

Empowering Your CM Team To Be The “Living Bible Curriculum”

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It’s About Jesus, Not The Lesson Plan!

Too often, because of the time constraints during a regular church service, children’s ministry (CM) team members feel pressured to complete the lesson before the parents come to pick up the children. While this is a logical goal, it is not the most critical goal! Making spiritual connections with the children is far more important than flying through the lesson plan!

Jesus was a master example of this awareness. He was a busy man, with hundreds of people “pressing in” on Him on a regular basis. He had a “lesson plan” to accomplish, and yet He often took time to deal with a single person’s need or question. His “big picture” lesson plan was not about completing all His planned sermons, it was about making life-changing connections with people. An excellent example of this perspective is found when He was on His way to heal the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue leader. (Luke 8: 40-56) As He was on His way, a woman “touched Him.” In verses 42-47, Jesus stops to engage a woman whose needs forced her to “touch the hem of Jesus’ garment.” Jesus’ conversation with the woman is an excellent example of a wise teacher taking a break from progress toward the “lesson goal,” and dealing with an individual’s needs. The woman’s life would never be the same because the Master teacher paid attention to her.



You may spend many hours and hundreds of dollars establishing the “perfect curriculum,” but ministry is more than a published set of lesson plans! It is about people! Children will not remember the great lesson plan that a CM team member employed!

When the children get into the family car at the end of the service, their parents will most likely ask their children two questions, “Did you have fun?” and “What did you learn?” Very few children will respond with a detailed overview of the printed lesson; but many children will talk about the adults in the room, what they did, and how nice it was to be there. These comments are all about something that goes beyond the printed curriculum! These qualities of a successful time in CM are all about the CM team members: the “Living Bible Curriculum”!

Teens Are Fleeing Jesus!

Studies have proven that **“40 to 50 percent of all youth group graduates fail to stick with their faith or connect with a faith community after high school.”** This is a very sad fact. The severe implication from these statistics is that the teens never really had any significant, personal connection with Jesus in the children’s ministry or the youth ministry.

(The Barna Update, “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years.” The Barna Group, September 16, 2006; George H. Gallup, Jr., The Gallup Poll, 2006; and Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, “Souls in Transition” New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Most people “come to Jesus,” or develop a “personal relationship with Jesus,” through a personal connection with someone who is a Christian friend or a significant influence in their life. Some people do accept Jesus privately, but even those people need a healthy connection to supportive friends or a church fellowship. If this is true, then what we do in the CM must involve more than simply “going through a lesson.” If teens are fleeing the Church, it is probably not all the fault of the youth ministry, it might be mainly the fault of the CM! This can be a very confusing fact for us in the CM. As Dan Lovaglia says in his book “Relational Children’s Ministry”:

“Children’s ministry leaders are crying out: ‘We created outstanding programs. We taught great information. We saw good behavior. We showed up faithfully. We sent home support. We gave so much. What did we miss?’ We are missing the transformative power of relationships!”

Focusing on the curriculum over focusing on the needs of the children may be “missing the mark” in the CM. Yes, curriculum is important, but it should be viewed as a “tool” to help us build relationships. Strong relationships based on God will help children “remain in the faith” long after their parents stop forcing them to attend church. In their book, “You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church – And Rethinking Faith” David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins say,



“The relational element is so strong because relationship is central to disciple-making – and as we’ve said, the dropout problem is, at its core, a disciple-making problem.”

Being “The Living Bible Curriculum”

1. **Pray** for the children. The more you pray for the children, the deeper your awareness of, and interest in their needs will be. Pray for them by name. Pray for their home life, school challenges, fears, interests, etc. Challenge every CM team member to bring a child’s name and needs to each CM team meeting. Corporately pray for the children, and celebrate what God is doing in their lives. This discipline will help change the CM “culture” from being lesson-focused to being child-focused.
2. **Train** your CM team to be interactive with the children. The lesson time should include movement, laughter, questions, discussion, and emotional “transparency.” Pray for God to use you to change the “normal” lesson presentation from “lecture” to interactive conversation.
3. **Take “bird walks”** during the lesson for the sake of a child’s question or comment. Don’t be so tied to the lesson that you don’t step away from it momentarily. Ask God to help you connect these “bird walks” to the lesson topic. This technique, used by Jesus, makes you “real” in the children’s minds. Don’t be afraid of telling the children that you have those same thoughts or questions. Be real!
4. **Celebrate** CM team members who use the curriculum as a “springboard” or guide only. Compliment them and tell their stories during CM team meetings. Let them give testimony to how wonderful it is to connect with children rather than “finish a lesson.” Consider using these team members as mentors to other team members.
5. **MBWA** (Ministry By Walking Around) – As often as possible, walk around the CM during the service. Ask God to help you see team members who are making connections with children. Look for smiles, close contact, eye contact, personal attention, complimentary interactions (“high 5’s,” etc.) with children, etc. Compliment the team members either immediately (if it doesn’t disrupt the



ministry environment) or right after the service. Compliment them corporately during CM team members.

6. **Compliment** the children to their parents during check-out. Letting the children hear you say good things about them to their parents will elevate you to a higher level of significance in their minds.
7. **Casual conversations** during craft times, snack time, trips to the restroom or drinking fountain, or any time that seems appropriate. To casually talk with children about the lesson, about their homework, or about their pets builds relationships. Make these casual conversations “two-way” and not “one-way.” Talk about your own life as you listen to them talk about theirs. Ask God to help you “work in” the things of God into the conversations.

