

4 Keys to Effective Ministry to Young People (Part 1)

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Preacher: Bill Salier

[0 : 00] Great, excellent. Well, look, thank you for the opportunity to come and talk. I've been talking with Brian and Greg, and it feels like you've got really good kind of ministries here. So I'm kind of wondering, I hope what I'm going to say is not totally redundant. I think, I hope you can add to what you're doing as we think about it.

People in a church often say, what do we do with the children? You know, parents come to church and they bring children. What are we going to do with them? And some churches I've been in see children as a massive distraction. People won't listen to the sermon. You can't have kids running around making noise.

So somehow you've got to get rid of them. So that's why we have a children's ministry, to get the children out of the service so the adults can get on with the real Christian business. And I was in a church like that once and it wasn't great. As to say, some people think the children are the church of tomorrow.

And so we've just got to kind of hold on to them until they get old enough to be a full grown church. Other people look at children as kind of an evangelistic hook. I'm not sure if that's a thing, but I know a number of ministries, one very famous one in South Africa particularly.

They just ran vacation Bible schools. They ran kids ministry and they attracted kids in order that they could get to the parents. So they were using children like the bait on the hook, throwing it in the water and hoping the parents would kind of grab it and then focus.

[1 : 28] All of these are really focusing on children as a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. And so I want to say, as I said, well, no, that's not the Bible's view.

The Bible's view is that children are and can be and are disciples of Christ right now. And so what you're doing is really, really important. And it's even more important when we consider some of the statistics about youth and children's ministry.

These are mainly Western and I'd be interested to see if it's the same in Kuchin. But we find out that about 80% of Christian people have made a commitment to Jesus before the age of 18.

And that's because they've been brought up in a family or a kids ministry. In other words, their first encounter with Jesus and that significant encounter of giving their life to Jesus happens when they're young at this age, between the years of zero to 18.

And there's something about childhood years and young adolescent years that makes people open to ideas. And as people get older, they tend to maybe get a bit more close that's there.

[2 : 44] So, you know, that's an interesting statistic. And if people paid a bit more attention to that, they might pay more attention to youth and children's ministry because that's where you can really ground young people in the Christian faith if that's where they're making commitments.

The second statistic that certainly comes out of the Australian context is that every time there's a transition, so the transition between primary school and high school, the transition between high school and kind of university or college, and then all to work, there's a big drop-off of people in the Christian faith.

And sometimes that can be as much as 60 or 75% in our culture where children were in the faith and then apparently have left the faith at those significant points.

And so that, again, puts the emphasis on thinking about not only children's and youth ministry, but children's and youth ministry as part of the whole life cycle of the church.

How do you manage those transitions so that people can successfully move from the Sunday school to the youth group, the youth group to the young adults group, the young adults group to the

adult Bible study or whatever system that we've got.

[4 : 06] And so some churches experiment with graduations. So when you finish Sunday school, you graduate, and then you maybe spend a little bit of an interim period going along to the youth group if it's on a different time.

Lots of different ideas, but to try and think of the life cycle of the church and how you can move people successfully through one side to the other to stop this kind of a drop-off.

And then, of course, it also begs the question of how can we be more effective in our teaching to ground people in the faith so that when those moments come, they automatically think, I should stay rather than I should go.

And sometimes perhaps it's the shallowness of the teaching or the fact that we've just been basically child-minded that maybe accounts for that as well.

Anyway, so all of this is just to really simply say that what you are doing is really important. Always good to meet. When I first became a Christian, back in, you know, well, a long time ago now, the first thing we did in our discipleship was to get involved in youth and children's ministry.

[5 : 13] So I started teaching Sunday school, got a whole bunch of training, ended up leading youth groups for many, many years, and that was a really important part of the training.

And all the way through, I was told that what I'm doing is really important, that ministry with young people, children, with youth is really important.

And the church I'm at for the moment has really bought into this as well. We think this is essential and it's one of the big planks. In fact, another study, I'm talking about a lot of studies, that we did a study of what makes an effective church in our context.

And we've got a whole bunch of factors. The top two factors for what makes an effective church, a growing church, a lively church, was, first of all, a senior minister who prays a lot.

Now, they seem counterintuitive, but they ask people, you know, how often do you pray and do you regularly pray? And there was a correlation between an effective church and a senior minister who prays.

[6 : 18] Now, that should not surprise us because God answers prayer and all the rest of it. But that was an interesting one because people were thinking, well, big car park, big budget. You know, they're thinking all sorts of factors, but a minister that prays.

Second factor was a lively and thriving youth in children's community. That was one of the key factors in an effective, growing church, where deliberate attention was paid and time was put in to children's ministry, to youth ministry, alongside some of the principles that we're going to be talking about today.

So, you know, all of that is to say what we're doing is really important. And I want to say also the Lord Jesus thinks it's really important. So we're going to have a look at two passages very briefly, just to orient our thinking.

I'm pretty sure they're going to be well known to you. But anyway, let's have a look. So the first one is Matthew 18, verses 1 to 5. And this is the Lord Jesus.

His disciples come up to him. At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child to him and placed a child among them.

[7 : 36] And he said, Truly I tell you, unless you change and become my little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lolling positions of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. So here we see Jesus uses a little child as the example of what it means to be a true believer.

Now, it's pretty hard to think of something more important than that. So he doesn't point to the Pharisee or to the priest. He points to the little child as the example of what it takes to enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is how much Jesus values children. And that does a couple of things for us. It forces us to think, What is it about a little child that is an example to us of that?

What is that? And I guess we need to understand what it means to be a child in Jesus' culture. The child in Jesus' culture was often underestimated, neglected and disregarded until they became an adult.

[8 : 53] They were really not worthless, but certainly not worth a lot. And they were not noticed.

They were helpless and they were weak. And so therefore they were disregarded. And Jesus says that helpless and weak is exactly the way that we ought to come to him as a little child.

People often think, Oh, they're talking about innocence or humility. But it's really helplessness and weakness that is the posture that we come to Jesus and we are accepted as a little child.

We recognise that like little children, we are helpless, we are undeserving, and yet we enter into blessing because of God's goodness and grace to us.

And the child shows, in that culture, a person totally without merit, though loved but without merit, who is able to come into the kingdom.

[9 : 57] So that's the first thing we're reminded about, the posture of the child. But the second thing is that if we think about it, if we're dealing with children all the time in our ministry, therefore before us is constantly that example to us of what it means to be blessed in the kingdom.

So you are really in a blessed position because you're dealing with children who are showing you what it means to be like into the kingdom. Now, that may seem like a long way away from the children you deal with because children can be a real pain in the neck, right?

They don't do what you tell them. They fidget. They talk. They answer back. They, you know, do our cooperatives and all that kind of stuff. None of that, of course, is an example of how to enter the kingdom.

But sometimes we can overlook because of all the frustrations with children, we can overlook the blessing it is to work with children that they are an example to us of how to enter the kingdom.

So, yeah, that may be an encouragement. Let's have a look over at chapter 19, verses 13 to 15.

And just again, another incident. It's interesting. Jesus, Matthew puts these pretty close to each other.

[11 : 09] Verse 13, chapter 19. The people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

They tried to stop the children coming. Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not think to them. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. And when he placed his hands on them, he went from there.

But this incident comes a little bit out of the blue in the Gospels and it's in Matthew and Luke as well. Very simple scenario. Jesus is a respected teacher and people want to bring their children so that he can bless them.

It's all there. The disciples try and stop them. I wonder why. Why would the disciples try and stop them? I think they think that the children are unimportant and that Jesus has more important things to do like that is talk to adults.

So they bring children to get in the road of real ministry. But Jesus completely denies that teaching and says that in fact, the little children belongs to such as these.

[12 : 15] He's picking up on earlier things. But the kingdom of heaven belongs to children. And so the point is very simple. Children have a place in the kingdom of God.

Now, I know there's lots of discussion about can children have a conversion experience? What kind of faith they express and all the rest of it. Jesus doesn't seem to have any of those discussions. He seems to be saying the kingdom of God belongs to children as well as to adults.

He seems to understand that children can be believers as well. And therefore, they can be disciples as well. And we'll see next week how Paul also agrees with that.

But so all of this is by way of saying what you are doing is really important. It's important in a statistical world-beehive context.

But more importantly, it's important because Jesus values it. And so I know children's and youth ministry can sometimes be very frustrating. Sometimes it feels like you're banging your head against the wall and nothing you say is getting through and all those kind of things.

[13 : 20] But in God's goodness and grace, children are important. The ministry is extremely valuable. And I hope you feel encouraged and honoured in the church, if not this morning as well, that you're doing it.

And I count it a privilege to be here to be able to speak with you about this. One of the great things of the time when I was at YouthWorks, I was the principal of that college for seven years.

All of our students were between about 20 and 23. And they were all doing youth ministry and children's ministry. They were employed for maybe one or two days a week.

And they were given a full-time job description to do in two or three days. And then they would come to us and study for two days a week. So they were incredibly busy but incredibly dedicated. And it was a real kind of example to me of sacrificial ministry.

Unappreciated often because of all the things we've been talking about. But it was such an encouragement for those years to do that. And they only did that because they knew that what they were doing was important.

[14 : 27] They heard the words of Jesus. They understood what the scriptures are saying. And they worked with all their heart to do that. So anyway, so what you were doing is important. And I'm going to say the same thing next week.

And remind you again that that's the case. Now, our question this morning is, what does effective ministry to young people look like? Now, I've said young people because I'm covering children and youth.

But I understand most of you are really dealing with children under 12. Is that fair? Is that true to say? Is anyone here involved in youth ministry as well? Okay, there are some as well.

So I'll keep talking about young people. And I'll try and avoid either saying youth or children. And you'll have to forgive me if I slip into that. We'll try to talk about these general principles.

The organisation I work for, YouthWorks, was set up initially to do a number of things in the Sydney Diocese, the Anglican Church of Sydney.

[15 : 24] We have a whole bunch of properties where we run camps. We have an outdoor education program for young people, where they go into the bush and they do all sorts of things.

We have a publishing arm where we publish resources for children's and youth ministry. We run a training college, which is a Bible college at the diploma level, specifically for people who want to be youth and children's ministers.

And so we teach a normal curriculum, but all our assignments and all our teaching is geared towards the fact that the people in front of us are doing youth and children's ministry.

And then we also have a whole bunch of advisors who work with a network of youth children's and youth ministers and they do training and all the rest of it. All that is to say that this is a heavy investment in youth and children's ministry.

I think it's important. And lately, some research has come out of all of that about what makes effective youth and children's ministry. And I want to share some of that with you, not because I think it's the law for everyone all around the world, but I want to offer it to you and see whether it resonates with your situation and whether there are things here that can help us all to think about our task.

[16 : 40] Okay. So this is the model. Okay. We're going to talk about four keys to effective youth and children's ministry. It is gospel-centered.

It is discipleship-focused. It is intergenerational. And it is loving. And what I'm hoping to do is we'll look at the first two this week and then we'll look at the second two next week.

Okay. Breaks down into those seven areas. So again, I've mentioned intergenerational ministry. I don't know if that phrase means anything to you, but we'll talk about that next week. Word ministry, gospel-centered.

Evangelism and mission, gospel-centered. Collaboration between churches and people. Healthy workers, leadership development, and family ministry.

So we'll be talking about these elements through the whole. And I'll put the little model there on your sheet there in case that will help you to think about it. But we're going to talk about these four areas.

[17 : 41] Gospel-centered, discipleship-focused, intergenerational, and loving. First two today. Second two next week. So let's think about gospel-centered ministry.

Again, I don't think I'm saying anything new and surprising to people here. But what we're saying is that our ministry is centered around the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I want to think about what that means. What does that look like in practice? And I think it's always good to be reminded about this because so many different things can distract us.

And sometimes gospel ministries start out as being gospel-centered but end up focusing on other things. So let me explain what I mean. Now, there are some common ideas.

A friend of mine calls them myths about ministry to young people. Ministry to young people should be cool, charismatic, and young. That is, youth like youth ministers.

[18:44] They don't want old people around. And children like young people. They don't like old people around. And not only should you be young, but you should also be charismatic, kind of wild, with lots of games and energy and running around the place.

And it's even better if you can be cool. And usually if I try to be cool, I just put on a pair of sunglasses. It doesn't really work. But this is the idea that you're looking for a certain type of person.

And youth in children's ministry is done by a certain type of person. The second idea that people have is that youth in ministry to young people should be young person-centered.

That you're focusing on the child or the teenager and their needs and trying to meet those needs. Now, that may sound, yeah, okay, that sounds right.

But we'll come back to this in a moment. And we're saying that, of course, we are ministering to young people. But that doesn't necessarily mean that our ministries are young people-centered.

[19:49] And I'll explain what that means in a moment. It kind of comes out in the next part.

Ministry to young people is either gospel-focused or welfare-focused. And this is really comparing with youth and children's ministry in the government or the secular space, particularly in Western countries, where youth workers are all about trying to alleviate youth poverty, youth mental health, youth suicide, youth depression, youth anxiety, whatever it's going to be.

The main aim of a youth ministry, a children's ministry, is to bring about healthy, mentally and physically young people.

And to look after their physical needs. And I notice this sometimes when I go to particularly some youth ministries in Africa, around African countries.

Because of the poverty, they are very much focused on feeding their children, which they should be. Of course they should be. But is that the main game of the ministry?

Or is that something that flows out of the main game of the ministry? They're very focused on trying to also teach their young children, or all their children, their teenagers, good morals.

[21:10] Basically, stop sleeping with other people and getting pregnant, unwanted pregnancies and things like that. And so that's welfare-focused, because it's a morality which is good for a person's life.

It's not necessarily gospel-focused, though there's a relationship. So these are three ideas that kind of float around different areas. You might have your own ideas here in the future, I don't know, about what ministry to young people looks like.

But that idea of cool, charismatic and young, young person-centred, either gospel-focused or welfare-focused, that's the kind of, some of the threads that are floating around.

Now, having said that, you want to think a little bit about what does gospel-centred ministry to young people look like? Three kind of ideas.

First one, Jesus is Lord, not the minister, and not the young people. So instead of focusing on young people, our ministry will focus on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22:20] Now, again, that will seem blindingly obvious, perhaps, but it's a very easy thing to slip focus away from. The gospel is powerful and effective.

That's what brings a person into a relationship with God, and that's what drives all the changes we would like to see in a person's life. So gospel effort is what we do.

So, and that begs the question of how does God work in the world? Well, a very simple understanding of how God works in the world is through his powerful word and in the power of prayer.

And so, you know, Christian ministry, if it's nothing else, is a ministry of the word of God, have a ministry of prayer. And that will be exactly the same for our youth and children's ministry.

It's a ministry of the word of God. It's a ministry that's supported and backed by faithful belief in prayer. So if nothing else is a youth leader or a children's leader, you are a person who is a person who's committed to the word and can understand that that's how God works to bring about people into his kingdom and change.

[23:32] And you will only realise that you can do anything because you are totally dependent upon God, and that's expressed in your prayer for your people. So that's one thing.

So Jesus is Lord, not the minister, not the young people. Secondly, the power of the gospel means gospel effort. Now that means that we do two things at once.

We hold two thoughts in our head. We know that God is absolutely sovereign, that we can do nothing apart from him. John 15, that's what he says to the disciples, you can do nothing apart from him.

We know that God is the one who changes hearts to bring people into a relationship with him. We know that God is the one who works in people by his spirit to transform them from ever increasing degrees of glory to glory.

It is all the work of God. But we also know that God works through the patient, hard, enduring work of his people who do the work of the gospel.

[24 : 39] They proclaim God's word. They disciple people. They pray. They plan. They write curriculum. They figure strategies. They do all sorts of things. And they do that knowing that God is sovereign.

Both those things fit together. So this is one of those areas where we always have trouble holding the balance and holding the two things together. Because we're not saying it's 50-50.

God does his bit and we do our bit. We're saying it's 100% us and it's 100% God. So we work with all our might because God is at work in us to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Philippians chapter 2. So we do that. And that means that we have a gospel confidence. So when you teach, I don't know, you've had one of those lessons, you give a lesson, no one's listening, you walk away thinking, why am I even bothering?

I've had that experience many, many times in the classroom and in Christian ministry. But we are confident that God is working through his work. Even if it doesn't seem to be working, we know that God is at work.

[25 : 48] And what I'll do after that class is I'll do a bit of an evaluation. What could I have done? What could I have done better? And I'll try and improve gospel effort. So we've always got the balance between confidence in what's going on and thinking about how we're doing our job and can we do it better.

And I'm assuming that's why we do this morning because we're thinking about how can we do this better and put the effort in. And so that's the second point.

Third point is that youth ministry and youth work go hand in hand. The gospel is interested in gospel ministry and social welfare.

The example, Acts chapter 6, where there was a dispute in the early church. I remember they were disputing food. As a result of the gospel, they were doing a good work.

They were supplying food to people that didn't have it. Some people were getting more food than others and it seemed to be racially based. The disciples of the apostles said, we can't handle this.

[26 : 53] We need to appoint some people to take care of that. And so we can get on with gospel ministry. So they wanted to keep both things together. Both things were important.

But the apostles had a priority on gospel ministry. And so they appointed nine deacons. I think they're called deacons, aren't they? I think that's where it is. Anyway, they appointed nine people to go and do, to look after the food distribution.

Now, it's really interesting that when you look at the two people whose stories are followed up of those nine, Stephen and Philip, we don't see them giving out any food.

What we do is we see them preaching the gospel and Stephen getting gnarled. So even in the narrative, we see that there's a movement between the two.

That the disciples appoint people to do the social welfare work, really important. But then two of the social welfare people work end up preaching the gospel. So it's always a both end.

[27 : 55] It's not an either or. And so the implication will be, when it comes to thinking about our children's and youth ministries, we will be concerned for their spiritual well-being.

But we're also concerned for their physical and emotional well-being. We don't need to pit them against each other. And we will do both things at once, as the Christian ministry kind of talks about. Now, you'll notice I've said nothing there about being young, charismatic or cool. Because the Bible doesn't say anything about them. What kind of leaders does the Bible look for?

It looks for fat people. Do you know this phrase? Faithful, available and teachable. That's what the Bible looks for. You don't have to be young, charismatic and cool.

You just have to be fat. Faithful, available and teachable. And that's the requirement for working in the Christian ministry.

[29 : 01] So, all of that's great. What does it mean? Well, let's think about three points of application. In our ministries, we will point people to Jesus, not to us and not to themselves.

Now, one of the great temptations in youth ministry particularly is to become a guru. You know what a guru is? Everyone goes to that person because young people have lots of questions.

They tend to form attachments to people very quickly. Children are the same. And so, youth and children's ministry can be very satisfying because suddenly you will have a whole bunch of followers.

People will do, they think you're wonderful. They will do whatever you do. And, you know, all that kind of stuff. And it's very easy in that thing for the ministry to become about you.

To do things that impress and build up your image in the face of your children rather than pointing them to Jesus.

[30 : 06] And this can sometimes compromise the message. Because if people like you and then you come across a passage that talks about judgment for a particular sin or something, it can be very tempting to downplay that negative teaching of the Bible and stick to the positive teaching that you know everyone likes because they will like you better.

And this is not a temptation which is peculiar to youth and children's ministry. This is a ministry problem all around the world where we will end up preaching. I mean, Paul talks about it.

People will, they want a gospel that keeps their itching ears. People want to hear what they want to hear. Sometimes they don't want to hear the truth. And sometimes the truth can make you very unpopular.

It doesn't always happen. But the point there is simply to think about pointing them to Jesus, not to ourselves and not to themselves. Part of, as you know, with young children particularly and youth, they tend to be very self-centered.

Not that we're not. It's just that they can't hide it as well as we can. And young children, they need to learn, as we need to learn, that they are at the center of the universe.

[31 : 21] But Jesus is. And so this will be part of what we're doing. And that won't be our teaching. We're not going to walk in every morning and say, you're at the center of the universe. Jesus is.

That will just be part of the atmosphere that you're creating. Because you're talking about how wonderful Jesus is all the time. And you're lifting him up before them. And they are picking it up. That's what we call the hidden curriculum. Sometimes when you're teaching, what you say is really important. But what you don't say or how you behave or the comments that you make are also teaching people a lot.

And so let me give you an example. At our Bible college, when I was teaching at Moore College, we were training leaders for Christian ministry. And I was talking to a friend of mine who's an industrial psychologist.

And he said, oh, what do you think is really important about leadership? And we said, service and collaboration and cooperation. And he said, okay, that's good.

[32 : 26] What's the leadership model like at your college? And basically, we had a principal who told us all what to do and we didn't. We were the servants. He wasn't. There was no collaboration.

We just did what we were told. And so the model we were giving of leadership in the college was reinforcing a pattern that we actually didn't want to see ministers going into a ministry. So that was the hidden curriculum.

So people were coming and they were hearing in lectures, oh, leadership's all about service, it's all about collaboration, it's all about cooperation with each other. But then they were watching basically a command and control model happen around them.

And what did they do when they went into their churches? Command and control. They thought, great, I can now tell people what to do and they'll do it. Kind of the direct opposite of what we were hoping.

So that's what we call the hidden curriculum. And sometimes we need to think about in the youth and children's ministry, what is the way we are doing things communicating to the children?

[33 : 26] What's it saying as much as what we're trying to say with our lives? So that's just a by-the-by. So we focus on both the gospel and the welfare of young people.

Now, I want to spend a little bit of time now thinking about the second point, spending most of the time making the gospel engaging, because that really goes to the heart of what we're doing now, teaching time.

How do we teach the Bible? How do we teach people about Jesus in a way that's engaging? Now, I understand that you are using material from either, I think it's Matthias Media for the younger children, the Bible Project for your older primary age.

Youth group, what kind of material? Are you generating your own material or are you using material? Yeah, we do use material that we need. We've also used youth work stuff, so thank you. You used to use youth work stuff as well.

So often we'll use borrowed materials and that's fine, but you still have to teach it. But you still have to make it interesting and engaging. And we're going to talk a little bit about that.

[34 : 39] But before I do that, let me just speak. Where are we? Yeah, let's just spend some, you can do a little bit of work here. So three questions.

How do you help young people build dependence upon Jesus? How much time do you spend making the gospel engaging or showing the gospel engaging? And how do you minister the gospel and improve the welfare of young people in your ministries at the moment?

It's a little bit of a temperature check and then we'll come back and think about teaching the Bible.

So just with the two ways to do this, you can either just meet with the people around you or you can get together with your team or people who are teaching roughly the same group and answer those questions specifically with respect to your ministry.

I'm not sure what the best way to do is you're all adults, you can work that out. But just get into smaller groups and just spend 10 minutes or so thinking about these questions.

How do you help people build dependence upon Jesus? What does that look like? How much time do you spend making the gospel engaging? How do you minister the gospel and improve the welfare of young people in your context?

[35 : 51] Okay, so break up and then we'll talk and then discuss an interesting. Okay, we might, we'll just spend a few minutes just here.

I'd like to hear some of the many thoughts that you had or some of you had about some of these questions and then we'll move on to thinking a little bit about a particular question too.

But how do you help young people build dependence upon Jesus? Any thoughts come out of your discussions? With your age, any particular things you said that were you felt were helpful?

We were thinking of the hidden curriculum stuff. Yep. So we were talking about how one way that we might model that to people is to the young people is to model it how we pray.

Yep. And how we're praying perhaps not just at the end of your meetings but you know constantly throughout the meeting as well. Just to help them feel that we're actually trying to engage with God and ask God to help us.

[36 : 58] Yeah, excellent. And we underestimate the importance of prayer as a, not only because God answers prayer, but as a model. And we need to think carefully about what we do pray as well as when.

So now that's really helpful. Yeah. Yeah. Any other kind of thoughts? How do we help young people build dependence upon Jesus? Our ministry is with group 1, so it's a very young, like, discussion.

Yeah. So we were saying that how the lessons were made up for us when we try to sing more songs about Jesus. Yeah. Because, like, it's not part of our team, but when we try to teach, we try to, like, do more songs and relate our topic.

Yeah. And that's a really important point. You need to think about the stage of the kids you're at and what you can reasonably achieve. So at a very young preschool age, you're really building the foundations for others to build on.

So sometimes it's a question of not doing too much damage as well as doing something wrong. It's a good idea. That's where the life cycle of the church is really important to think about.

[38 : 03] Okay, what do we do here? How is it going to be built on at another kind of step? Any other thoughts on building dependence? Yeah, the back. So a case of just reminding, yeah, when I was teaching at UCO, it's well, I was, as I said, the audience were, you know, the students were 20 and 23, very confident, you know, rulers of the world.

And so one of the things we used to constantly say was the first lesson in theology is that there's a God and you're not him. And so we wouldn't say that all the time, but that became, at the end when people graduated, that was one of the things that they remembered simply because we said it over and over again.

And so it's often worth thinking about what messages do you really want your people to come to and how can they be captured in like almost an advertising slogan that people will remember and go away with.

And that might be one of them. Good. My name is We are teaching before, we asked the students and children what are the issues that they face, maybe any problem that they have, not so much of a family problem, like problem issues with schools and so on.

That is why we say that there is a lot of things that we cannot do enough for. Yeah, and that makes that much more explicit teaching as well. So yeah, terrific, good ideas and worth thinking about.

[39 : 59] Now we are going to spend a little bit of time thinking about making the Gospel engaged, you want to focus on that, would that be helpful if we talk about the teaching time? Yeah, we will come back to that. What about ministering the Gospel and improving the welfare of young people?

Any kind of thoughts there that people have? It really depends on your context as to what welfare needs you feel your group has, so that may be part of it.

Yeah? I think one of the things we talked about is because a lot of our kids in our class are preschoolers, so they have like, she was mentioning that, 20, 30, 80 things still, so all those things are still like, they haven't had the achievement.

But on the other hand, we also pick up things on ADHD and autism, which are traits that we try to identify with, and have a conversation with the parents.

Okay, yeah, good. And that particular area, the second one, those kind of syndromes or whatever, that's a massive change from when I was teaching. We didn't know anything about that, and the kid was just a bit weird, you know.

[41 : 05] Like, playing for parents. But that's a real, that's a new kind of area too that's coming to play. Yeah, yeah. And also, dealing with creating a safe space for children with special needs and things like that is part of dealing with their welfare.

Yeah, you were going to say something. I was just building on that, because I teach the next group of five and six years old, so that's where their traits are really showing. So we do feedback, and then we discuss more of the teachers, and we do feedback of the other things, and then we will have simple things like, you will assume parents feed their kids before going to Sunday school, and then some of the adults.

So just things about play like that, because, you know, just, sometimes basically, while we teach the lesson as well. Yeah, yeah, right, okay. And in some cases, of course, it will be important to feed the children.

Like, a lot of schools in low areas in our, in my country, they'll run a breakfast for people, because the kids come to school hungry, and you can't concentrate. You know, you've only got people in your Sunday school classes that are, what, half an hour, 40 minutes, so maybe not so acute, so these other areas come into play.

Yeah, any other thoughts? Just one to keep an eye on. I suspect that's not a big issue in terms of balancing off gospel and welfare, but, because we're in the Christian context, and we realise both that are there.

[42 : 29] Yeah. Let's think about making the gospel engaging. What kind of things did you talk about in your groups there, when you were talking to me? Any group members, what do you think?

We're very thankful for our materials that give a lot of suggestions and teaching points, and really helps us to focus, especially when the hype is pressed. Yeah.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, so one of the, one of the skills though, is evaluating the materials that you're offered, to make sure that they are teaching the gospel, and that they are educationally sound, that is age and stage, developmental, appropriate, those kind of things, and then using it.

Not all off the shelf material is good, and there's also the question of whether it suits your needs at the moment. So, it depends on your program. Churches in Australia tend to run a Sunday school program in conjunction with the sermon series.

I don't know if you do that here, and sometimes you can't find material on the sermon series. And the reason we do that is so that the children can talk with their parents about what they're both learning at the same time.

[43 : 38] So, that's the, so rather than running a different program, that's what we, that's the reasoning that's going on there. Yeah. Yeah. But there can be a challenge with the, and here we're thinking particularly, I guess, of the teaching time, the context to think about what to do there.

So, let me, let me talk a little bit about preparing a teaching time. Again, these won't be any principles that you haven't heard before, but more by way of reminder that maybe there's some new ideas or some helpful ideas here.

Even if you're using prepared materials and you're given a script, our responsibility is also to know the passage ourselves. Not to rely just on the good people of St. Matthias or the Bible project, because we all know that, you know, anyone can make a mistake.

And also, that they're written in other places and countries and might not be completely appropriate for your own context. So, to read and engage whatever passage you're doing yourself and understanding its message and things like that is a really important step, just as a way also of interacting with the materials that you're using.

So, I take it that as soon as you volunteer to become a leader in a ministry, a children's and youth ministry, you're also volunteering to become a Bible scholar, because you're dealing with the Bible and teaching it.

[45 : 05] So, you're going to be committed to learning a little bit more about the text that you're working with. Generally speaking, with youth and children, and probably with adults as well, we tend to focus on the one idea in the sermon, or the talk or the teaching thing.

If you can take the passage and say, okay, what's the one thing that this passage is trying to teach us? And then that can give you a nice clear focus that's there.

I think when you're teaching adults, you can get away with two or three ideas that are related. But the younger the child, the simpler and the clearer the idea has to be as you kind of work through. And usually what that means is you try and get a single sentence to sum up the idea of the passage. So, at some point, you could use that sentence and it becomes a hook that people remember.

And so, this is not, it's not as easy as it sounds. Because, I don't know if you've had that experience, but when you look at a Bible passage, you think, this is saying about five things.

[46 : 15] You know, so, how do I choose one? And that becomes maybe a collaborative effort to talk or to look for clues in the passage if things are repeated. Maybe that's the big idea that's coming through.

Usually, we try and say that the big idea is it's going to be about God and Jesus and not about us. So, the big idea is not you should be good, but God is good. That kind of thing, that kind of idea. You might want to say you should be good because God is good. You know, that's trying to combine the best. But we try and get this to one idea. When it comes to packaging, this is where lots of different things can be possible.

Usually, in children's ministry, I think we tend to focus on the narrative sections of the Bible, because they give us stories to tell. And that's perfectly appropriate. In fact, I've often thought that, particularly at the younger ages of children's ministry, if the children can come out knowing the Bible stories, that's setting them up for that next stage, where theology and interpretation and all that comes out.

So, and often we start right at the very beginning with very simple ideas. Preschool kids, God made the world. God made me. God loves me. Now, if a child comes through a first year of a teaching program in your preschool, they know those three things, I think that's pretty good.

[47 : 41] You know, you might want to add a little bit more, but nice, simple, clear ideas to do that. And you can build stories, visual aids, actions and drama, all those kind of things around that.

So, storytelling is often the basis of a lot of narrative kind of passages. When you're dealing with the kind of things like Paul and others, then we'll often be searching for stories to illustrate the points that are made.

The power of stories is really helpful. Though you've got to realise the further you get away from the Bible stories, the more likely the story can't do everything.

You have that illustration. This happens with atonement illustrations, Jesus dying on the cross. Sometimes you have to say, this illustration is showing you this point, but it's not telling you the whole story.

Or illustrations of the Trinity. Whenever you use illustration of the Trinity, it's always wrong. So, is the Trinity like an egg? It's got a yolk, an albumin and whatever else, or it's like a three-leaf clover?

[48 : 50] You usually end up teaching some kind of heresy. With what image you use of the Trinity. So, you've got to be really careful because illustrations can sometimes mislead as well as they lead.

But I guess I want to encourage you here to, even if you're using borrowed material, just to think a little bit more divergently, particularly as kids get older. With stories, often we will tell the story, but maybe get the kids to tell the story.

And they can do that through drama. Okay, I want you to go away and read this story and then come back and dramatise it for me. And show us what it looks like. One technique I've seen used really successfully, we might even do it in a minute, is where you get people to read the passage and then ask people to be characters in the passage and then interview them about what happened to them.

So, I'll show you how that works maybe in a moment. Obviously, one of the key skills you use is questions. And very simply, as the older kids get, you just need to have more different kinds of questions.

So, younger children, you'll tend to ask simple, factual, recall questions. What happened in the passage? What did Jesus do? Where was he going? Who did he speak to?

[50 : 07] What did he say? How did they respond? Almost very basic comprehension. But as children get older, they're able to do more interpretation and thinking into the passage. What do you think Jesus was thinking when he asked that question?

Why did Jesus do this, do you think? And you're asking them to speculate and some people aren't comfortable with that. But as long as you are making it clear that you're trying to help people to get into the emotion, the thought of the passage, the interpretation.

Why do you think Mark said that thing three times? Why does Jesus say three times that he's going to go and must be betrayed and die and suffer?

What's going on there? That kind of thing. And then, of course, application passages. How does this apply to us? So, a very simple Bible study technique, and you've all done this, is comprehension.

What does the passage say? What does the passage mean? What does the passage imply for action? Those kind of things. And then the other point, and this comes in sometimes the issue in groups, think about the context that the talk takes place in.

[51 : 17] So, we often, I used to think of the talk as really important, and it didn't kind of really matter what else you need. But if you can think of games or activities or icebreakers or whatever you're doing, which somehow relate to the talk, then you've got a more kind of harmonious, a more coherent evening that comes.

So, let me try and illustrate some of these things. Let's have a look at Mark chapter 2. Is this possible? Let's have a look at Mark chapter 2, 1 to 12. Very familiar passage. This is where Jesus heals the paralyzed man and forgives his sins.

So, I'll read the passage very quickly. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it, and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, son, your sins are forgiven. Now, some teachers of the Law were sitting there thinking to themselves, why does this guy talk like that? He's by speaking.

[52 : 40] Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this is what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, why are you saying these things? Which is easier, to say to this paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up, take up your mat, and walk?

But I want you to know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the man, I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home. He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of the law.

This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, we've never seen anything like this. So I think we're all relatively familiar with the passage. What would you say is the big idea of the passage? What did you hear repeated?

Jesus has not believed you, but forgive sins. Yeah, that's it. Three times we're told, we're asked, son, your sins are forgiven.

He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Jesus says to them, what's easier to say, get up and walk, or your sins are forgiven. So Jesus can forgive sins. Pretty simple.

[53 : 47] Okay? Now, there's other interesting stuff along the way, how he ties it into the paralyzed, but that's pretty clearly the point. So whatever else we're going to get to, we're going to point out that Jesus can forgive sins.

We might want to add in the divine son, Jesus, can forgive sins because of the God alone thing. But, you know, we can play around with that that's there. Now, obviously, this is just a great story to tell.

So you could read it out. You can tell the story. This would be a great story for people to dramatize, because you've got to get four people carrying a paralyzed man in, all that sort of stuff, crowds, noise, and things like that.

But this would also be a good one for us to just imagine a little bit what it's like to be there. Did you notice the detail about the roof? Okay? How did they get to the roof?

They dug through it. So it's made of dirt or something. So they didn't just pull some tiles off it. They dug through it. What would it have been like to be in that room with people digging through the roof?

[54 : 49] What would have happened? Well, all this debris would fall on your head until you'd be suddenly looking up, and then you'd see this man being lowered down through the roof. Like, it's a pretty interesting picture that's going on.

And it's just a little bit of color in the way of telling the story that's there. But what you could do then is you could say, okay, I'd like to interview four people. So I want someone to be the paralyzed man. I want someone to be a man in the room. I would like someone to be a teacher of the law. And I'd like someone to be one of the friends that's carrying the paralyzed man in. Okay?

And so I don't know if anyone feels like they'd like to be someone at that point. But then, yeah. I would say to a person, okay, you're in the crowd. Tell me what happened. And then they could retell the story.

We were in this room. It was really crowded. Jesus was in the middle talking. And then suddenly all this dirt started falling on his head. And this guy was getting lowered through the ceiling. And we kind of all stepped apart.

[55 : 49] And there he was in the middle of the room. And then, you know, they started talking about forgiveness of sins. And Jesus made the man walk. It was amazing. So very simple. You might want to talk to the paralyzed man.

And you can say, okay, what happened? Well, we heard Jesus was in town. And we knew that he was in this house. And we thought maybe he could help me. You know, kind of last resort.

And we couldn't get in. So my friends, they carried me up onto the roof. And they dug a hole and they lowered me down in the middle. And then Jesus said, your sins are forgiven. And you might say to the paralyzed man, how did you feel when Jesus said that?

And I think he might say, I was really disappointed. I was hoping he'd make me walk. That he forgave my sins. How do I know he's forgiven me for my sins? How can I possibly tell?

And then you could record, he could remember the conversation. And then Jesus, then he made you get up and walk. How did you feel then? Well, I felt wonderful because I could walk. And I also knew my sins were forgiven.

[56 : 48] This is an amazing thing. And so people who are listening to the story, what about the teachers of the law? How would they respond? This is blasphemy. Here's this guy saying he can only do what God can do.

This is outrageous. And what did you think when he healed the man? We didn't know what to think. Well, certainly he's not God, but, you know. Anyway, so you can see how this might work.

And with stories, you can take an alternative point of view. And even when you're telling the story, you can tell the story from the point of view of a paralyzed man. And just do different ways of engaging on the way through.

Now, what about the general context? If you're running a group, your kids have just come from church, they've got a lot of energy. So you want to do a bit of a game to, you know, run out a bit of that energy and get them settled for the teaching time or whatever.

Well, you can do any game or whatever your usual game is. But maybe in this context, you might play a game like red light, you know, where the kids have to creep up and then freeze.

[57 : 52] They're paralyzed when you turn around and look. So it's only a very small leak, but it just leaks in a little bit with one of the leaves that's there. One thing we did in a youth group with this was we had a room with a bit of a raised stage.

And we brought along about, you know, a couple hundred old newspapers. And we put three people up on the stage and we had the rest of the youth group on the ground. And we said, what you've got to do on the ground is get that newspaper, scratch it up and throw it off of the stage. And the people on the stage have got to clear the stage as quickly as they can. So we're going to end up with a lot of paper on the stage or on the ground. But there was about 50 people on the ground, three people on the stage.

So in the end, the stage got filled up with newspaper. So what? Well, then we said, well, this is like sin in your life. It just keeps coming at you. And no matter how hard you work to clear it, it's always going to keep accumulating.

You need another solution. And so it led into the idea of forgiveness as a solution. And it was a lot of fun because who doesn't like scratching up newspapers and trying to be, you know, that kind of thing.

[59 : 06] So, but they're just two examples of games that are trying to key into passages. And so it's purposeful time, not just kind of fun as you think about it.

So that's just some ideas to think about there as we do that. So I'm going to, I was going to get you to have a bit of a shot of the passage, but we're running out of time.

Are there any questions about what we said so far before we move on to thinking about discipleship focus? Any questions about anything that we said there?

We really talked about being gospel focus. No? Okay. All right. So let's think about discipleship focus now. And again, the same pattern, some common ideas.

Ministry for young people is either focused on reaching non-Christians, that is evangelistic, or building up Christians. And so people often have this discussion about what's our Friday night youth group really all about?

[60 : 13] Is it inviting people into the Christian faith or is it for believers? And so one program we once ran, we would do three weeks of so-called discipleship and then one week of evangelism.

And so people often try and, you know, play around with it. What about your Sunday schools? I'm going to suggest that they're probably focused on building up Christians, not evangelism, because they are children of the church that are there.

Is there an outreach element? To those, maybe, maybe not. Ministry to young people does all the discipleship for young people. In other words, young people aren't disciples, but we just spend a lot of time investing and training and picking up.

They don't actually do stuff. And the third one is that ministry to young people is all about keeping them safe, occupied or entertained until they become adults, when they can really become disciples.

So we've talked about that idea on the way through. What we want to suggest is that the good children's and youth ministry is discipleship focused ministry to young people.

[61 : 24] And by that we mean that it's all about helping people to be disciple making disciples. So a discipleship focused ministry helps people to become disciple making disciples.

They are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who are invested also in making disciples of others, whether that's evangelism or encouragement. That's the third one.

Okay. So three ideas that comes out. Discipling means making disciples and teaching. Matthew chapter 28. What does Jesus say to the disciples?

Go and make disciples, teaching them all that I have committed to you. So Jesus doesn't seem to see much of a distinction between discipleship and evangelism.

You make disciples through the gospel. You teach disciples through the gospel. Both activities are there and we need to focus on both that are there.

[62 : 25] Secondly, a mission strategy. It can be individual and it can be us as a group working together.

So individuals are commissioned. Peter goes to Cornelius and preaches this. Ephesians chapter 3 talks about how we are all together in this. The church is a witness.

The church testifies. So when you gather on a Sunday morning, if an unbeliever comes into the gathering, the whole gathering is preaching the gospel to them as well as the sermon that's there.

And again, that God's sonority and Christian human agency applies again. God does all the work. We do our work as well as we think about this.

And then thirdly, we've mentioned that children are models. They are already disciples. They are model disciples, in fact, of how to receive the kingdom there.

[63 : 23] So all of this is just part and parcel of thinking about a discipleship-making ministry. What are the implications? Again, three points.

Well, your ministry can focus on both reaching non-Christians and building up Christians at the same time. In fact, if you're teaching the scriptures, you're introducing people to various aspects of the Christian faith all the time, even if it's not a direct appeal to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

So the teaching of scripture itself is an evangelistic and a discipleship activity because you're introducing people to the will of God.

And so there will be times, I think it's a little bit like a camera. You know how, I don't know much about cameras, but you can bring things in and out of focus.

So you've got some people in the background, they can be brought into focus and the foreground goes out of focus and vice versa. So if you think about your ministry as to reaching non-Christians and building up Christians, some activities will have reaching Christians, building up Christians in focus, but in the background will be evangelism.

[64 : 39] Sometimes evangelism will be in focus and building up Christians will be in the background, but it's the same lens, the same focus, the same gospel that's doing that.

And so I suspect that in a Sunday school context, we probably won't think too much about reaching non-Christians.

And that may be even more difficult in your context than it is in mine, in terms of inviting people. But one thing that we encourage our young people to do of any age is to invite a friend to come with us to church.

Now in Australia, that is very counter-cultural and it doesn't often work, but occasionally because kids are natural inviters, if they love it, they want their friends to come.

And so we've had children bring their friends along because they say, look, it's really fun and you know, you can learn about God and you know, all that kind of stuff. Parents are horrified, but you know, pretty hard to refuse your kid.

[65 : 39] And so sometimes, you know, non-Christian children come along to the Sunday school and they hear the gospel. They don't have to change the program. They may hear the story that is there.

Perhaps it's a little more strategic at the youth level. I think that you probably think more explicitly about evangelism. But that's not only getting people to bring people in, but equipping young people to disciple others.

So at some point in your programs, are you helping your young people, young children, to be able to tell the gospel to their friends? Even in a very simple way.

Even if it just means simply saying God loves you. Maybe that's all they need to say. But are you encouraging them to disciple non-Christian believers, but also to encourage Christian believers? What does it mean to disciple one another? Well, is there a version of that that is age and stage appropriate? Do you pray for your children or do you encourage the children to pray for one another?

[66 : 48] And again, the older you get, the more reasonable that will be. But, you know, we, I mean, Sonny, my two and a half year old, very hard to understand what he's saying, but he's saying prayers all the time.

His mum and dad are teaching him to pray at night before he goes to bed and to pray for his little sister. Ruby, you know, he's six months and we try to encourage Sonny, how can you make Ruby laugh?

Okay, because he can. And so that's his service to her. So we try to encourage him to serve his sister by making her chuckle. You know, now that's all very simple and it will change.

But try to help him to be a little bit other person centred. That's the part of discipleship as he starts to do that. And the height of all this is the idea that young people are disciples of Christ now.

And we'll talk more about this next week. But how can they have, can they find opportunities to serve in your congregations as disciples of Christ?

[67 : 49] So one very simple idea we have. I don't know if you have welcome teams, but sometimes we have people who welcome others in the church. And if it's a parent, we say, why don't you welcome people with your child?

And so as you walk in, you say, hi, great to see you. And the child is there. You're modeling that at least. And very often if they're a confident kid, they'll say, hi, great to see you as well. Sometimes they say, hey, haven't seen you for a month. Which an adult would never say, like, rude. Kids can say that. And everyone thinks, oh, that's sweet. You know, but the question's asked. And it's a question that you want to ask. And the child can ask that as they go. So lots of different kinds of things there. And one way we found to equip our young people to preach the gospel is to give them a very simple gospel outline.

You have the beads, you know, the red, yellow, green, blue beads, eternal life and sin and all that. That can be one. I've got a five finger gospel, which is very simple.

[68 : 55] So is that a friendly or an unfriendly question? Unfriendly. Unfriendly. Right? This is us to God. We're shaking our fist with God.

And God is going to judge us. So this is not good. But God gave Jesus for us. What have we got? We've got an open hand. God welcomes us with a handshake that he wants to be our friends because God gave Jesus for us.

And it works for kids because they can do it with their hands. I do all these little hand exercises that, you know, can you do this? Can you do this? And practice it. I'm going to show you something you can all do with your hands. You want to try and put your hand up?

Right? So what have we got? Unfriendly fist. Now, what do we say? God gave Jesus for us. And you can shake hands with a person beside you. It's a friendly hand.

Right? So very simple. And, you know, kids can remember that. It's action based, so they like it. But if you can think of things like that, you can invent that as well.

[69 : 55] That we do. Okay? Anyway, so I went through that fairly quickly because our time is short. And our discussion questions, I'll just quickly go to that.

There we go. How are you reaching non-Christians and building up Christians at the same time? How are you equipping your young people to disciple others? And how are you creating opportunities for young people to live as disciples of Christ? Now, that could be at home, but your responsibility is within the church.

Now, children aren't adults. So you're not going to elect them onto your governing bodies and things like that. Okay? Though there is an argument for maybe mature older teenagers to be part of the governance of the church.

And, you know, if they're up to it. But are there opportunities for young people to participate in some of the activities in the church? Can they serve at morning tea? Can they lead prayers in the congregation in the time that they're in?

[71 : 02] We, when we do the Lord's Supper at our church at home, we do a question and answer thing with a young child asking the minister, what do the various elements of the Lord's Supper mean and why are we doing this?

Very, very simple. But children see a child on stage doing part of the liturgy and you belong. You are part of it. So the old kind of story about families going to church, I don't know if you've heard this.

The family says we're going to church together and they get to the car park and then the parents go into the main hall. The children go off to their, the youth go off to the youth group.

Are they going to church together? No. They're going to different churches. It just happens to be on the one property. So what does it mean for a family to be in church together? We'll talk about that next week with intergenerationality.

But just take five minutes again with the people around you. We will finish at 11.30. Just to quickly either pick one of those questions or quickly work your way through just to get a few thoughts together as we finish up.

[72 : 12] And then we'll close it in five minutes. Thank you. Thank you. I hope that was just enough to get you started thinking about ideas. Even on the simple one, how you're equipping your young people to decide hello is just a very simple thing of saying if you see someone at church you don't know why you're going to say hello.

That can be valuable to see the expression of fellowship. Anyway, next week we'll be talking about intergenerationality, how we all minister to one another across generations.

And then we'll also talk about what it means to have a loving ministry. I do promise that we'll leave a good chunk of time at the end for questions as well for specific things. If there are specific issues that you want to talk about though, you can let Greg know and we can incorporate that into the program as well.

But I hope that's been helpful in stimulating and getting you to talk about your ministry. And then we just simply need to talk about what we're doing with a bit of free time. And then that starts everything flowing and that can be there. I will pray for the ministry.

So let's pray and then we're done. Father, thank you for the ministries that you've given us and such a privilege to work with children and young people to be in the presence of that example that the Lord Jesus gave and what it means to send into the kingdom.

[73 : 29] And we pray that even as we teach, you will help us to be taught. Father, we pray that you'll help us to recall what out of today, what is going to be valuable for our ministries to make them more effective in your name because we desire that.

I thank you for the dedication of people who are willing to give up time on a Saturday to come and think through this. And also time regularly given away to minister to young people in this particular context.

But we pray that you will help us to find joy in all that we do and that you'll help us to be faithful and proclaim and centre upon the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.