

"What a joy to find such a short book that packs so much in! From cover to cover, there is everything a new leader needs to start thrilling children with Jesus Christ. I will be using this book to train our young leaders, one to one, a chapter at a time. Thank you!"

ED DREW, *Children's Worker, Dundonald Church, UK*

"If you're in children's ministry and you're tired, confused, or discouraged, pick this book up. I found myself highlighting every concise, wisdom-filled, Christ-centred chapter. For those starting out in children's ministry, it's my #1 recommendation."

NICK MCDONALD, *author of Faker*

"This book is easy to read, well written, practical, engaging and inspiring. It's everything I want to say to my teams. The 'prayer pause' takes it from being a book about learning how to do children's ministry to actually doing children's ministry straight away!"

JANE WATKINS, *Head of Children's Work,
Above Bar Church, Southampton, UK*

Starting out in Children's Ministry
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HOW TO GET THE BEST OUT OF THIS BOOK

ON YOUR OWN

Take your time. If you read a chapter at a time, including the prayer pauses and reflection questions, you'll give yourself the best chance of ensuring that the helpful bits sink in and stay with you—and any unhelpful bits (though I hope there aren't many) float away...

WITH SOMEONE ELSE

You could read a chapter aloud together and chat about it, or each read at home first before you meet up.

IN A GROUP

Read each chapter on your own beforehand, and then use the prayer pauses and reflection questions as the basis for a group discussion.

AS A CHURCH

Download the free team-training material from www.thegoodbook.co.uk/startingout. This will give outlines for a series of team-training sessions based on the material in this book.

THE CHAPTER EVERYONE WANTS TO READ FIRST

IN THIS CHAPTER...



- The secret of effective discipline

THINK ABOUT IT

It has been my privilege to help encourage and train children's leaders for thirty years. Some have been from my own church, but many more have been serving at churches around the UK and beyond. They have come to training events in their area, or have invited me to do something for their own church team.

In all that time, and all those locations, there has been one topic that people want help with more than any other. One subject they worry about the most. One concern that can lead to people not wanting to get involved, or even giving up once they've started.

Yes, people ask for help in teaching the Bible well. Yes, they want ideas for telling Bible stories, running crafts, or praying with children. They want help with children with special needs, or how to lead music when they can't sing. But the one theme that comes up more than any other is discipline—how to keep control of a lively group of children.

- *Why do you think discipline is such a hot topic?*

Discipline is something almost everyone is concerned about—and yet this is the shortest chapter in the book! Why? Because the secret of effective discipline is to build it into *every aspect* of children's work.

- **Discipline is a planning issue:** It's common for children to become disruptive when bored, or when they are expected to sit quietly with nothing to do while the leaders sort out the next activity. Good planning will minimise these moments, and also mean there is an alternative activity available if something goes wrong.
- **Discipline is a team issue:** It is never just the responsibility of the person who is currently at the front of the group speaking or leading an activity. A team that works together can diffuse potential problems before they erupt, and calm them quickly if they do.
- **Discipline is a gospel issue:** Because children who are able to listen to the Bible story quietly, and engage well with the activities that have been designed to support the teaching, are in the best place to hear and respond to the good news about Jesus Christ.

So, instead of a separate chapter on discipline, throughout this book you will find boxes that look like this:

Discipline tip

The "secret" of effective discipline is found in the other seven chapters of this book...

Each box will help show how some forward planning, and effective teamwork, will minimise discipline problems, and help you to handle them if they do occur.

WHY CHILDREN'S MINISTRY?

IN THIS CHAPTER...



- Why we do children's ministry
- Why children's ministry is a fertile gospel opportunity
- We are in partnership with parents, but they are the primary partners

THINK ABOUT IT

When the Kids' Club leaders asked parents what they wanted from the Sunday morning groups, this is what they were told:

"After an exhausting week, John and I need some peace and quiet on a Sunday. As long as the kids have fun, they'll be happy to go to the group, and we can sit quietly at the back of church."

"Kids' Club is where my children learn about God and stuff. They do maths and English at school; then come to Kids' Club to learn about religion."

"I want my son to love Jesus, but I don't know much about the Bible. At Kids' Club he learns things that I don't know yet—and then we both read the Bible story together when he comes home."

"Carl plays cricket in the summer. But there's nothing in winter, so we bring him to Kids' Club instead."

The children's team wanted to give the parents what they asked for if they could. But were these really the best reasons to keep running Kids' Club?

- *Do you think these are good reasons for children's ministry?*

I heard the gospel for the first time as a child. I will be forever grateful to those leaders who ran the Christian camp I went to, and who faithfully taught me the good news about Jesus. That's one reason I'm so enthusiastic about children's ministry.

But here's what a theology of children's ministry would look like if we just built it on my own personal experience:

- Alison became a Christian at camp—therefore all children must go on a yearly camp or houseparty.
- Alison chose a sailing camp because she wanted to learn to sail—so we must first nurture a child's nautical gifts if we want them to respond to the gospel message.
- Alison became a Christian in the week she first heard the gospel—therefore we can expect all children to do the same.
- Alison used an evangelistic booklet to help her pray a prayer of commitment—therefore we must give all children evangelistic booklets, and tell them that the way to be saved is to pray the prayer in the booklet.
- Alison ended up serving the Lord full time as a children's worker and writer—we can expect that every child who becomes a Christian in our group is destined for full-time Christian work.

Clearly this is nonsense! But it's remarkably easy to base our assumptions about children's ministry on what we ourselves experienced when we were younger, rather than on Scripture. To avoid that trap, we need to look carefully at what the Bible says.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT CHILDREN'S MINISTRY?

Nothing! Or at least it says nothing about children meeting together with others of their same age group and learning about Christianity together. You won't find the typical Sunday School or after-school club anywhere in the Bible. So, if we want to be sure that our children's ministry is Bible-centred and pleasing to God, we need to look at the wider principles and then apply them to our own situation.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT CHILDREN?

A lot! There are clear commands in both the Old and New Testaments about the importance of teaching children the truth about our wonderful God. Here's an example from Psalm 78:

¹My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
²I will open my mouth with a parable;
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
³things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
⁴We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
⁵He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach their children,
⁶so that the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
⁷Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.
⁸They would not be like their ancestors—
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
whose hearts were not loyal to God,
whose spirits were not faithful to him. (Psalm 78 v 1-8)

- **Circle** any words and phrases that refer to **children** (e.g. "descendants").
- **Draw a rectangle** around the words that tell us **what we are to do** for the children.
- **Underline** the things we are to **tell** children.