# Session 4: Developing a Mission-Minded Heart

***Objectives:***

* Understand development and how it affects a child’s growth physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually
* Explore how we can develop a mission-minded heart from birth through age 18

***Teaching Time:*** 20 minutes, 40 minutes with translation

***Materials:***

* Bible
* Session 4 handout for each participant
* Developing a Mission-Minded Heart Chart handout for each participant
* white board, chalk board, overhead, or chart paper
* dry erase markers, chalk, or markers

***Getting Ready:***

1. Pass out the Session 4 handout and development chart to participants before the session begins.
2. Review the missions versus mission diagrams in this script so that you can draw them easily.

Missions versus Mission

During this session, we will explore how we can develop a mission-minded heart in our children from birth through age 18.

First, let us review what we learned in Session 1 about God’s mission.

If you remember, missi*ons* (with an s) is the local and global activity we do to help carry out God’s miss*ion*.

We are not trying to develop activity-driven hearts.

Instead, we want children’s hearts to beat for God’s missio*n* (no s.) – seeing God’s name made great so that people from every nation, tribe, and tongue might know and worship Him.

This desire transcends and influences all aspects of their life, regardless of where they go or what they do in life.

Often in the Christian life, we view missions as a segment of our Christian walk.

(Draw a circle on the board. Divide the circle into segments by drawing lines from the center of the circle to the edge. Include segments for worship, fellowship, Bible study, service, etc. Make missions a tiny segment.)

We have a section for church, for Bible study, for worship, for fellowship or community, for service. And we squeeze in a tiny piece of our Christian walk for missions.

However, when we look at Scripture, we see that God’s desire is that mission be the core from which everything else in our life comes.

(Draw another circle, with a smaller circle in the center labeled mission. Then draw pie slices around it with other Christian habits like prayer, giving, Bible study, fellowship, service.)

mission

Church, Bible study, fellowship, etc. all come out of mission! They are based on and influenced by God’s mission to make His name great so that people from every nation, tribe, and tongue might know and worship Him.

Let us read this definition of God’s mission together. It is near the top of your handout. (Have participants read God’s mission together in their heart language.)

Development Introduction

Up to this point in our training, we have covered the *why* behind doing mission mobilization with children.

We are now going to transition into talking about the *how* *to*.

As our Christian young people become adults, their life choices are influenced by all their developmental years, especially by the nature of the foundation they received up to age twelve.

During this time, children are developing in four key ways: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

In your handouts you will find this chart. (Hold up the development chart.)

Here, we have briefly touched on key characteristics of how children are developing during each life stage, along with suggested activities to encourage spiritual development.

As we go through this chart, we will be answering the question, *What can I do at each age to help children grow up knowing the person and purpose of Christ?*

In many cases, children across the globe develop in similar ways. However, factors like culture, family environment, and genetics can cause variations.

Feel free to adjust these suggestions based on where your children are. Some children will develop faster than others; some will take more time.

The goal is to help each child embrace God’s mission in a way that is understandable for them at their age.

Each life stage is an opportunity for children to say “yes!” to God in new ways as they develop and grow in their faith.

So let us take a look at each of the stages now.

Stages of Development

Birth through two years old

Let us start with birth through two years old.

During the first two years of a child’s life, children are developing trust as they rely on those providing for them to meet their needs.

Because of this, children’s early concepts of God are being shaped by how parents and other adults interact with them.

Focus on creating a safe, loving, nurturing environment for children so they will be able to thrive and grow.

Sing songs and read simple Bible stories.

Begin the habit of praying for your child or the babies in your classroom. Pray that God would shape their hearts to have a passionate desire to know Him and make Him known.

Ages Two through Three

Next, let us look at ages two through three.

Toddlers have a short attention span. They will learn best through repetition, singing, rhymes, and stories.

These children are beginning to understand that God loves them.

As you read Bible stories, talk about what God is like and how He is involved in everyday situations.

Pray with your child using simple words. Pray for them and their needs, as well as family and friends who do not know Jesus.

You can begin introducing children to people of other races and cultures using pictures or simple books. Explain that the same God that loves them also loves all these people.

Focus on similarities between your child and other people. At this age children are not yet able to distinguish differences.

In every stage of your child’s life, it is important to remember how much what you say and model impacts them as well. Your interactions with them are helping to form their view of who God is and what He is like.

Children build their assumptions of how God will respond to them based on the ways parents and other adults respond to their efforts, successes, and failures.

Foundations for faith are being laid through the everyday interactions of children and adults.

Ages Four through Five

Four- and five-year-olds also have short attention spans and learn best through play and a variety of short activities.

Children in this age group usually begin to wonder about life and death. This is a perfect opportunity to begin to introduce the salvation message using simple words.

These children are concrete thinkers. Avoid using symbolism. Here is an example \_\_[Insert a culturally-relevant example of symbolism that a child at this age would not understand. Here is an example: when we tell children that we are saved when Jesus comes into our heart, they often perceive it to mean Jesus physically entering their body.]

Begin to teach them Bible verses about God’s love for all peoples.

Since they are now able to compare and contrast, use simple objects or pictures to teach about people from other cultures that have never had the chance to hear about Jesus.

Provide opportunities for children to lead in classroom or home tasks.

Begin to teach children how to pray in their own words. Establish a habit of praying for those who do not know Jesus on different continents, using a world map.

Ages Six through Seven

Our next group, children ages six through seven, are beginning to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Spiderman and Jesus are no longer equal.

They are developing a sense of right and wrong, and beginning to understand how the Bible fits together with both the Old and New Testament.

This is a crucial time to model God’s love in a consistent, loving way, and to affirm that the Bible is true and trustworthy.

Teach them how to navigate the Bible, finding chapters and verses.

Show them how God’s story works together and how Jesus fulfilled what the Old Testament was all about.

Focus on the spiritual discipline of prayer. Pray for countries, specific global needs, and current events.

Teach simple games and art from other cultures and learn how to say words in other languages.

Continue to share the gospel message with them and give them opportunities to lead in worship and serve others.

Ages Eight through Nine

Children ages eight through nine are starting to reason and think for themselves, developing a value system of right and wrong and a strong sense of justice.

These children are searching for identity and heroes beyond the family unit, becoming more outwardly focused, and understanding the importance of serving others.

These children are learning how to talk about what they read in the Bible, so help them apply Bible stories and ideas to their everyday lives. Encourage and model how to look for answers to life questions in God’s Word.

Focus on the discipline of worship – singing, prayer, Bible reading, obedience, and serving.

Begin learning about unreached people groups and pray for children at risk.

Provide experiences for children to explore their own gifting and talents and help them think about how God might want to use them.

It is easy to simply focus on applauding and pointing out good behavior in our children.

We see a child doing well, and we say “Good job!”

What if we took the extra effort to identify what we notice about their character and behavior?

Maybe you noticed \_\_\_ [insert girl’s cultural name] encouraging another student who was struggling with the craft. You could say to \_\_\_ [insert same cultural name], “Hey, I noticed today how you really encouraged \_\_\_[insert a second girl’s name] when she was feeling discouraged. Maybe God has given you the gift of encouragement, and you can use it to build up His church.”

Or maybe you see \_\_\_ [insert boy’s cultural name] helping rally the kids to line up for a game. Instead of just giving him a pat on the back, you can call out the gift of leadership in him and help him find ways to develop that to lead other children.

Many of us probably know Proverbs 22:6 by heart:

*Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.* (Proverbs 22:6)

In the Amplified Bible translation, Proverbs 22:6 reads,

*Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it.* (Proverbs 22:6)

When we know who we are and what we are gifted to do, when we discover what we are most passionate about, we thrive.

It fills us with commitment and dedication, giving us confidence to walk in the path we are on and not depart from it.

If we can call out in children how God is gifting them, and help them discover the things they are passionate about, we will be helping to form them into life-long followers of Jesus.

If you are serving children in this age group who have had none of the prior development, it is okay.

You can still start here, incorporating some of what they missed from earlier stages and then building on it. These guidelines are flexible. You know best what your children need.

Some children will be more advanced and will be ready to try things in a higher development range. Others will need to go back to the earlier stages.

The goal is to be building and growing children as you go.

Ages 10 through 12

Children ages 10 through 12 are entering a time of many physical, emotional, and social changes. Their peers are very important to them.

They are looking for identity and purpose and they desire an increased independence. This is a crucial time to mentor them, keep communication open, and be patient and available.

Listen, ask questions, and avoid being judgmental. Help them process through their feelings and desires, and learn to make decisions based on biblical concepts.

Both boys and girls alike will be struggling with a range of new emotions. Some days they will be happy children who love church and love you; other days they will hate everything around them and not want to be there.

When a child is acting this way, remove him from the situation that is emotionally charging him until he has settled down.

Have a calm, two-sided conversation with him. Ask how he feels, and try to get to the root of what is causing the bad behavior. Then together talk about how actions should be corrected and what the proper responses are when one is feeling sad, left out, or bored.

Through this process, you are mentoring children to make wise decisions and handle their growing, developing emotions.

Children in this age group are capable of greater involvement in evangelism and service so give them opportunities for that.

Continue praying for unreached people, being sensitive to certain peoples or issues that God may be laying on your kids’ hearts.

Encourage friendships with those of other cultures and backgrounds.

Teach children how to pray specific Scripture passages and promises from God for these people groups, as well as model for them how to share about Jesus with others around them.

Since hero worship continues to be strong at this stage, introduce children to missionaries or other believers who are serving God in a variety of ways or roles.

Focus on the discipline of daily Bible study and developing their personal relationship with God.

Talk about how to pray and listen for God’s voice, and what it means to then walk in obedience as God leads.

Ages 13 through 18

Lastly, let us look at a brief overview of children ages 13 through 18. Most of their core development has taken place between the ages of birth through 12 years old. These suggestions are going to be key in now mentoring and guiding them.

The suggestions for this age group are not extensive. They are more broad, general ideas for the larger age range.

Teens are going through many changes in their body, moods, and behavior. They are beginning to have adult desires and face adult decisions, even though they are often still viewed and treated as children.

Your biggest challenge and greatest opportunity is to help mentor and guide them into an independent, healthy, strong adulthood.

As teens begin to really define who they are, what they *do* or *do not* like, and who they want to become, we need to invest focused, one-on-one time with them.

Create a safe place for them to share, process, discuss, and ask questions about anything. Listen. Seek to understand where they are coming from. Help them find answers to their questions in Scripture.

Children in this age group will be looking for a rite of passage into adulthood. Rite of passage ceremonies used to be an important part of Jewish culture and are still found in many cultures today.

When we do not identify for teens when they have moved from childhood to adulthood, they will go looking for that confirmation in other worldly things.

Things like drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and other dangerous activities will become their rite of passage. They will seek out things that make them feel like adults.

Honor teens as they move into a new season of life by providing a positive rite of passage. Have a special ceremony. Invite friends and adults who have significantly impacted their lives to get involved in the ceremony.

Teens are looking for chances to lead and have ownership in things. Significant tasks are crucial in helping them to mature into responsible adults.

Give teens opportunities to serve in ways and areas they are passionate about. Allow them to give input and make decisions about what you do and who you reach out to.

Encourage teens to learn more about and pray for unreached peoples. When possible, encourage them to go on a short-term missions trip that will expose them to the unreached.

Continue to show them what a life of following Jesus looks like. Jesus said He came so that we might have life, and have it abundantly!

Help your teens see what that abundant life looks like and the joy that comes as they live out their part in God’s global story. Conclusion

Each of you will have a different situation. Some may have children who are all the same age or developmental stage. Others may have children spread across the entire age range.

If you have children in different age groups in your family, it is important to remember that you will likely never have a Bible lesson or devotional that will connect with every child every time.

Sometimes you will have devotional times that connect more with your youngest children. These times may include lots of music, dancing, playing, and simple Bible themes.

To include older children, have conversations with them later that go deeper on the topic.

In a multi-age classroom situation, try mixing up your lesson with an activity specific to each age group.

Regardless of your situation, hopefully this chart will help you take beginning steps in developing a mission-minded heart in each of your children or students.

As we said before, these are just suggestions. As you try new things, you will discover if your children need to slow down and start with simpler tasks, or are ready to move ahead into deeper levels of learning and experience.

Wherever you start, your goal should be consistency.

Continue to build upon whatever you do so you are always challenging children to go deeper and grow in their relationship with God and their understanding of the world He so loves.

Questions and Answers

(If extra time permits, allow for questions and answers.)