

## Session 4: Developing a Mission-Minded Heart

### **Objective:**

- 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:** 30 minutes, 45 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, *missions* (with an s) is the local and global activity we do to help carry out God's *mission*.

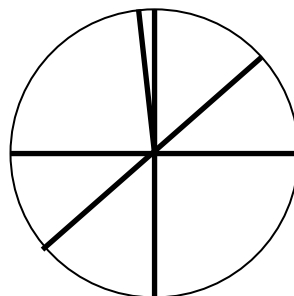
We are not trying to develop activity-driven hearts.

Instead, we want children's hearts to beat for God's *mission* (no s.) – seeing God's name made great so that people from every nation, tribe, and tongue might know and worship Him. Seeing His name made great so that the "unreached" (cover your ears with your hands) might hear the gospel message.

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

As believers, we often view missions as a segment of our Christian walk.

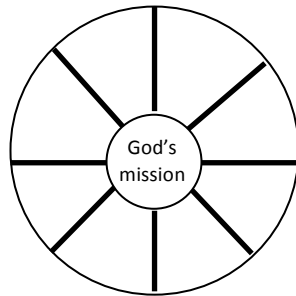
(Draw a circle on the board. Divide it into 8 segments by drawing lines from the center of the circle to the edge. Include segments for worship, fellowship, Bible study, service, prayer, giving, etc. Make missions a tiny segment.)



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, worship, giving, Bible study, fellowship, service.)



Church, Bible study, worship, 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.

Think about worship, for example. When God's mission is at the center, worship is no longer just a segment of our Christian walk. Instead, it naturally flows from our heart as a response to the glory of God's mission that He is fulfilling. It is His mission that draws us into a posture of worship.

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*.

Close your eyes and remember what it was like to be 3, 6, and 10 years old. Do you remember what was important to you? Who influenced you? How did that time in your life shape the person you are today?

Just as your developmental years influenced you, the life choices of our Christian young people 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 ways to encourage spiritual development, integrating God's mission into discipleship.

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.

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

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. Pray that God would shape their hearts to have a passionate desire to know Him and make Him known.

If you pray with your children in a consistent way, they will begin to copy actions like bowing their head, folding their hands \_\_\_\_ [adjust actions from host culture] and repeat words like "amen".

### 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.

At this age children are not yet able to distinguish differences. Focus on similarities between your child and the other people in the books and pictures. Explain that the same God that loves them also loves all these people.

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: 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.

Talk about differences in clothing, homes, languages, foods, etc. Emphasize the biggest difference – your child is learning about Jesus and people in these cultures have no way to hear about the true God.

Fours and fives love to help. 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 [insert familiar superhero or cartoon character in host culture] and Jesus are no longer equal.

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

This age is beginning to understand how the Bible fits together with both the Old and New Testament. Show them how God's story works together and how Jesus fulfilled what the Old Testament was all about.

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

Six and sevens are developing a sense of right and wrong. Some have an awareness of their own sin.

Continue to share the gospel message with them. Talk about God's gift of salvation for all who trust in Jesus to forgive their sin.

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 or count in other languages.

Give this age a variety of 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 and praying for unreached people groups and children at risk.

Children at risk are usually defined as children in poverty, orphans, street children, exploited children, and children impacted by war and disease.

But wealthy children can also be at risk spiritually. Because all their earthly needs are met, these children see no need for God. Their abundance becomes a barrier to coming to Jesus.

Provide experiences for eights and nines 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 your daughter encouraging her friend who was struggling with her homework. You could say, "I noticed how you really encouraged your friend when she was having difficulty with her math. Maybe God has given you the gift of encouragement, and you can use it to build up His church."

Or maybe you are leading a class at church or school. 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 have never practiced any of these suggestions throughout your child's development, don't worry!

You can still start here, and you can encourage other families to do the same by incorporating 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; other days they will hate everything around them.

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. Teach children how to pray specific Scripture passages and promises from God for these people groups.

Be sensitive to certain people groups or issues that God may be laying on your kids' hearts.

Encourage friendships with those of other cultures and backgrounds. Model 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 already taken place between the ages of birth through 12 years old.

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

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 other people may continue to view and treat them like 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.

Older teens will be looking for a rite of passage, a way of identifying that they have moved from childhood to 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 provide a positive rite of passage for teens, they will look for confirmation of adulthood in worldly things.

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

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 at the same developmental stage. Others may have children spread across several age ranges.

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 one-on-one conversations with them later that go deeper on the topic.

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.

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.)