

Philosophy of Children's Ministry

Whitton Avenue Bible Church

April 2008

Some of the last words Jesus spoke on earth were the following: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). With these words, Jesus gave a mission to his followers, which flowed from a grateful compulsion to tell others about the beauty of the gospel: Go and make disciples.

Though our mission is to make disciples, there are many different methods to accomplish such a mission. In any missionary method, going is central to reaching the nations, because proximity is key to making disciples. Disciple-making is not an easy process. It requires years of investing in people and being within reach to answer the hard questions, helping them walk through the trials of life.

As a church, we affirm the value of the mission field yet also recognize that most of our members are not living in a foreign country amidst an un-reached people group. But there are people we come in contact with everyday, whether at work, school, or around the neighborhood. We believe God has already established relationships around us and that these have the greatest potential for disciple-making. In fact the people we likely spend the most time with is our family. Thus there is no more important place to be thinking about making disciples than in our own families, and especially with our children.

As parents, our children are our primary mission field. This is in part because the Bible calls children a "gift" from the Lord (Ps 127.3). They have been given to us for a season so that we may equip and launch them like "arrows in the hands of a warrior" (Ps 127.4). All Christian parents should be working hard to do all they can to invest in their children spiritually during this brief season of influence.

But our children are also our primary mission field because the Bible indicates that teaching our children the Scriptures and modeling an authentic love for Jesus is more important than any other ministry activity in which you could be involved. Paul makes this clear when he describes elder qualifications in I Timothy 3.4-5, "he must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" Paul sees a man's spiritual influence in the home as the best measure of his ability to lead the church.

The privilege of discipling our children is an essential part of parenting, but it can also be a daunting endeavor. How does one go about such a task?

Biblical Instruction

The Bible does not leave us guessing about how to make disciples of our children, giving us guiding principles in both the Old and New Testaments. First, in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is told to "teach [the words of the law] diligently to your sons and... talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up... so that you

do not forget the Lord” (Deut. 6.7,12). The instruction here is to be constantly talking about the Scriptures, teaching them throughout the normal routines of the day.

The New Testament charges fathers to “bring up [your children] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6.4). Fathers are to take the lead in the spiritual development of their children – not depending solely on the church to fulfill this responsibility.

How We Apply These Commands at WABC

Our goal is to foster an atmosphere where parents believe in and embrace their role as the primary discipleship influence in the lives of their children. This does not mean that the church body has no role in shaping our children. Rather, it means that both the parents and the body at large understand the role they play in the discipling of children.

What we desire is that parents would so capture a vision for discipling their children that they would no longer depend on the weekly worship meetings to be the primary source of spiritual nurturing and shepherding of their children. Our goal is that the activities of the church would support, encourage, and complement, rather than replace, any intentional disciple-making that is occurring in the home.

With that as our foundation, and recognizing that parents have the greatest spiritual influence on their children, especially during the formative pre-teen years, we desire for the following to occur with the children’s ministry at Whitton Avenue Bible Church:

- To develop programs that intentionally equip parents with resources and training that help make the home the primary source of spiritual development of children.
- To develop such programs without becoming program driven, and instead see all programs as one means of fostering the authentic spiritual growth of the parents and children. As a result, we will strive to constantly evaluate the effectiveness of any program towards this end.
- To discover and provide resources that are specifically geared toward helping young families intentionally teach the Scriptures in the home.
- To provide encouragement and appropriate levels of accountability for parents through methods such as mentoring relationships and small groups. Such vehicles can provide a place for parents to share ideas and support one another in their efforts to disciple their children.
- To encourage parents to be constantly pursuing the gospel on their own and praying for wisdom and opportunities to teach the gospel to their children.
- To have an atmosphere and church schedule that encourages times of family teaching and worship in the home. Having an abundance of activities in the church can actually hinder family intimacy by pulling families apart. We desire to manage the church calendar in a way that gives every family enough margin for developing an effective time of family worship.
- To utilize children’s Sunday school curriculum that complements the effort of parents. We also desire that all children’s curriculum emphasize the centrality of God in all things as

opposed to having a man centered or moral principle centered approach to teaching the Bible. We want our children to understand that the entire Bible is about a big God who does big things and can be trusted in any situation.

- To encourage parents to integrate the lessons taught at church into their times of worship as a family. This includes the integration of lessons that are taught to parents and children in separate classes (during the Sunday school hour), and the lessons that parents and children experience together (during the sermon).
- To encourage an atmosphere where children are valued and esteemed in their role in the weekly worship service.
- To encourage fellowship between families so that relationships are built and that young children are being influenced by other Christ centered families on other days than just the weekly worship gathering.

We believe that these ideas help express the 'action' of a vision for equipping our children to be committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

Outreach to Children

We also recognize that not every child attending Whitton Avenue Bible Church has parents that are committed to helping their children become disciples of Jesus. Thus we seek to create opportunities to invest in the lives of these children and teach them the gospel. One such means of accomplishing this occurs during the Sunday school hour and during the junior church services. These small groups provide a place for us to get to know the kids that are brought to us and a place to begin to disciple them. We also want to encourage godly families to take a proactive role in the lives of those who do not have godly parents. Our prayer is that the families of Whitton Avenue Bible Church would share a deep burden to seek out the parents of such children and minister to them through whatever means God may provide.

The Challenge

The American church is surrounded by a culture that seeks quick solutions, immediate results, and expects that a good business plan can solve almost any problem. Though there is value to such an approach in much of the business world, and even in some the efforts of the church, the spiritual growth of people is not an exact science. There is no precise formula for building a godly man or woman, it is a process that takes time, energy, prayer, and the influence of many godly mentors. In the same way, successful family worship, Scripture training, and disciple making is a function of time and effort.

We recognize that every family is a unique combination of a variety of personalities, differing levels of spiritual maturity and interest, encompassing a wide range of ages. The challenges to worshipping together as a family are numerous, but no great task should be avoided because of the challenges. Our prayer is that the Whitton Avenue family would long for the day when the majority of families in our church would be actively engaged in pursuing the gospel together on a daily basis.