

Discipleship & Spiritual Formation for Children

By Andy Kirk



THE CALL TO INVEST IN THE NEXT GENERATION

An important but sometimes neglected area of ministry is the discipleship and spiritual formation for children.

In Matthew 19:14, Jesus makes it clear that children are integral to the Kingdom of God. Yet, in our busy ministries, it's easy to see children's discipleship as secondary to adult-focused programs.

What if we recognised that the spiritual seeds we plant in the hearts of children today will grow into the fruit-bearing disciples and leaders of tomorrow?

Discipleship and spiritual formation are lifelong processes. It doesn't start in adulthood; it begins in childhood. Kids are not too young to understand the love of Jesus, embrace His teachings, and start practicing their faith in real ways.

Research from OneHope identifies three essential points for fostering spiritual vibrancy in children:

• **Spiritual Knowledge**

A strong foundation of biblical knowledge helps children navigate life with a biblical worldview. Knowing God's story—the overarching narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration—gives kids a sense of purpose and identity in Christ.

• **Spiritual Practices**

Regular habits like prayer, Bible study, and worship help children internalise their faith and experience God personally. These practices are not just rituals but pathways to a vibrant relationship with Jesus.

• **Spiritual Community**

The Church and other faith communities provide a crucial support system. A child's spiritual journey is nurtured through mentors, role models, and a sense of belonging in a group that loves and serves God together.

When these three elements converge, they create a spiritual vibrancy that sustains children through the challenges of life.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND THE CHURCH

Parents are the primary spiritual influencers of their children. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 charges parents to diligently teach God's truths to their kids, weaving faith into the fabric of everyday life. Yet, according to Barna research, while 73% of parents believe they should be the primary spiritual leaders, only 53% feel equipped to do so. This gap presents a critical opportunity for churches to step in as partners in discipleship.

Imagine what could happen if pastors, children's ministry leaders, and parents worked together to intentionally disciple the next generation!

OneHope's Global Youth Study in Australia revealed that *only 3% of young people aged 1-18 qualify as committed Christians* when measured by six key traits. This data is a wake-up call. If we want to raise a generation that loves Jesus and lives out their faith, we must prioritise both spiritual formation and discipleship. This requires intentional strategies that connect what happens at church with what happens at home.



PRACTICAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S DISCIPLESHIP

Having the right tools can make a significant difference in children's discipleship and spiritual formation. Here are a few highly effective, practical resources that churches and parents can use to engage children in their faith journey:

Bible App for Kids

Developed by YouVersion, the Bible App for Kids offers an interactive, story-based way for children to explore God's Word. With colorful animations and engaging narration, kids can learn Bible stories in a way that captures their imagination and helps them retain biblical truths. It's perfect for use at home, Sunday school, or as a supplement to family devotions.

> [Download from the App Store](#)

Kids Bible Experience

Built into the YouVersion Bible App, the Kids Bible Experience is designed specifically for preteens. It provides daily devotions, relatable content, and interactive prompts to help older children connect scripture to their everyday lives. This resource is ideal for helping kids transition from basic Bible stories to a deeper understanding of God's Word.

> [Use via YouVersion Bible App](#)

Bite Size Bible

Created with younger audiences in mind, Bite Size Bible delivers scripture and biblical teachings in small, digestible portions. This is perfect for busy families and kids who may struggle with longer attention spans. The bite-sized approach makes it easier for children to reflect on scripture and apply it to their lives in practical ways.

> [Go to \[thebitesizebible.com\]\(http://thebitesizebible.com\)](#)

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

- **Teach Foundational Truths Early** Start with the basics—God's nature, the story of Jesus, and the Bible's authority. Use age-appropriate methods like storytelling, art, and play to make these truths engaging and memorable.
- **Model Faith** Children often learn more from what they see than what they hear. Encourage parents and leaders to live out their faith authentically, demonstrating prayer, worship, and service in daily life.
- **Encourage Ownership of Faith** Provide opportunities for kids to explore their faith through personal prayer, scripture reading, and ministry involvement. Let them experience the joy of serving others and seeing God work through them.
- **Build Strong Church-Home Partnerships** Equip parents with resources to disciple their children at home. This could include family devotion guides, workshops, or small group support for parents.
- **Create a Welcoming Community** A thriving children's ministry fosters a sense of belonging, where kids know they are valued and loved by God and their church family.

ETERNAL IMPACT

Discipling children is not a quick-fix program; it's a long-term investment with eternal returns. As pastors, we have the privilege of shaping the next generation of Christ-followers. By prioritising discipleship and spiritual formation for children, we are building a legacy of faith that will outlast our ministries and transform communities for the Kingdom.

We are called to guide this journey that begins in childhood with intention and faithfulness. Let's build strategies, empower families, and disciple children with the urgency and passion that the gospel demands. Together, we can nurture a generation that loves Jesus and lives for His glory.

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