

CORE TRAINING SERIES



RECRUITING, EQUIPPING, & RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

MINISTRY ROLE:
Children/Youth Ministry
Leaders, Pastors

TARGET AGE:
Infant to Youth Classrooms

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by Jill Nelson



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One of the most difficult jobs for a children's or youth ministry pastor or minister is recruiting a full staff of volunteers who are not only spiritually mature but also joyfully motivated to nurture the faith of next generation. Furthermore, these volunteers must be adequately equipped and trained for their specific classroom roles and responsibilities. Along with that is the challenge of retaining these volunteers, if possible, from year-to-year, so there is a stable, spiritually mature core in your ministry team. How does a ministry leader do this?

While it is true that every church has unique challenges in recruiting, equipping, and retaining volunteers, there are some basic principles that can help every ministry leader in this endeavor. While these principles are not guaranteed to solve your recruiting problems, they may serve to foster an environment in which people feel more inclined to volunteer as they feel properly led, called, equipped, trained, and encouraged.

INVITING PEOPLE TO A GLORIOUS VISION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Recruitment is, first and foremost, about vision. You are asking people to commit their time and energy to something. What is that "something"? We believe that "something" must be defined and shaped by a biblical vision for the next generations. At Truth78, we have found Psalm 78 to be very instructive in this regard.

*...tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.*

*⁵He established a testimony in Jacob
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,*

*⁶that the next generation
might know them,
the children yet unborn, and arise
and tell them to their children,*

*⁷so that they should
set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;*

PSALM 78:4-7

This is not a merely a call to "work with children in Sunday school," or a plea that "we need more helpers for our Wednesday night kids clubs." This is a call—a command—to proclaim the most glorious truths in the universe to the next generation. And Psalm 78, in its fuller biblical context, is a vision,

**...that the next generations know, honor,
and treasure God, setting their hope in
Christ alone, so that they will live as
faithful disciples for the glory of God.**

So, at its core, recruiting involves inviting faithful believers to join in a glorious vision and mission—one with eternal consequences! It is not only a serious responsibility but also a joyful privilege. Consider these words from John Piper:

Have you Sunday School Workers ever thought of yourselves as a squadron of God's commandos, weekly storming Satan's bastion to liberate his hostages? Listen to 2 Timothy 2:24, 25: "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured

by him to do his will.” When you love your students and teach them truth, you are God’s gentle storm troopers! It is truth taught in love that batters down the walls of Satan’s prison. He cannot hold out against the truth.

O, never, never underestimate the power of truth. We handle glorious things every Sunday. We are in a great battle for liberation. Do not be deceived that you hear no bombshells. Do not be discouraged that your medals are few. The Last Day will reveal that the greatest centers of power and of lasting liberation were not in Washington or London or Bonn or Geneva, but in classrooms where truth was taught and young people were “freed from the snare of the devil.” This is no exaggeration. It is absolutely true.¹

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A SPIRITUAL LEADER

It is not enough to simply articulate and promote a glorious vision for the next generation. There is an important relational dynamic involved in recruiting, equipping, training, and retaining ministry volunteers. Namely, demonstrating God-honoring, Christ-like, Spirit-dependent leadership. For example, a children’s and youth ministry leader² should endeavor to:

- Lead, teach, and guide with the Word of God and prayer.
- Display integrity.
- Shepherd with humility.
- Be God-centered and people-sensitive.
- Be a servant of servants—have a demeanor of “How can I help you?”
- Care for people more than the volunteer roster.
- Be visible and accessible: Let volunteers see you in the classrooms as much as possible—walk around from room to room to encourage and provide assistance when needed.

- Initiate communication. Make regular phone calls and ask them how they are doing. Invite them to share any problems or concerns.
- Feed, then lead! Feed your own soul through prayerful study of the Word. Read good books that help you to grow in your walk with the Lord, and books that help you to grown in areas of biblical leadership and children’s and youth ministry.

With these principles in mind, here are some practical suggestions for recruiting, equipping, and retaining volunteers.

HAVE A PROCESS

Ask yourself, “What will be my steps when I recruit?” Whatever your process...

- Involve the church’s leadership, asking for their input and help. The senior pastor, speaking from the pulpit or in a general communication to the church can help cast the vision and invite volunteers.
- Recruit early.
- Recruit year-round.
- Recruit with a deadline.
- Encourage the church leadership (pastors, elders, and overseers) to establish a policy in which Sunday school will not begin until fully staffed. This communicates a high value of the biblical education of children and youth, and it demonstrates to the volunteers that you care about them and do not want to place undue burdens on them.

SET HIGH STANDARDS

- Be choosers, not beggars—never beg, push, or prod for volunteers.
- Set qualifications.
- Interview perspective volunteers: Listen carefully regarding their desire to

serve. Ask probing questions and follow-up questions. Look for genuine faith and a growth in grace in their daily walk.

- Implement a policy that insures the safety and protection of children and youth. (e.g., background checks for all volunteers).
- Seek to match individual giftings with special roles and responsibilities, yet be willing to take some risks and try people in new roles.

BE CLEAR ABOUT EXPECTATIONS

- Have job descriptions for each volunteer (e.g., team leader, worship leader, teacher, small group leader, etc.), and clearly communicate what each entails, and the duration of the commitment.
- Ask them to count the cost of this commitment. Is it realistic in light of their current commitments?
- Ask them to take the job seriously. Teaching and mentoring children and youth regarding the greatness and worth of God and the glorious news of the Gospel is both a grave responsibility and an enormous privilege.
- Consider creating a “Volunteer Ministry Covenant” for each volunteer to sign that clearly articulates these expectations.

EQUIP YOUR VOLUNTEERS

- Provide both formal and informal training for each specific volunteer position. (Truth78's Core Training Series has been designed for this purpose.) This is especially important before the year begins.
- Provide all necessary resources (e.g., curriculum components including Classroom Kit, Teacher's Guides, visual resources, Student Workbooks, etc.; supplies; equipment; room requirements; etc.). Meet known needs, and address problems ASAP.

EXPRESS APPRECIATION TO YOUR VOLUNTEERS

- Communicate words of appreciation to each volunteer, in person.
- Write notes (e.g., send the volunteer cards on their birthdays).
- Have special events that recognize and honor your volunteers (e.g., a year-end dinner banquet and program).
- Have the church provide a uniquely designed yearly gift for each volunteer (e.g., a coffee mug, t-shirt, calendar, etc.).

PRAY FOR YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Let your volunteers know that you are praying for them. Pray...

- before their ministry begins when you are looking at an empty roster. God knows each name.
- for each by name, throughout the year, as they are volunteering in the classroom.
- that each would love the LORD with all his heart, soul, and mind.
- that each would have a hunger and love for the Word.
- that each would be growing in confidence in Christ and find all-satisfying joy in Him.
- that each would be depending daily on the Holy Spirit.
- that each would be a doer of the Word.
- that each would love his neighbor as himself.
- that each would not grow weary in the life of faith.

BUILD AND ENCOURAGE A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

When volunteers feel they are part of a glorious vision of nurturing the faith of the next generation to be joyful worshipers of God, and when they feel well-equipped and trained, they will be much more likely to want to continue from year to year. A ministry leader can foster this attitude even more as he or she articulates a long-term perspective for ministry. Some ways this can be encouraged:

- Adapt a team model in each department—working as part of a team develops relationships that can foster a longer term commitment.
- Allow for volunteers to “move up” with a group of students, providing them with a sense of long-term commitment to a specific group of students.
- At the end of the year, interview volunteers and ask them what their greatest joys and challenges were. Consider how to address these. Depending on the situation, it may be wise to provide them a gracious way to not serve again. Or, you might encourage them to consider a new role or age group that would be more in keeping with their interests and gifts.

FURTHER TRAINING

Visit [Truth78.org/training](https://truth78.org/training) to read other articles in the Core Training Series and browse conference sessions.

For further training on recruiting, equipping, and retaining volunteers, we encourage you to listen to following seminar on our website:

- [Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers](#)
- [Protecting Your Church from Predators](#)
(Note: These seminars were produced under our previous name, Children Desiring God.)
- [A Vision for the Discipleship of the Next Generation](#)
- [A Vision for God-Centered, Gospel-Focused Teaching for the Next Generations](#)
- [A Vision for Teaching the Word of God](#)
- [A Vision for Encouraging Faith in Christ](#)

Endnotes

1. Piper, John. “Sunday School as Liberation,” article published on July 7, 1981, copyright 2014 Desiring God Foundation, desiringGod.org.
2. Depending on whether the individual involved has the title “Pastor” or “Minister,” some of the qualities that follow would not be applicable in the same way. For example, a woman who is a children’s minister or children’s director would not have the biblical authority to “lead, teach, and guide” in the same way a man would.

NOTES



Equipping the Next Generations
to Know, Honor, and Treasure God

Truth78 is a vision-oriented ministry for the next generations—that they may know, honor, and treasure God, setting their hope in Christ alone, so that they will live as faithful disciples for the glory of God.

Our mission is to nurture the faith of the next generations by equipping the church and home with resources and training that instruct the mind, engage the heart, and influence the will through proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

We are committed to developing resources and training that are God-centered, Bible-saturated, Gospel-focused, Christ-exalting, Spirit-dependent, doctrinally grounded, and discipleship-oriented.

RESOURCES AND TRAINING MATERIALS

Truth78 currently offers the following categories of resources and training materials:

VISION-CASTING AND TRAINING

We offer a wide variety of booklets, video and audio seminars, articles, and other practical training resources that highlight and further expound our vision, mission, and values, as well as our educational philosophy and methodology. Many of these resources are freely distributed through our website. These resources and trainings serve to assist ministry leaders, volunteers, and parents in implementing Truth78's vision and mission in their churches and homes.

CURRICULUM

We publish materials designed for formal Bible instruction. The scope and sequence of these materials reflects our commitment to teach children and youth the whole counsel of God over the course of their education. Materials include curricula for Sunday School, Midweek Bible programs, Backyard Bible Clubs or Vacation Bible School, and Intergenerational studies. Most of these materials can be adapted for use in Christian schools and education in the home.

PARENTING AND FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

We have produced a variety of materials and training resources designed to help parents disciple their children. These include booklets, video presentations, family devotionals, children's books, articles, and other recommended resources.

Furthermore, our curricula include Growing in Faith Together (GIFT) Pages to help parents apply what is taught in the classroom to their child's daily experience in order to nurture faith.

BIBLE MEMORY

Our Fighter Verses Bible memory program is designed to encourage churches, families, and individuals in the lifelong practice and love of Bible memory. The Fighter Verses program utilizes an easy-to-use Bible memory system with carefully chosen verses to help fight the fight of faith. For pre-readers, Foundation Verses features 76 key verses with simple images. Visit FighterVerses.com for weekly devotionals and free memory aids. Download the Fighter Verses App for quizzes, songs, devotionals, review reminders and other helps.

For more information on any of these resources and training materials contact:

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