his plan – but at least he has a master plan. He has a goal. As the saying goes, "He who aims at nothing is sure to hit it!"

So this is your assignment. I'm not going to do it for you. Here are three questions you need to answer if you want to have a Disciple-Making Children's Ministry:

- 1) What **KNOWLEDGE** do Kid Disciples need to learn?
- 2) What **SKILLS** do Kid Disciples need to be taught?
- 3) What **HABITS** do Kid Disciples need to develop?

Don't let curriculum run your ministry. Curriculum should work for you, not the other way around. There may be things you want your kids to learn that your curriculum never covers. Find other ways to cover that material. Bible knowledge is incredibly important, but knowledge by itself is useless if it is not applied to life. I don't need to quote soon to be outdated statistics about the numbers of church going youth leaving the Church to convince you of the fact that Bible knowledge alone does not produce disciples of Jesus. There are Christian skills that disciples need to succeed in the Christian life. While [DiscipleTown](#) (which I write) covers 24 "DiscipleSkills" identified by Mark Steiner, you can easily identify Christian disciplines you want your kids to develop. Children need to be taught, not just what to believe, but how to live the Christian life on their own. You may list things as simple as knowing the books of the Bible or how to look up verses, to more difficult skills, like being able to share their faith with a friend. Finally, imagine your kids have all this vast knowledge and skills, but unless they have some key habits – or spiritual disciplines – it really won't matter, will it? This list may be shorter, but it is still important. Obviously, you want them to have a Quiet Time, but be more specific. As an example, mine was once a week in first grade, twice in second grade, and so on up, up to six times a week in sixth grade. That was

my goal. I didn't expect seven days a week until seventh grade. I just don't consider it realistic to ask a fourth grader to have daily devotions. I sure didn't in fourth grade. Nevertheless, I had a serious and vibrant walk with Jesus. I prayed before bedtime. So I set that as a goal for my kids. I set Scripture memory goals, by age. Consider these questions: Do they share? Do they give? Do they serve? How and at what age? Do they take sermon notes? Do they gossip? Do they tithe? Then ask yourself the more important questions: How do I help make this happen? What do I need to teach on? What opportunities do I need to create? What accountability or reward can I offer to measure success?

It's all about AIMING, and then measuring whether you are hitting the mark. As I Peter 5:2-3 says so well, "*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care...not because you must, but because you are willing...eager to serve...those entrusted to you...being examples to the flock.*"

God has entrusted these children to you. Be intentional in how you attempt to guide them toward becoming disciples of Jesus!

Developing a Church-Wide Disciple-Making Strategy

The good news is, there seems to be a rising tide of emphasis on disciple-making in the church. The question is, how do you bring all this talk into a reality in your ministry?

First, in his book [Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions](#), George Barna confirmed what those of us in children's ministry have known all along: The ripest spiritual field is children, and the most strategic way to stop the disappearance of a biblical world view in our church is to renew our commitment to children.

Next, in his book [Rock Solid Kids](#), Larry Fowler highlighted the biblical basis for churches not to just value children but to prioritize ministry to children. Others then followed with a renewed call to broaden the scope of children's ministry to include the entire family. The loudest voice was Reggie Joiner at the Orange Conference asking us to rethink ministry, offering their virtue-based family time resources and strategy to incorporate complete families in the Sunday church experience.

Then [Awana Clubs](#) – long known for its success at reaching unchurched children and providing kids with a solid biblical foundation – surprised us by dramatically altering its approach. It confessed its longstanding "let us disciple your kids" attitude was insufficient and began to completely reengineer its programs to better include parents in the process.

Soon many more, like Julia Duin in *Quitting Church*, began revealing stats showing just how poorly we are doing at translating Bible Quiz Whiz Kids into faithful disciples when they get old enough to choose whether to attend church or not. While [DiscipleLand](#) has long offered a comprehensive home-based, church-supported curriculum strategy for discipling children, other companies all over the map are waking up to the need to engage the home rather than just continually adding to the programs and resources available at church. "Family Ministry" and "Partnering with Parents" are the buzz words appearing everywhere.

Then Larry Fowler was back with a strategy to build a comprehensive birth-to-high school strategy for preparing the next generation to be spiritually strong and healthy, to be "[Modern Day Josephs](#)" in an increasingly secular culture.

Most recently, [D6](#) (Deuteronomy Chapter 6) has splashed on the scene offering not only an annual [conference](#) but a family-wide church curriculum that includes devotional magazines from preschool through adulthood, aiming to get the entire

family in sync with what they are learning at church while they are having devotions in the home.

Everywhere you look, from workshops at the [Children's Pastor's Conference](#) to the newest children's ministry leadership books, there is a growing call: The spiritual formation of children must be done by parents, not for parents.

The church's role is shifting from one of serving and supporting parents to one of empowering, equipping, and encouraging parents. If you can't feel the wave growing, you've either let it pass ahead of you – or should see the swell rising behind you.

To best "surf" this growing ministry wave, you'll need to carefully watch the swell growing, letting some of the smaller advance waves pass, position yourself in the best spot, start paddling in the right direction, and get ready to start pushing down at just the right moment. Soon you too can stand up and ride it in!

Perhaps you are convinced already. Children's Ministry "as usual" isn't cutting it. You have to better partner with parents if you truly want to see children transformed into spiritual champions and "Modern Day Josephs." The question is, how?

Let me tell you this. The answer isn't another curriculum, resource, or program. That doesn't mean you might not switch to DiscipleLand, send home FamilyTime CDs, encourage the use of D6 devotional magazines, establish new programs, or plan various family events. However, these cannot be your solution. They can only be components of YOUR strategy.

The solution for your church begins with you and your pastor. As I wrote in "[The New Deal](#)" – an article in the Jan/Feb 09 issue of Children's Ministry Magazine – and expounded upon and detailed in my Kidology Leadership Lab, [Partnering with Parents](#), the key is to start with a brutally honest and open conversation with parents about what their needs, desires, frustrations, struggles, and hopes are for their kids and how they see the church helping or hindering their efforts.

Next, you have to step back and ask yourself those three key disciple-making questions about *every age level* in your ministry:

What **KNOWLEDGE** do I want them to have?

What **SKILLS** do I want them to have?

What **EXPERIENCES** would I like them to have?

KNOWLEDGE: Obviously, there is a great need for teaching children the Bible and the truth it contains. Most ministries do this fairly well. However, few can give you an overview of their strategy for ensuring what their students will or should know at the various stages of growing up. A genuine strategy for forming disciples requires that the organizer of the process knows what the long-term goals are. Again, as the old saying goes, "If you aim at nothing, you are sure to hit it." Now extend this to families: What knowledge do families need to be successful? Do we run the risk of filling our kids with a whole host of biblical trivia and neglect giving families the knowledge they need in order to translate what the children are learning at church into real life? Perhaps it is time to get out paper and pencil and start writing out what you believe your families need to know to succeed, and then start evaluating whether they do, how they can, and how you'll evaluate if they do?

SKILLS: My experience has been that the vast majority of churches—if they focus intentionally on what their children need to know—stop there. But knowledge alone does not make a disciple. A disciple is one who lives out the knowledge of God in their daily life, and to do so requires key skills. Bible skills, while often taught to children, are only the beginning. We all learned to drive a car while young, but we would all agree that there is much more to driving than operating a car. Likewise, being able to navigate a Bible is useless if one doesn't know how to study, understand, and then apply what is discovered to life. Have you listed, by age range, what you want your children, youth, and parents to be able to DO as followers of Christ?

EXPERIENCE: The third aspect touches on one of the weaknesses of church programming. In the creating of programs and planning of events, we are often quick to forget the *purpose* of programs and events. They are not the end; they are the means to the end. The goal of a church ministry is not to create programs or events, it is to create life experiences that impact the spiritual growth of the individuals enrolled in the program or attending the event. This is an important distinction, because not all experiences that a disciple needs along their spiritual journey can be programmed or created via an event. Programs and events can only create a context for life experiences. So, again, I challenge you to invest some time in asking and answering the question: What *experiences* do the children, youth, and families of my church need to grow as disciples of Jesus? One of the best things you can do for your ministry is to mentally set aside all your programs, events, and plans and answer the questions above. Then, after having answered them, take a look at your programs, events, and plans and consider the following:

- What is the best thing I could *stop* doing that doesn't fit these objectives?
- Does my curriculum support these objectives? (Beyond just teaching Bible knowledge.)
- How do my standing programs help or hinder these objectives?
- What events do I need to create in order to provide the needed life experiences?
- What events do I need to cancel because they may be good but are no longer on target?
- What experiences can no program or event create? How can I foster those experiences?
- How can I help families develop the skills they need to keep growing?

In order to develop a ministry-wide strategy of making disciples, you must not only *include* parents in your considerations, but *make them an essential ingredient*. This will take effort, creativity, and a willingness to accept – even initiate – change. "Ministry as usual" is certainly easier, but if long-term results are what you are truly after, then you must be willing to make adjustments now. If only one degree of change now can have incredible results in the long term, imagine the eternal impact of being more strategic now. Most ministries probably need more than one degree of change, but we'll have all eternity to enjoy the results if we don't hesitate. It all starts with asking the right questions. The answers to these questions will be different in every church. But if you don't ask, you'll never enjoy the results.

The Power of One-on-One Discipleship

I need to conclude this book with a personal challenge that can transform your ministry. Many will resist this challenge initially and push back with the defense that they simply do not have time for this.

However, let me assure you, you do. It is simply a matter of priority.

One-on-one discipleship (or one on two if you meet with two disciples) can become the single most powerful and most effective aspect of your ministry long term. Hear me on this. What do you want to be remembered for? Running great programs? Or changing the life of a child? I have never received a thank you note from a child about a great VBS or a super overnighner, as fantastic as I think they were. But I have sat across the table from a young man at a restaurant, after filling out his Bible college reference form, and asked him what made him decide to give his life to the ministry. He simply pointed at me. That is the result of discipleship. I had a mother tell me at her daughter's wedding that when the young couple first started dating, she asked her daughter why she chose this young man, and she said, "Because he reminds me of my kids pastor." That is discipleship. Nearly every child I have discipled is in the ministry or in Bible college today. Those who aren't are in godly marriages and are fully involved in serving God in the local church. They are devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Intentional Discipleship means choosing kids that you will meet with and journey with, and making sure they know Jesus and know the basics of the Christian life and are equipped to walk with God for the rest of their lives. My wife and I wrote a tool to help do this called [Awesome Adventure](#), and it contains 12 lessons that cover the basics of the Christian faith. But whether you use that or another similar tool, or simply meet with them to talk, pray, study God's Word, and work through your own goals for what you want to cover, it can make the difference between a life of aimlessness and a life devoted to Jesus Christ. I had a discipled named Ralph Hines, who met with me in high school. He answered my questions, challenged me, and trained me as a young disciple. He didn't use any formal tool that I can remember, just the Word of God and things he wanted to talk about each time we got together. The end result was a young man who took his walk with God and calling very seriously, and who didn't see ministry as something he needed to wait until he was grown up to do.

The fact of the matter is that one-on-one discipleship is the single most effective ministry in the church...every time it is tried.

So what does One-on-One Discipleship look like?

First, you need to learn how to *choose kids to disciple* and how to approach them about being disciplined. You must also realize that you can't disciple every child in the church, so you'll need to be a recruiter of disciplers AND challenge PARENTS to disciple their own kids as well!

BUT WHO SHOULD YOU DISCIPLE?

Look for kids whose parents are not Christians or not mature Christians. You can play a significant roll in their life. However, the far other end of the spectrum is important too. Kids with very strong Christian parents need an influence outside the home to reaffirm what is being taught in the home. This can be the difference between whether or not they follow in their parents' faith.

Look for kids who are in need or experiencing crisis—a child whose parent is dying or whose parents are going through a divorce, for example. Rather than just getting together to talk about that issue, focus on the lessons, but be sensitive to when they are ready to talk about the needs in their life and family. Children of single parents could really use someone to come alongside them, and their parent would really appreciate it too – single moms with boys especially appreciate a man reaching out to their son. Be alert as well to kids that demonstrate great spiritual potential. Train them for ministry, but also develop their character, which is of equal importance for a life of serving God.

As far as what tool to use to guide your time together, you can use my *Awesome Adventure*, of course, but any tool that covers basic Bible doctrine and spiritual disciplines and has a focus on Scripture memory will work. It is the *relationship* with you that is the most important.

What do you DO at the meetings?

At the first meeting, spend most of the time getting to know them and explaining what discipleship is. Share your testimony of how you came to Christ. Explore whether or not they are a Christian. Share the Gospel if it seems unclear if they have a genuine relationship with Jesus, but there is no need to press it. You'll have time to let that unfold naturally. Ask them if this sounds like something they would enjoy doing, and show them the material you would like to go through. The advantage of the book is that it provides a natural close to the process so they aren't signing up for a never ending

meeting. They can start something that they can finish and feel like they accomplished something.

If they agree to the discipleship, do the first lesson together, then assign the next lesson and a memory verse and close in prayer. Don't let it go too long. You know the kids ministry principle of "stopping while they still like it," right? It applies to discipleship as well!

At your second meeting, review the last lesson and talk about the lesson they did on their own and see if they have any questions. Quiz them on the memory verse. You can either do the second lesson together again, looking up the verses and talking about them, or do the next lesson together. You can re-do each lesson together to reinforce it, or do every other one together and at home. It is all depends on the process, knowledge, and interest of your disciple. Another key is to talk about the application of whatever you are studying.

At your subsequent meetings, review anything from past lessons and review ALL the memory verses, and then focus on the last lesson. When the memory work gets to be a lot, pick some verses at random or use some games to review to make it more fun. Let your prayer times grow as the relationship and discipleship grows to be more meaningful and intentional.

BE ALERT for special needs – be willing to drop the lesson when things pop up that are more important. Remember, the lesson is a guide, it is not the purpose. Discipleship may mean setting the lesson aside to deal with an issue in their life, to look to God's Word for an answer, to pray, or to simply listen and care. EMPHASIZE for them that this is not about finishing a book, it is about APPLYING these thing to life. The rest of life won't have a workbook, but it will have more trials and opportunities to apply the things you are studying in the book.

If you hit a spot where the disciple isn't doing the work or loses interest, be willing to STOP if necessary and challenge them to return when they are ready to move on. You won't do them any favors if you allow them to finish a book weakly or with little enthusiasm or effort.

When you complete the book or reach the end of the time you've agreed with them to meet, make a big deal about their graduation. Recognize them at church somehow. Consider giving them a significant gift, such as serious study Bible. You may even want to take them on a trip or out for a steak dinner! Before you complete your time

with them, ASK PERMISSION to hold them accountable, and as a fellow disciple, allow them to hold YOU accountable too.

You will gain lifelong friends and the opportunity to pour into their lives for years to come. You have no idea the impact you can have on these kids when you become a One-on-One Discipler!

A Final Word from Karl Bastian

So what am I trying to communicate in this eBook? Have you gotten the message? On the final page you will see a list of resources available from Kidology that can help you implement these Pillars. As one of the very first children's ministry websites on the Internet, Kidology.org has grown over the years to host literally [thousands of helpful articles and resources](#). Folks connect daily in our [Facebook Group](#) on hundreds of topics related to reaching and teaching kids. In addition to my [podcast](#) and [online training videos](#), we offer one on one [personal coaching](#). There is an [online store](#) offering endless resources from over 100 vendors and even a place [YOU can sell](#) your used resources.



But don't let these offerings distract you from the fact that successful ministry is NOT DEPENDENT on any of these tools. They certainly can help, and that is why they were created and why they are offered by Kidology and other resource providers. However, the Kidology Way can be pursued without spending a dollar! The Four Pillars of Children's Ministry stand independent of any product or program. Resources serve these Pillars, not the other way around.

Your focus needs to be first and foremost on creating a ministry that is creatively child centered, highly relational, Gospel focused, and discipleship driven, built on a foundation that is solidly biblical.

If do you do this, you will see long-term results in the spiritual lives of the children to whom you minister. How can I know this? Because it worked for Jesus, and I've seen it in decades of my own ministry as well.

If products, programs, or people can help further those principles, use whatever financial means you have. But when you don't have the means, remember, Jesus had none of the tools we have today. He had no electricity, no Internet, and no computer. He wasn't able to shop online. He attended no conferences, published no resources, and wrote no books. All He did was become one of us. He was highly relational. He shared the Good News. He made disciples. And He followed Scripture.

Go and do likewise.

Pillar Resources

Here is a list of Kidology Resources that can help equip you as you seek to apply these principles to your ministry. Remember, these resources are only tools, they are not the solution. The key is to wrestle with these mandates and figure out how to apply them in your ministry setting. If these tools can help, I'm glad. If something else helps, let me know!

The Kidology Way:

Child Centered

[The Kid's Church Cookbook](#)

Highly Relational

[The Kidology Handbook](#)

[It's About Relationships](#)

Gospel Focused

Check out [10-7-31, The Code of Life](#)

Discipleship Driven

[Awesome Adventure - Age 6-9](#)

[Awesome Adventure - Age 9-12](#)

[Awesome Adventure - Leader's Guide](#)

[Next Steps for Kids](#) ([Student version](#) as well.)

Built upon a solid biblical foundation.

DiscipleTown - [How to Use the Bible](#)

DiscipleTown - [How to Study My Bible](#)

DiscipleTown - [How to Meet with God](#)

DiscipleTown - [How to Navigate the Old Testament](#)

DiscipleTown - [How to Navigate the New Testament](#)