

FAST4 Online Teaching Series: Taking your children's ministry from good to great with Karen Warner

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The Great Commission – Jesus' Vision Statement

“Go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Excerpt from Julie McKinnon's article:

What does 'make disciples' look like in Children and Family Ministry in the current climate? This is a crucial question to ponder as we think about what comes next. We have an unprecedented opportunity to reflect on the core purpose of our ministry and evaluate if what we are doing contributes to that goal.

We want the children we work with to love Jesus for the rest of their lives. Discipleship is at the heart of our ministry. This mission has not changed, but perhaps the method has. Maybe it's time to hone our focus to what really contributes to making disciples.

Resilient Child Disciples

* If a child disciple is a child who loves Jesus for the rest of his or her life, what does a **resilient** child disciple look like and need?

* In this uncharted territory how do we continue to be effective **child disciple makers**?

Book: “**Resilient:** Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church”

Valerie Bell et al.

www.resilientdisciples.com

Definition of Spiritual Resilience from the above book:

A quality that describes the spiritual elasticity of a child or adult. The resistant strength to bend and flex, but not break against the weight of culture (and the disappointments of life)

WHY is it important we consider this – quotes from book:

“We are experiencing a cultural shift away from Christianity like we have never seen before.”

“The greatest challenge to the future of faith is the discipleship of our children.”

“If your young people are going to thrive in a digital age, they have to move beyond familiarity with Jesus to a place of intimacy.”

Barna Group, Faith for Exiles.

“They will need to be disciples as few modern generations before them have had to be. They will need to have spine and heart – spine to stand firm for Christian beliefs in an increasingly

hostile secular world and heart to embrace that same intolerant-of-faith world with a love that can't be ignored."

A challenge from Francis Chan:

"Maybe we shouldn't go back to church as usual. Life as usual. What if God is taking us to a different place?"

Ten "WHAT IF" questions to consider as we ponder and navigate this uncharted territory:

Note – all quotes, unless specified, are from the Resilient book.

- 1. What if, in light of the uncharted territory in which we find ourselves we refocused our energy on discipleship rather than programmes, and renewed our passion to see children grow in knowledge, love and relationship with Jesus?**

"I fear we may realise too late that we gave them things that didn't matter, things that didn't travel into their adult lives as anything more than spiritual entertainment and moralistic stories, things lacking real spiritual power and proactive purpose."
Valerie Bell

*"What if we didn't start with our assumptions about the needs of the system (existing programming), but rather started with the needs of the child?
What if our ministry started with a young boy or girl looking up at us and asking, "Where are we going?""*

- 2. What if we used this "new normal", this gift of time away from programming, to develop a discipleship pathway for our children?**

"Child discipleship sees each kid as being on a path to becoming all whom God intends for them to be in His Kingdom. Each child is known, loved and understood and has a pathway to spiritual growth as they believe in, belong to and become like Jesus."

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The authors propose "Belong, believe, become" as a framework for a discipleship pathway

- 3. What if we renamed our volunteers Child Disciple Makers – and re-envisioned and equipped them for this crucial, life changing calling?**

"A volunteer has a role to fill, but a child disciple maker has a calling. How can we get more disciple makers?"

“One loving, caring adult in the life of a child can dramatically increase a child’s long-term probability for success.”

4. **What if the church, as an intergenerational community of faith re-found its calling as a vital component in the spiritual formation of children – welcoming them, loving them, walking alongside them, and showing them by word and deed what a lifetime of following Jesus looks like?**

“One of the deepest longings of the human heart is to know, “Where do I belong? Who are my people?”

“Today’s kids are starving for real, authentic, relational engagement that leads them to a place where they say, ‘I’ve found my people.’”

“The effective disciple making church of the future will distinctly and specifically elevate giving kids a place to ‘belong’ in a world of increasing isolation and the reordering of community.”

“This reimagined church is a church made up of child disciple makers. These are the fire carriers. The loving adults who make up an engaging church community who throw their doors and arms open to the children of our families and communities. This is a place of belonging where kids can believe in and become like Jesus.”

“What is more life-giving than experiencing a contagious faith in community – the feel of it, the lows and highs of it, the supernatural joining togetherness of it?”

5. **What if children’s ministry was just one component of the discipleship pathway?**

“Sometimes our programming can overtake our vision and the priority of future discipleship.”

“Are we programming the immediate, or prioritising the future?”

It’s about connections over curriculum - what will the children remember about this in a year’s time?

*“Part of the rub that we experience as CM leaders, is that our programming puts us in a ‘week-to-week’ mentality, but **child discipleship is about the long game**. We need to cast a new vision for resilient child disciple makers that moves our mindset into our new reality.”*

6. **What if parents and church truly partnered together to grow resilient child disciples?**

“Children’s Ministry leaders are perfectly placed to help parents to see their children’s spiritual potential in ways they have not previously seen them.”

“No matter how spiritually adequate the parents, they can’t expose their children to communal faith without the church.”

“A church program can’t spiritually form a child, but a family living in an intergenerational community of faith can.”

Ivy Beckwith

7. What if having God-connected children was our main goal – and what if they were the norm in our churches and homes?

“If your young people are going to thrive in a digital age, they have to move beyond familiarity with Jesus to a place of intimacy.”

Barna Group, Faith for Exiles.

An intentional discipleship pathway can help to foster this – both at church and at home.

Rachel Turner: Parenting Children for a Life of Faith

A God-connected child:

- Has something extra that goes beyond head knowledge
- Live in a vibrant two-way relationship with God
- Share life with him, play with him and interact with him throughout the day
- Know they are loved by him
- Their head knowledge of God is just a part of discovering a lifelong heart connection with him.

8. What if prayer was at the heart of our ministry?

“We need to pray the generations of “screen disciples” growing up today will have a collision with their Creator, and understand that they belong to him, above all else. We need to pray that they will be resilient disciples who love Jesus for the rest of their lives.”

“Prayer changes everything. Prayer starts renewal of God’s people. Prayer softens our hearts.”

9. What if this “new normal” was the best thing that ever happened to the children of our churches and our local communities?

10. What if our child discipleship pathways included reaching unchurched children?

What if you are in your role, whether as a leader or volunteer, for such a time as this?

“Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?”

Esther 4:14

What if God is using this uncharted territory, this new normal, to take us

FROM GOOD TO GREAT

Helpful resources:

- Faith Formation Children - www.athomeandchurch.org.nz
- BCFM Foundations of Ministry & Mission with Children & Families booklet – email the office for a copy
- Here2Stay – 10 formational pillars for faith formation (www.here2stay.org.au)
- Resilient Disciples – articles and podcasts www.resilientdisciples.com
- Let's talk – email Karen or a talk with like-minded others
- Online discussion forums – let Karen know if you are interested in taking part