

2009

Brought to you this month  
by Janice Haywood



# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

## Charting intentional discipleship with children

**A**ny journey by land or sea is more successful when a route is charted. You decide where you want to go and then plan how you will get from your starting point to your destination, whether it is a place or an experience.

The same is true of the spiritual journey. It begins at birth, but we sometimes wait until the journey is half over before we give it intentional direction and attention. If we are clear about what a fully committed follower of Christ is, then we must start at birth to chart a route rather than just hoping children will simply find their way somehow. The Holy Spirit is a capable guide, but trustworthy adults who are “God in skin” can help children to perceive God’s prompting much as Eli helped young Samuel. Here are five tips for charting intentional discipleship with children.

### 1. Teach and model discipleship practices prior to a child’s conversion or commitment to becoming a Christ follower.

Even in the preschool years we begin to develop the habits of a disciple as we teach children to talk to God — not in rhymes or rituals, but with conversational prayers. They learn that they can say anything to God and God listens to them anytime and anywhere. Later they will learn that they need to listen as well as talk to God. Listening prepares them for the prompting of the Holy Spirit in their lives that can lead to a commitment decision.

An appreciation for the Bible, its stories of people and God, and the wisdom it has for our lives begins from birth. As we teach or read the biblical stories to children and make learning verses engaging, we are encouraging lifetime Bible readers who will hunger and thirst after its truths.

The missing element in establishing these life-long practices as habits in the lives of our children is intentionality. Whether it is stew-

ardship, worship, service, prayer or Bible study, discipleship practices can be established early.

### 2. Assist parents in practicing faith disciplines personally and with their children.

Discipleship is demonstrated most effectively in the home because of the amount of time children are in relationship with their parents, but most churches provide little assistance for teaching parents how to be intentional in their “disciple making” role. Churches can help parents in a number of ways:

- Offer seminars on how to incorporate faith practices into daily routine.
- Provide print, book and DVD resources that give specific suggestions such as bedtime rituals for all ages, family service projects, sex education or the impact of television on children’s value formation.
- Design opportunities for parents to grow in their own faith, which will help them to live and communicate their faith more effectively with their children.

### 3. Design a church curriculum that has discipleship as a priority.

Curriculum is more than a program or series of programs offered on a certain day or time. It is an overall educational and experiential design that focuses on equipping children to become Christ followers. In all church programs leaders are aware that their goal is to inspire and engage children in disciple-making experiences. This is more than indoctrination; it is encouraging children to choose to become a Christ follower of their own free will.

### 4. Offer new member classes or inquirer classes for children to have clarity about their commitment to becoming a Christ follower.

Often parents and churches assume that children who “join the church” understand what it means. Unfortunately, many children respond

to emotion, coercion or even expectations rather than the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Leaders and parents should provide a series of sessions to help children clarify their understanding and response. These classes can be for children who have indicated they have made their commitment to Christ or for children who are asking questions and need more direction.

### 5. Teach children personal faith practices after their commitment decision.

After children commit their life to following Christ, most parents and church leaders forget that these children more than ever need guidance to grow into men and women who love God and love others. Here are some ways churches and families can assist them:

Parents can continue to read Bible stories and pray with their children even after the children can read themselves. As children hear the familiar stories, they will begin to hear them with the “new ears” of their growing faith. Rich dialog and prayer experiences can grow out of these bedtime, mealtime or anytime experiences.

Involve children in worship leadership, not just worship “performance” on special days. As they pray, read scripture, lead in a litany or engage in other worship experiences, children grow in their ability to understand that worship is more about giving than consuming.

Give children opportunities to grow in their service to others. Quarterly church mission projects or family mission experiences will help children to live in service to God and others — just like Jesus. **BT**

#### Note:

*Becoming Like Christ: Helping Children Follow Jesus* is a series of six sessions to help children understand the unique role of Jesus in God’s redemptive plan for people and how they can choose to become Christ followers.

**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month’s page was written by Janice Haywood ([www.janicehaywood.com](http://www.janicehaywood.com)), a childhood ministry specialist living in Cary, N.C. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.