

Session 3: Children are Strategic

Objective:

- Comprehend the value of seeing children as partners in ministry
- Understand how God has uniquely created children to be participants in His story
- Visualize the end goal of children's mobilization

Teaching Time: 60 minutes, 1 hour 30 minutes with translation

Materials:

- Bible
- Session 3 handout for each participant
- Session 3 People Outlines from Teaching Aids folder (Samuel, Naaman's servant girl, Josiah)
- One short candle and one tall candle
- Dots Banner from the Teaching Aids folder
- Three clothespins
- Scissors

Getting Ready:

1. Print out the dots banner and tape the sheets together. On the first sheet, use a colored marker to color in 10 dots near the upper left corner (They will already be red if you are using a color printer.)
2. Print out the Session 3 people outlines teaching aid. Cut out each person outline.
3. Pass out the Session 3 handout to participants before the session begins.

Introduction

So far we have looked at God's big story and seen how His mission permeates the story from beginning to end.

God is still making His name great among the nations in our day and He invites families to play a strategic role.

This is not just about husbands and wives. If my family has a part in God's story, then my sons and daughters should be included. It is not about children being onlookers as mom and dad serve together.

Mobilization involves more than parents modeling what it looks like to live our lives in light of God's mission. Mobilization involves preparing our children and providing our children with opportunities to actually participate in God's story.

In this session, we will see how children are strategic in God's mission and how He creates and empowers them to participate in His story.

We will also look at the long-term effects of what can happen if we, as parents and church leaders prepare and release the children in our homes and church families to be used for God's purposes.

Partner Discussion

Let us begin by thinking about how most people in our own culture view children.

Look on your handout. Do you see the section at the top that says "Partner Discussion Questions"? (Give participants time to locate this section.)

Find a partner sitting near you and discuss those two questions. You have five minutes to talk to your partner. Then we will share ideas with the large group.

What do most people in your culture expect children to do?

What do most people in your culture think children are incapable of doing?

(After five minutes, have a few participants share some observations.)

Potential of Children

We know how most people in our culture view children. How does God view them?

During Jesus' last week on earth, He was in the temple. The religious leaders were annoyed at the commotion caused by the boys and girls surrounding Him. As the children shouted with excitement, praising Jesus as the Son of David, these leaders complained about their words. Here was Jesus' response:

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?" (Matthew 21:16)

Jesus never discounted children because of their age or lack of experience. In fact, in matters of faith, Jesus said that we must all approach Him with the humility and dependence of children.

Now let us think about the potential children have to partner with God in His mission.

Suppose the electricity goes off in your village/community. You go to the store to purchase candles. Which one of these would you buy?

(Show the tall and short candles. Allow answers. Most people will choose the tall candle.)

(Hold up the taller candle). But this one is bigger and will cost more. Why would you buy this one?

(Allow responses.)

This taller candle is worth the investment because it will burn longer in the darkness. Both of these candles represent people who understand God's mission and can be a light to the nations.

(Point to short candle) This candle stands for a person who began to understand his part in God's mission as an adult.

Surely God can use him in mighty ways, but he has already lived part of his life without this understanding. He will not have as long to join with God in blessing the nations.

(Point to taller candle) This candle represents someone who began to understand his part in God's mission as a child.

This boy or girl has their whole life to join with God in blessing the nations, to be a light in the darkness.

Think about children whose parents are discipling them to love both God and His mission.

Think about children growing up in families who understand that God loves the peoples of the world and invites them to participate in blessing them.

Imagine how God could use these children to bless those who have no way of hearing the good news of Jesus.

Not only that, but imagine how God could also use them to impact their families, friends, and their local churches for generations to come.

Partners in Ministry

Pastor ___ [insert cultural name] really wants to find a way to encourage families in the congregation to get involved in active ministry and outreach throughout the week. He is struggling to figure out what he can do differently.

Every Sunday parents bring their children to church and drop them off in the children's area to learn about God. There, the children will sit quietly and listen to their teachers.

Then parents join the other adults in the service where they will also sit quietly and listen. Afterwards, they pick up their children and go home.

Could it be that the parents in Pastor ___'s [insert cultural name] church are only doing what they were taught to do as children?

Could it be that parents are not accustomed to actively discipling children in their homes because they grew up learning that the church was a place to learn about God?

Maybe the families in Pastor ___'s [insert cultural name] church have mistakenly believed that pastors, worship leaders, and church teachers are the ones who minister, not parents and their children.

As adults, if we confine worship and serving to certain days and places, if we assign worship and serving to certain groups of believers, if we exclude our own families in our thinking, then our children will grow up with this same way of thinking.

How about us? Church leaders, do you view the families in your church as people that you minister to, or as partners in ministry?

Parents, are you depending solely on your local church to provide spiritual leadership for your children, or do you view the church as a support to what you are already teaching and modeling at home during the week?

Is It Possible?

What would Pastor ____'s [cultural name] future congregation look like if church leaders began to equip parents to disciple their children at home, to encourage them to serve in the church and participate in outreach and missions as families, even while their children were young?

Including our children? Is this even possible? Yes. Let me tell you four reasons why.

1. First, God has created children in a special way.

- Their hearts are soft towards the things of God.
- Children have great faith that acts.
- They lack fear and barriers—fear of rejection, lack of Bible knowledge, barriers of race or social status.
- They love to be committed to causes greater than themselves.

2. Second, God has empowered children to serve.

- Children who follow Jesus have the same Holy Spirit as adults who follow Jesus.
- The Holy Spirit gives children gifts and abilities and places them into the Body of Christ.
- These gifts are not eggs waiting to hatch when children become adults.
- These gifts are more like ripe fruit, ready for use now.

3. Third, God has given children spheres of influence.

- Children can minister in places where adults cannot.
- I cannot go into a child's classroom or onto the ____ [insert popular sport here] field with his team, but he can.
- Often, a child is the best one to share Jesus with his teacher, classmates, and friends.
- A child is the best one to recruit other children to join him in ministry.

4. Fourth, God has used children in His story in the past.

Let us look at three situations where God gave children important jobs in His story:

Samuel

In 1 Samuel chapter 3, we meet Samuel. (1 Samuel 3:1, 8-10)

When Samuel began to serve God, he was probably around three or four years old. God does have a requirement before children can serve him ... but it is not their age. God requires obedience.

Messages from God were rare in Samuel's day because the people were sinning against God. When God chose to communicate, He spoke through a young boy who was following and serving God.

(Hang people outline #1, Samuel, on the timeline between the Nation of Israel and the Psalmist.)

Today, God still speaks to children and invites them to serve Him.

Naaman's Servant Girl

In 2 Kings chapter 5, we meet Naaman's servant girl. (2 Kings 5:1-3)

We do not know her name, but we know her situation.

Enemy soldiers took this young girl from her home and country.

She was torn from the family she loved to become a servant in the home of her enemy.

And yet, she had complete trust in God and a capacity to forgive.

God used her to bring hope to an unbelieving family.

(Hang people outline #2, Naaman's servant girl, on the timeline between the Psalmist and Isaiah.)

Today, children are living in areas where wars are raging.

Some children are slaves or live in other situations beyond their control.

How do we look at these children?

They may be the very ones God wants to use to point needy people to Him and bring hope.

Josiah

In 2 Kings chapter 22, we meet Josiah. (2 Kings 22:1-2)

Josiah became king of Israel when he was eight years old.

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David. He did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

God used Josiah to bring the people of Israel back to the straight path, the path of obedience to God's laws.

(Hang people outline #3, Josiah, on the timeline between Naaman's servant girl and Isaiah.)

Raise your hand if you know an eight-year-old child.

When you look at that eight-year-old, what do you see?

Do you see someone who has the ability to change a nation?

Today, God still uses children to stand up for what is right and show other people, including adults, how to follow God.

In the Old Testament, God's used children in His big story – to proclaim His truth in their generation, to reveal His glory to unbelievers, and to turn back those who had wandered away from Him. God can also use the children of our generation in His big story.

Turn to a partner and say, "God can use the children of ____ [insert host country name] in His big story."

Mobilization

We have seen that children have the potential to be strategic in God's mission.

However, this will not happen by accident. It will only happen if we mobilize children.

Why is it important that we prepare our children release them to be used in God's story?

Let us do an activity to think about this question.

Participation Activity

I need three volunteers.

(Choose three people to come to the front of the room.)

(Turn to the three volunteers.) You three represent pastors, missionaries, and evangelists.

(Point to the large group.) These are unreached people who have never heard about Jesus.

You can go select one person at a time and bring them to Jesus. Take his hand and bring him to the front of the room.

If you are selected, come to the front and stay here until the activity is over.

(Turn to the volunteers again.) Once you bring someone to the front, you can go back into the group and repeat this. Keep bringing people to Jesus until I say *stop*.

I will give you two minutes (Depending on the size of your group, you will need to adjust the time limit so that your three volunteers will not be able to complete their task.) Ready? Go.

(After two minutes, stop the activity. Have everyone return to their seats except for your original three volunteers.)

Let us try this again. But let us do the activity a little differently.

This time, when our evangelist, pastor, or missionary brings you to Jesus, then you can also go out and bring others to Jesus.

(Repeat the activity. Stop the activity when no one is left sitting in the class. Everyone has been brought to Jesus. Ask everyone to be seated.)

Discussion

1. Why were we able to reach everyone faster the second time?

2. Are pastors, missionaries, and evangelists the only people who should be participating in the Great Commission? Who else?
3. If we are all active participants, what will we accomplish?

To obey the commands of Jesus, to reach all nations, we will need all believers working together.

This includes parents. *And* this includes the children in their families.

Mobilization happens naturally in homes where parents understand God's story and have a vision for their part in His mission.

At the same time Mom and Dad are introducing their children to Jesus, they can integrate God's mission into family discipleship – His eternal purposes, His heart for all peoples, and His desire for each of us to join in what He is doing around the world.

Parents can also give their children opportunities to be involved in God's mission, beginning now, when they are young. Families can serve together in reaching the nations.

End Goal of Family Mobilization

What is our goal in mobilizing families, both parents and their children? Let us look at four things:

1. First, we want to raise up disciples who follow Jesus for a lifetime, disciples who have a strong faith and set an example for others. 1 Timothy 4:12 says,

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

Mobilized parents share God's story in a way that gives their children identity and purpose. They empower their children to believe that they matter, and that God can use them in a variety of world-changing ways.

They also equip their children and release them into God's mission.

Mobilized parents help their children embrace both the person *and* purposes of Christ, which brings greater depth to their understanding and relationship with Jesus.

2. Second, we want to multiply these lifelong followers of Jesus. In Luke 10:2 Jesus told his disciples,

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (Luke 10:2)

Some of these harvest workers are the children growing up in our homes.

There are 2.2 billion children in the world. That is 1/3 of the world population!

2.2 billion is a hard number to wrap our brains around. Let me show you what 2.2 billion children looks like.

(Hold up and unroll the dots banner.) Each of these dots represents 100,000 children.

(Point to 10 colored-in dots.) These ten dots represent one million children.

The number one million sounds large, but it is only a tiny fraction of 2.2 billion!

Some of these dots represent children who already know Jesus, but many are growing up in cultures with no access to the gospel.

As we begin to mobilize our families, our children will begin to pass on God's vision for the peoples of the world to their peers ... who will pass the vision on to their peers ... who will pass the vision on to their peers.

Think of the potential of these new harvest workers, mobilized to reach the world for Christ.

3. Third, we want to see multi-generational impact.

The vision does not stop with the children growing up in our homes today It is a long-term vision. Psalm 145:4 says,

One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.
(Psalm 145:4)

If children grow up in homes where God's heart and purposes for the world are central, someday they will become parents who pass on this vision to their own children.

They will become the next generation of pastors and teachers who pass on this vision to the-families in their church.

4. Most importantly, we want to reach the unreached, people who have never had the opportunity to hear about Jesus. We already know how God's big story ends.

In Revelation 7:9-10, the apostle John describes heaven. John saw people from every nation, tribe, and tongue standing before the throne worshiping the Lamb.

As we learned, all of history has been and continues to move towards this point. It is not a hope of what we want to happen; it is a reality of what *will* happen!

We want our children to understand and embrace God's heart for every tribe, tongue, and nation.

We want our children to know how to leverage their lives to be in harmony with what God is doing in the world.

Look at the end of your handout. Read the quote there. Ask yourself that question:

If tomorrow's world of unreached people were waiting for our kids, would our kids have a heart to reach them based on what we are giving them?

Conclusion

Think about what you have heard in this session.

Do you see children as ministry partners who God has created and empowered to serve Him in unique ways?

Is this the heart and vision you have for your sons and daughters? For the children in your church?

God has designed children to be active characters in His story. He has a role for them that only they can play.

If we want to see the church have its greatest impact on the world, then we have to mobilize the whole church – including children.

Processing Activity

(Have participants form groups of 12-20 and have these groups spread out around the teaching space. Then have each group form two lines with equal numbers of people, facing each other. If you have an odd number of participants, one group can have 3 people.)

The person facing you will be your first discussion partner. After each discussion topic is finished, one line of people will move to the right so that you are facing a new discussion partner.

The person at the end of the moving line will walk to the front of the line and face his new partner. (Demonstrate this movement with one of the groups.)

I will pose a topic for discussion. You and your partner will have 4 minutes to share your ideas.

When it is time to switch partners, I will say “move”. Then I will give you a new idea to talk about.

(Ask at least 3 of the following questions.) Think about the three sessions on God’s story, the role of families, and the potential of children. Respond to each of the following:

- The most important thing I learned is _____.
- The most surprising thing I learned is _____.
- The most useful thing I learned is _____.
- One thing that I learned that I would like to apply is _____.