

RENEW PARENT FORUM SPRING 2026

Forming Faith

Chapter 1: We're Using Old Maps

Matt Markins begins with a story of how, when his cruise ship got stuck on a sandbar, the crew continued to run regular activities as if nothing had happened.

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Cruise ship runs aground during Caribbean voyage

Julia Buckley, CNN
© 2 min read · Updated 12:50 PM EDT, Thu March 17, 2022



Norwegian Escape has canceled a cruise mid-journey after running aground in the Dominican Republic.
Erika Santolucito/AP/Getty Images

“The cruise liner needed to drop the daily-fun script, and to move to a new script—one that matched the moment.”
(P. 19)

Do we have a healthy perspective on how to form the faith of today’s kids?

In light of the current secular trajectory, it’s fair to ask, **“Is the church adequately preparing today’s eight-year-old to thrive in his or her faith in a very different, post-Christian, highly secularized future?”**

(P. 20)

Q: How many remember the old Rand McNally maps and atlases?



- **1989** – Garmin
- **1997** – MapQuest
- **2012** – Apple Maps, Googles Maps, Waze!

Q: Have you ever come across really old maps (like from the 1500s)?



It is impressive what they were able to map without the help of satellites; but the maps were still fairly inaccurate.

But here's the thing. If today's child educators were still using this old map to teach geography, geopolitical boundaries, and navigation to our children, we'd be outraged! We'd say, "This is an outdated map. We have more information now than we did when this map was created. If we keep using this old map to educate our children, it's going to lead to long-term consequences."

Children's ministry today is using **old** maps.

Most children's ministries today were built off 1980s and 1990s assumptions that were published in books and blogs and taught at workshops in the early 2000s; and most of us are still operating off of this common blueprint today.

We even call our contemporary model of children's ministry "innovative" because it uses current entertainment, screens, videos, mobile technology, and discussion-based child development pedagogy.

As David Kinnaman, a leading Christian researcher and president of Barna Group, has said, "**The Church is woefully unprepared for Gen Z.**" (P. 25)

We had the chance to form them as children, then as students. But only **10** percent of them—whom Kinnaman calls “resilient disciples”—are thriving in their faith as young adults, still engaged in the church.

A 10 percent success rate is a hard pill for all of us to swallow. To make this practical, as a leader of an organization myself, I think, If our ministry was losing 90 percent of our church partners or donors, how long would we be able to remain in ministry? Not long.

The windows on the cover of the Forming Faith book represent God’s two agents of formation: **church** and **home**.

Consider these two perspectives as we prepare to press onward:

1. If our primary investment in children—the most vulnerable among us—is in shielding and entertaining them, we will likely form within them a safe-yet-**fragile** foundation.
2. However, if our primary investment in the most vulnerable among us is in forming them, we will become artisans who shape a generation whose inner **spiritual resilience** is so compelling that future communities will gasp at their Christlike beauty.

Chapter 2: A Little Less Disney, a Bit More Mister Rogers

We live in a culture that Neil Postman says has an “infinite appetite for distractions.”

Our world has been so affected by the [false] Darwinian idea that all progress is good and that every iteration is better than what was before.

“It seems nearly impossible to have an uninterrupted conversation at a family dinner,” [Sherry Turkle] writes.

We have allowed the passions of innovation, creativity, and entertainment—divorced from a personal presence and intentional relationships—to drive the programming in our churches.

Many of us in our 40s and older grew up watching Mr. Rogers.

He famously said, **“Our society is much more interested in information than wonder, in noise rather than silence.”**

The global pandemic of 2020 did to kids’ ministry what it did to everything else in our world. It forced us to stop and ask, “Why are we doing what we are doing? Are we doing the things that matter most?”

Kids’ pastors often face pressure from parents, church leaders, or themselves—and sometimes it’s all three. This pressure, which is sometimes spoken but generally unspoken, is for our ministries to be more like **Disney**.

“However, the older I get and the longer I do kids’ ministry, the more I realize that Walt Disney’s idea of child formation was wrong, and Fred Rogers’ was right.”
(P. 32)

“Walt created a world that is an escape from the real world. Fred lived in a neighbourhood and showed kids how to navigate the real world.” (P. 33)

When Fred Rogers gave the commencement address to the Marquette University graduates of 2001, he said:

“I’d like to give you all an invisible gift: a gift of silence to think about those who nourish you at the deepest part of your being—anyone who has ever loved you and wanted what was best for you in life.”

EXERCISE:

Take a minute and think about the people who impacted you the most positively in your life as a younger person.

When we are alone with ourselves for one minute, the person we remember most is not who entertained us; it is the person who showed up in our lives—the one who disciplined us.

What if COVID was a way for us to realize we can’t do church the same as we have been doing it? Maybe we shouldn’t be doing church the way we have been doing it.

3 Resets:

Reset #1: Who Matters More than What

Who your kids are becoming matters more than what your children’s ministry spaces look like.

What things do we need to teach, and how can we teach those things to kids in a way that creates lasting faith in Jesus?

Reset #2: Real Transcends Virtual

We need to train a community of people who can teach the Scriptures and transmit their faith to the next generation. Plug-and-play Bible stories are excellent and professional, yet often at the expense of being tangible and authentic. Kids need more than just information; they need incarnation.

Reset #3: Small Is the New Big

“The return rate of kids at our large campuses as we started to come back from COVID was around 10 percent, way below expectations. At our smaller campuses, the return rate was **80** percent. One year after coming back to in-person meetings, our larger campuses are still only at 75 percent, while our smaller campuses are back to 100 percent. What is the difference? Community, accountability, relationship; in a word, it’s discipleship.” (P. 36)

WALT DISNEY	FRED ROGERS
Walt built a fantasy world	Fred lived in a neighbourhood
Walt entertained kids	Fred empowered kids
Walt’s “home” was a castle	Fred’s “home” was a house
Walt was more concerned about your experience	Fred was more concerned with who you are becoming

I stopped asking the kids in our church, “Did you have fun?” I now ask, “What did you learn about God today?” “How did you see Jesus in the story today?” Last, “How did the Holy Spirit show up in a special way?”

We must be more obsessed with who our kids are becoming, not just how we can get more kids coming.

NOTE: At Renew, we believe that both evangelism and discipleship are important.

How Can Children's Ministry Become More Like Mister Rogers?

1. Remember relational presence transcends production value.

Eugene Peterson defines discipleship as “a long obedience in the same direction.”

Entertainment involves us passively consuming; discipleship involves us actively pursuing.

2. Show up, listen, and insist on intimacy.

The Disney model is entertainment-driven and tries to grab your attention rather than give you its attention.

Listening is a prerequisite of love.

One of the greatest misconceptions about discipleship is that it is primarily the transfer of information.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer agreed with Mister Rogers when he said, “So often Christians ... think that their only service is always to have to ‘offer’ something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.”

3. Tell your kids the truth.

When we give our children pat answers, they will find out.

4. Don't forget you were a kid once.

Take the time to remember what it was like to be the age of the kids whom you are serving.

5. Keep in mind, most of all, that Jesus was a kid once.

Chapter 3: The Old Map of Children’s Ministry

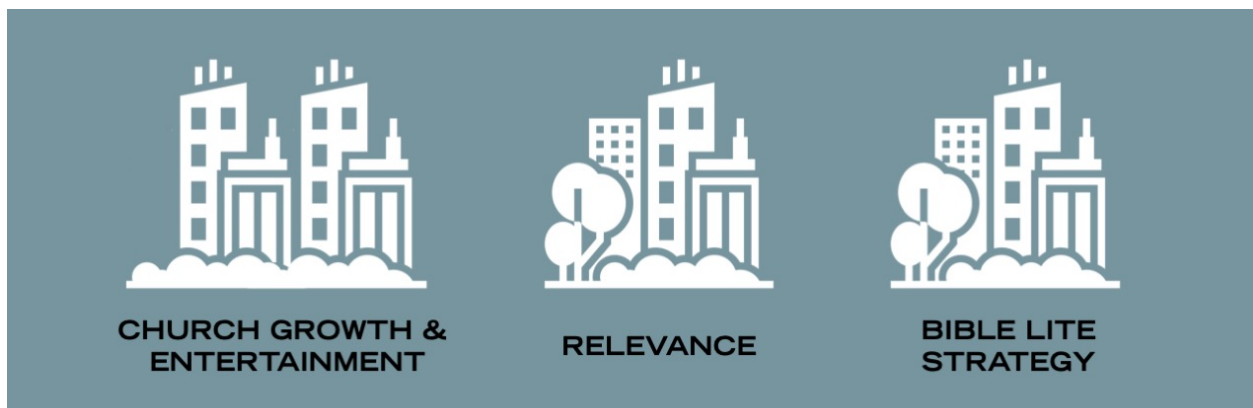
We are on a “burning platform.”

Only **10** percent of eighteen-to-twenty-nine-year-olds are “resilient disciples.”

Church leaders and concerned parents must actively evaluate what we are doing in our children’s and student ministries.

1. It’s not a matter of will the church move to the new map (which is actually an ancient map), but ***when***.
2. We need to thoughtfully begin charting the new map.
3. If we don’t move toward the new map, we’ll eventually discover the old map of children’s ministry is a burning platform—and be forced to take a leap.

3 Cities on the Old Map



City #1: The Twin Cities of Church Growth and Entertainment

First Twin City: Church Growth

The church growth model is the stewardship of knowledge and wisdom to grow the church through attractionalism marked by emphasis on evangelism, missions, practical ministries, and numerical growth.

Numerical growth is the driving force behind the attractional model to the point that it's become the chief metric that's influencing, forming, and shaping the behaviors of local church leaders, especially kids' pastors.

One Children's Ministry Leader's Experience: "I'm facing a big problem at the leadership level. Our executive pastor has given me the goal of moving our children's ministry attendance from 13 percent to 30 percent of the overall church body attendance."

"There's ample data indicating that showing up at a church service alone is not forming lasting faith." (P. 54)

The church growth movement, founded by Donald McGavran, served a good purpose in North America. It took stagnating churches and showed them how to make their churches attractive to unbelievers.

This overall effort had a profound impact on US pastors from the 1970s to 1990s, notably leaders like Robert Schuller, Elmer Towns, Bill Hybels, Chuck Smith, John Maxwell, Rick Warren, Leith Anderson, and many others.

Nothing has shaped children's ministry in the US more than the church growth (attractional) model, because this model has created the dominant context in which most US churches operate.

Second Twin City: Entertainment

"In our 2014 study, there was only one area where we, as a children's ministry community, outperformed the level of stated importance. Any guesses on what it was? Fun!" (P. 57)

In *Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church*, Valerie Bell said, "I fear we may realize too late that we gave them things that didn't really 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."

City #2: Relevance

A relevance-focused Christianity sows the seeds of its own obsolescence. Rather than rescuing or reviving Christianity, “hipster faith” shrinks it to the level of consumer commodity, as fickle and fleeting as the latest runway fashion.

Pastor Mark Sayers makes the point that in our pursuit of “relevance,” the church becomes changed by the very culture we are trying to reach.

After visiting a well-known, nationally recognized church’s children’s ministry wing, Matt Markins remarked to a colleague, “That children’s ministry space is so over-the-top amazing that if I were a kid at that church I’m not so sure I’d even understand my need for Jesus.”

City #3: Bible Lite Strategy

The Bible Lite Strategy emphasizes values, **morals**, or good character from the Bible in a way that’s unrooted from the gospel. It isn’t always inaccurate, but it is incomplete.

Good character is not the goal of a Christian; it’s the **by-product** of a life surrendered and cultivated in Jesus Christ.

At Renew, we hold a high view of Scripture combined with gospel-centric teaching.

The **Conservative** outcome of the Bible Lite Strategy: **Legalism** and **Moralism**

Legalism and moralism shape kids to think that the problem in life is found outside of oneself and is to be avoided, and the answer is found inside of oneself through a system of virtues or good morals, rather than the gospel.

The **Progressive** outcomes of the Bible Lite Strategy: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

The five basic tenets of MTD are:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. This god wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. The god of MTD does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Mark Sayers: **“Post Christian Culture is an attempt to advance the goals of Christianity without Christ. [It’s] the kingdom without the King.”**

Chapter 4: Charting the New Map

Insight One: Secularism is here, and it's likely here to stay. The dominant culture of today and the near future is a secular culture. No matter how much we shelter our children, the broader, mainstream culture they live within is secular or post-Christian in its thinking. If we are fish, this is now the water in which we swim.

Insight Two: Therefore, our job as church leaders and parents is to **prepare** them to thrive in their faith in these new cultural realities. Our focus as their pastors, leaders, shepherds, and mentors must shift to a child discipleship process that is robust enough to form lasting, resilient faith in our new realities.

- Motivation of the Old Map Dominant City: numerical growth, size, quantity
- Motivation of the New Map Dominant City: forming faith, depth, quality

3 Cities on the New Map



City #1: The Twin Cities of Faithfulness and Lasting Faith

First Twin City: Faithfulness

Faithfulness is one of those attributes of the Christian faith that's central. And it's often **caught** ... not taught.

Children need to be able to see, hear, and experience the essence of faithfulness so they actually know what it is.

Kids catch this not only from their parents but also from pastors, kids' pastors, teachers, volunteers, coaches, and mentors.

Second Twin City: Lasting Faith

"By 2013, we, at Awana, began asking, 'What is it the church community does that tends to form lasting faith in kids?' To this day, this is still the central question of our global ministry." (P. 87)

Child discipleship is designed to form lasting faith by helping kids **belong** to God and His kingdom, **believe** in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and **become** like Jesus and walk in His ways through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **Belong:** highly relational ministry led by loving, caring adults
- **Believe:** deeply scriptural ministry rooted in the gospel and the truth of God’s Word in order that kids may know, love, and serve Jesus Christ
- **Become:** truly experiential ministry designed to help kids navigate a changing culture, experience God’s presence, and walk in the ways of Jesus

The **3B child discipleship** approach isn’t just about church (children’s ministry). It isn’t just about home (family ministry). Child discipleship is about viewing child faith formation as a holistic effort—one in which loving, caring adults (volunteers and parents) are trained and equipped to engage children in ways that are most known to form lasting faith in children.

When the church and the family both understand this remarkable insight, they can work together on a new map, which is really an ancient map, to influence the lasting faith of children.

Taking this new approach does not require burning everything down that we have already created. We simply need to adjust our ministry to fit the new map.

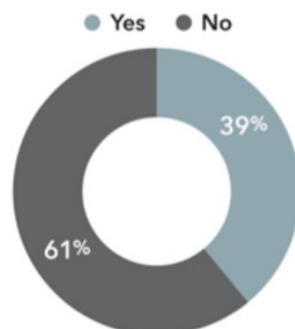
City #2: Community

Pastor Brian Bowman contributed an article to The Gospel Coalition titled “I was Discipled by...the Church”.

What’s contained in Pastor Brian’s article is what research shows to be the most catalytic factor in forming childhood faith: community.

Barna Group: “Today, two in five churched parents of 5-to-14-year-olds (**39** percent) indicate their child has a meaningful relationship with an adult at their church.”

Two in Five Children in Children’s Ministry Have a Meaningful Relationship with an Adult



n = 1,021 U.S. churched adults with a child ages 5–14 at home, June 11–July 6, 2021

We need to help young people move “from **noticed** to **named** to **known**.”

“This is the future of children’s ministry: a church that’s primarily motivated by faithfulness and forming lasting faith in children. And the most catalytic way to form lasting faith is to cultivate a local church community where volunteers, parents, pastors, and congregants engage kids through a highly relational church culture.” (P. 99)

This is a big part of the motivation for the Mix events that we do at Renew.

City #3: Gospel and Scripture Engagement

At church a child may hear...	Outside of church a child may hear...
“Love your neighbour.”	“Self-love is the greatest love.”
“God’s Word is the source of truth.”	“Live your truth.”
“Your identity is in Christ.”	“You be you.”
“Love the sinner, hate the sin.”	“To not approve of me is to hate me.”
“Do not kill.”	“My body, my choice.”
“Be kind to others.”	“Your opinion of me is hateful.”
Gospel Formation	Cultural Formation

Cultural formation is such a powerful force that it is distorting the very meaning of these important words and ideas. The result? Confusion. Chaos. Instability. Anxiety. Isolation.

Today’s kids need to hear the gospel, and they need to hear it with clarity and consistency.

Not simply the salvation message, which is the climax of the gospel. They need the complete message of the good news of the gospel because most of today’s children are unaware of the biblical narrative of **creation, fall, redemption, and restoration**.

How the Gospel Helps Children

1. The gospel gives children reality.
2. The gospel points children to salvation from sin and death.
3. The gospel shows children how to live here on earth.

The gospel narrative (creation, fall, redemption, restoration) must become central to all that we do in children's ministry.

Imagine two children in our children's ministry: one who grasps the gospel narrative, another who only knows the dominant cultural narratives. How will these children each hear, understand, and interpret the following teachings in our local church children's ministry?

- The story of Noah
- The story of Moses
- Bible lesson on the virtue of kindness
- The story of Daniel
- Bible lesson on the virtue of honesty
- David and Goliath
- Bible lesson on the virtue of love
- The story of Esther
- The Parable of the Prodigal Son
- Bible lesson on the virtue of courage
- The story of Stephen or Paul or Peter, etc.

If a child does not grasp the gospel narrative, these are merely stories with good virtues.

A child who grasps the gospel sees them differently—as defining reality and as reinforcing the big picture of God redeeming all of creation through Christ.

Chapter 5: Our Single Most Strategic Opportunity

Alarming Statistics:

70 percent of youth stop attending church and start leaving when they graduate from high school.

Lifeway Research found **66** percent of churchgoing teenagers drop out for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22.

1 in 3 young adults say they go to church **less** than they used to pre-pandemic, a bigger portion than other groups.

The authors would contend that graduation day isn't the deadline to sow into the faith of children in our churches. The deadline for faith formation is much, much earlier than seventeen or eighteen years old.

According to a study by George Barna, "What you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing."

George Barna: "A person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach age nine."

There is a strategic reason why public schools are pushing radical ideologies at earlier and earlier ages.

Many scholars believe that the disciples were not the old men seen in the paintings of the Renaissance, but more likely they were teenagers called by and following their rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, to become more and more like Him.

"The International Bible Society indicated that **83%** of Christians make their first commitment to Jesus between the ages of 4 and 14, thus when they are children or early youth." (P. 121)

Those numbers to tell the story. More than **four** out of five believers come to saving faith in Jesus before age **fifteen!**

Review the Stats:

- More than 80 percent of Christian children come to faith in Jesus between ages four and **fourteen**.
- A person's moral foundation is in place by age nine.
- The worldview of many is solidly in place by age thirteen. Yet, over **half** of all young people stop attending church once they graduate.

DISCUSSION: At what age did you come to faith in Jesus? If it was as a child, what prompted you to do so, and if you're now an adult, what factors allowed you to stay faithful past high school?

Chapter 6: Getting Unstuck from Our Stalemate: Moving from Declaration to Dialogue

When it comes to forming the faith of our children, God's two agents of formation, the church and the home, seem to be stuck. Gridlocked. Truth is, in most cases we're stuck in a church and home stalemate.

In the 2000s, George Barna published a book called *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, in which he wrote: "**Parents** should provide the primary spiritual training of children."

It's been twenty years since the popularization of this message that "Parents are the primary spiritual influence on their kids."

One children's pastor confesses: "I've spent over twenty years championing family ministry. I've told parents they are responsible to disciple their own kids until I was blue in the face. I've hosted parent events where less than 10 percent of the parents show up. This family ministry thing feels stuck. What am I missing?"

George Barna was clear in his research and analysis not only that “Parents are the primary” but also that there are two agents of formation, **church** and **home**, and each has a role to play.

According to his own words:

The church is responsible for “encouragement, training, and resources” and must be a “healthy community of faith” that is “supplementing what the parents are doing.”

The home is the place where parents provide “spiritual training of children” as well as “spiritual direction and care,” where they are the “spiritual mentor of their children,” and where “parents may receive ... training” from the church.

From this, we can extrapolate the role of the church and of the parent...

The role of the church is to **train** and **equip** the congregation to disciple children and youth at home. The church does this through inspiration, encouragement, and hands-on training opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn and gain experience so they can confidently know how to actively participate in the discipling of their own children.

The role of the parent is to **be a disciple** who engages in training and equipping provided by the church. A trained parent has the vision, confidence, knowledge, and experience to know how to actively participate in the discipling of their own children.

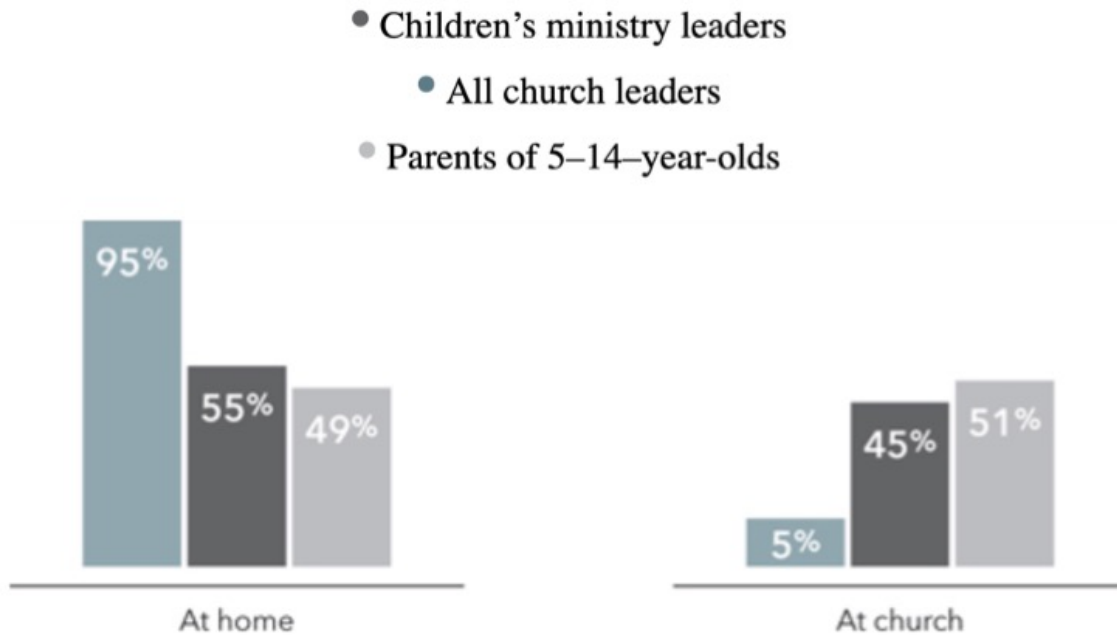
Could it be that we have swung the pendulum so far toward the message of “Parents are the primary”—emphasizing that “they” are responsible—yet missed the profound responsibility that we as church leaders have in training parents?

Where should the primary source of children’s discipleship take place?

If we could be a fly on the wall, what would we hear parents saying about discipling their children?

“According to the data, we’d hear disagreement, discussion, and dialogue. One father says he feels an overwhelming sense of responsibility to disciple his own kids ... a mother chimes in to share how insecure she feels about discipling her daughter ... another father with a busy travel schedule backs her up and says he doesn’t have the slightest idea where to begin with his son ... a mom mentions how she feels so much shame from decisions in her own teen years, and besides, no one has ever showed her

how to disciple her own kids ... a wise grandmother pushes back gently and reverses the tide by advocating for how we at least need to try and take responsibility; after all, we have more available hours in a week to influence kids than they could ever get in even the best local church children’s ministry.” (PP. 134-135)



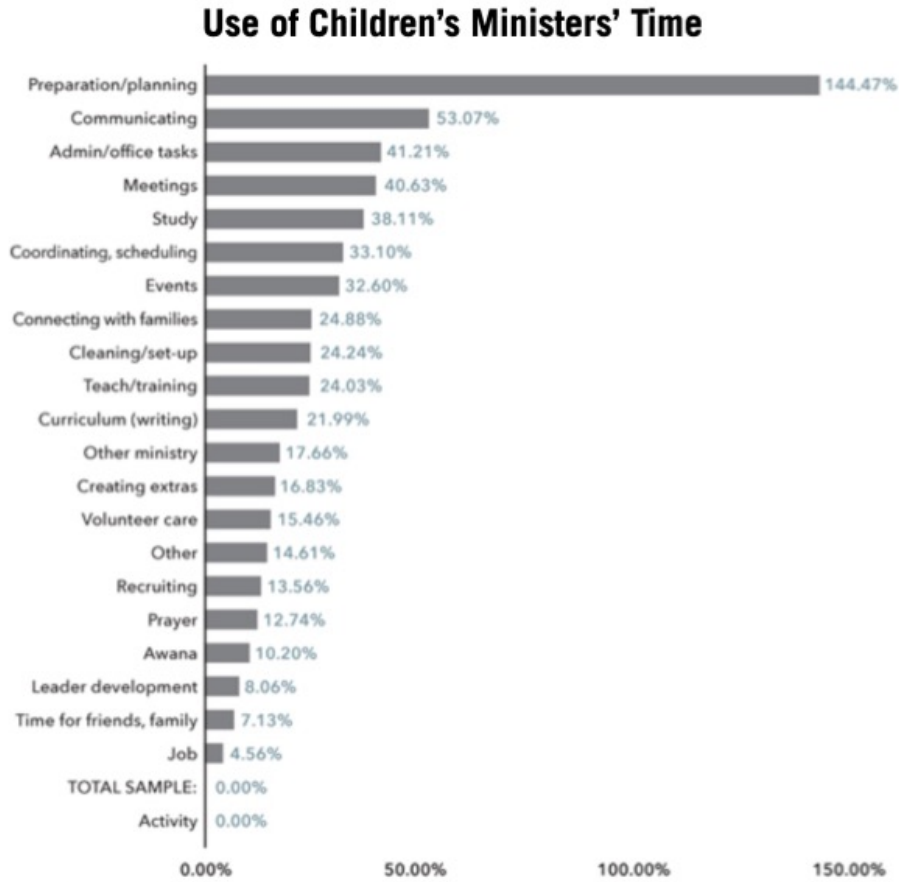
Thinking back to that popularized phrase, “Parents are the primary spiritual influence on their kids,” this is a belief and a conviction. It is God-given in the Scriptures, therefore theological in nature (Deut. 6:4–9; Matt. 18:6; Prov. 22:6; Ps. 78:4–6).

So, as church leaders, our position of parents are the primary disciplers of their children is theological, biblical, and practical.

Tiffany, a children’s ministry director, passionately told the authors: “The most fruitful and effective way to do children’s ministry is when we get relational time with parents and volunteers. They are the ones on the front lines with kids! When parents are trained and equipped, discipleship with kids tends to happen more naturally and effectively.”

Unfortunately, most children’s ministers get to spend very little **time** with the parents of the children they are discipling.

Stats show that most children’s and youth leaders spend the majority of their time on communicating, admin, meetings and coordinating/scheduling.



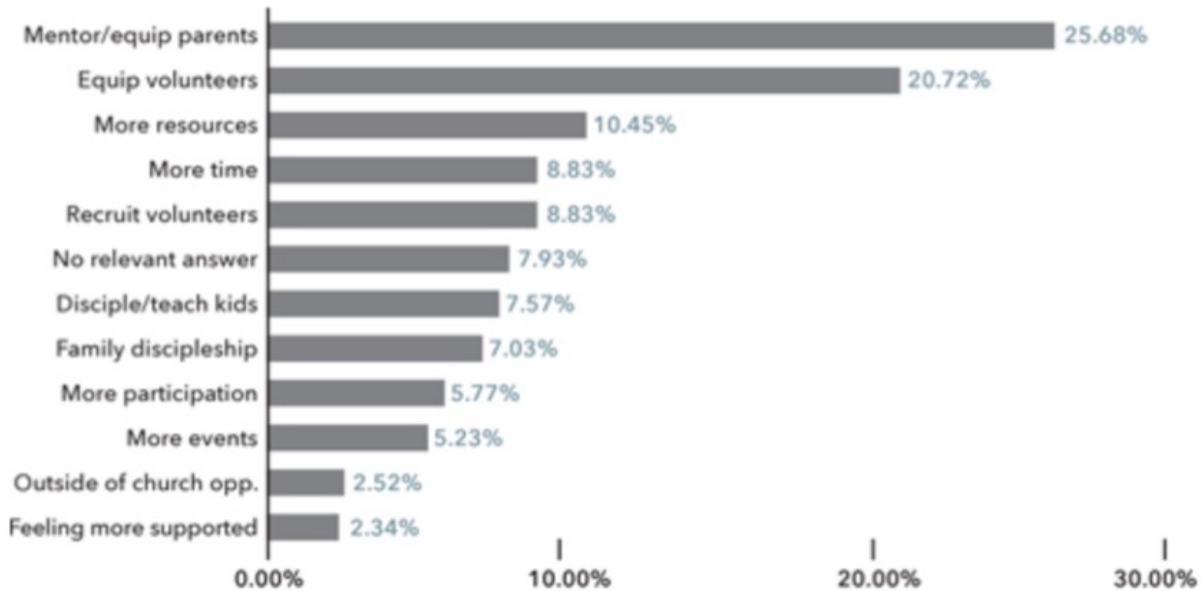
Open-end responses coded into categories 1st mention: 555; 2nd mention: 551; 3rd mention: 532; 4th mention: 467; 5th mention: 385

But when pressed, most will confess that they believe other activities will have the most impact on child discipleship. The top 4 were...

1. Building relationships
2. Prayer
3. Discipleship, mentoring
4. Equipping parents

When asked, “What do you wish you could do (that you are not currently doing) in any of the areas in this survey to be more effective in discipling children?” children’s ministry leaders responded:

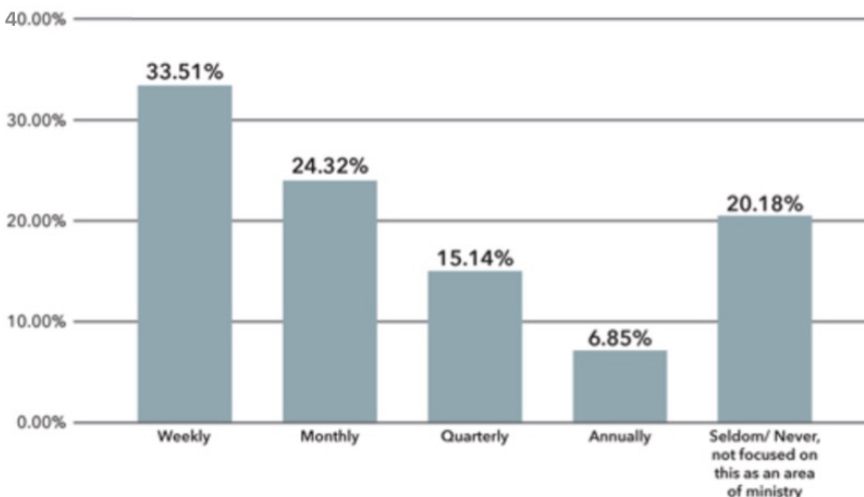
What do you wish you could do (that you are not currently doing) in any of the areas in this survey to be more effective in discipling children?



Open-end responses coded into categories Answered: 555 Skipped: 0

When asked, “How frequently are you focusing specifically on equipping parents to help them disciple their children in any way?” they responded:

How frequently are you focusing specifically on equipping parents to help them disciple their children in any way?



Answered: 555 Skipped:0

The Crux of the Stalemate:

Those who are most experienced and skilled (church leaders) to train and equip parents are in a church model (the old map) that leaves little (if any) weekly time to do the work of training and equipping the saints (parents and caregivers) for the work of child discipleship. **Therefore, parents are not getting trained.** They lack the confidence to disciple their children, and child discipleship is simply not happening in most Christian homes. We are gridlocked.

Chapter 7: The Formational Church

Where were you on January 28, 1986?



NASA managers approved the launch despite repeated un heeded warnings.

“I genuinely believe that if we don’t relationally equip the saints to disciple their own children, then we may be guilty of pastoral malpractice (saying one thing, but doing another).” (P. 159)

John F. Kennedy at Rice University (Sept. 12, 1962): “We choose to go to the moon...”
He was specific, he was clear, and his goal was measurable.

We are holding this forum to share a vision of what child discipleship needs to look like at Renew.

The church that understands the importance of child discipleship ruthlessly focuses on the urgency of lasting faith, rather than being dominated by the immediacy of administrative needs.

At Renew...

- we are thinking decades, not days.
- we are measuring discipleship, not just attendance numbers.
- we are imparting the gospel, not just trying to be novel.
- we are using our leaders to train our parents in child discipleship.

What to Expect:

- periodic training events, just like this one
- highlighting successes that parents are having
- sharing of resources (books, podcasts, etc.) that parents can use
- regular classes that parents can attend for their own discipleship
- increased communication among parents and children's leaders (WhatsApp)
- organic sharing of discipleship strategies
- making use of available times to work with parents (such as during Ignite meetings)
- continue to encourage mixed generation events

“We need to realize that in the discipleship of children, it isn't the parents' responsibility, it isn't the church's responsibility—it's both.” (P. 174)

Updating Our Language

- “Belong, Belief, Become”
- “Developing leaders, discipling kids.”
- From “they are just kids” to “kids are our greatest asset and the future of Renew”.
- “Children are a blessing.”
- “Child Discipleship” over “Children’s Ministry”
- “Parents and church leaders are partners in child discipleship.”
- “It takes a family to raise a child—a family of origin and a family of faith.”
- Referring to volunteers as “Child Disciplers” or “Student Disciplers”
- “Intergenerational Connections”
- “Seen, Known, Loved”

Discipleship Takes Community

We need a multigenerational team of individuals who **obsess** over the Christlikeness of the kids in our church.

Our kids cannot become like Christ camped in their room, reading through the Bible each year.

Discipleship does not happen only at home or at church but in **partnership**—the community at home and the community of church partnering together to cultivate faith and interdependence.

John Piper:

Parents, successful parenting is more than compliant kids. It is gospel-saturated living and teaching. Show your children how Christ, crucified for our sins, and Christ, raised for our justification, and Christ, showing the Father’s love, and Christ, guaranteeing the Spirit’s daily help—show them how this gospel is not just something that begins the Christian life but empowers it and shapes and sustains it. Pray and love and teach your children until Christ breaks in on their hearts and becomes their Treasure.

Chapter 8: The Formational Home

Key Question: How can church leaders train and mobilize parents to cultivate a culture of discipleship at home?

What we've discovered is that most of the children in our ministries do not live in a home that has a culture of discipleship.

Peter Drucker: "**Culture east strategy for breakfast.**"

Children's ministry leaders are working overtime trying to get parents to pray or read the Bible or have a faith conversation with their children (strategy), while most parents are living the frantic pace of life (culture).

We need to be aware that the strategy of simply providing materials to aid parents in discipling their children is not going to be successful, because the culture of the home and society has radically changed, even in the last twenty years, and will continue to do so in this increasingly post-Christian reality.

The Four Central Objectives to shape a culture of discipleship in the home are **vision, time & place, language, and community.**

Vision: Discipleship Drives Direction

Tedd Tripp asserts that we must not just begin with the end in mind, but we must develop a vision that is "clearly about man's chief end. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever; therefore, your objective (in speaking to parents) in every context must be to set a biblical worldview before your children."

Ask the typical parent what they want for their child and they'll reel off no shortage of goals: straight A's, a meaningful career, a sure financial future, good friends, and a great marriage.

If we were to talk with parents in our churches about the goals they have for their kids, would they include a lasting, thriving faith in Jesus?

What does it look like for Christian parents to begin to cultivate a **vision** for the journey their children can walk in throughout their lives as they follow Christ?

Helpful Questions for Parents to Consider:

- Who is the adult you see your child growing into?
- Imagine your child as a forty-year-old. What does your heart long for as you think of their future?
- What are the values, priorities, and convictions of that future adult?
- What are you doing now to shape who they become?
- How does a biblical worldview get both taught and caught in the home as well as in the church?

Time & Place: Discipleship is Deliberate

The home that prioritizes lifelong faith in Jesus will organically and **intentionally** arrange their rhythms to consistently engage in discipling their kids.

We all have the same number of hours in each day and the same number of days in each week.

“We must remember that anything and everything we put in place of God becomes an idol—that includes the “good things” on which families might spend their time. Soccer can become sacred. Ballet lessons, gymnastic meets, and theater classes can encroach upon the divine design of the home, which isn’t unending activity, but deliberate discipleship. Evil doesn’t always parade around in obvious attire; sometimes it dresses in opportunities and activities, which, when prioritized, become idols that rob us and the families we serve from putting God at the center of life.” (P. 204)

According to a 2022 study conducted by the American Survey Center, “a generation ago, family meals were routine. Roughly three-quarters of baby boomers (**76** percent) and 84 percent of Americans who belong to the silent generation report that they had meals together as a family every day. Fifty-nine percent of Americans who belong to Generation X say they had daily meals with their family. In contrast, less than half of millennials (**46** percent) and Generation Z (**38** percent) report that growing up they had meals with their family every day.” (P. 204)

In a 2022 survey by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “adults living in households with children under age 6 spent an average of **2.1** hours per day providing primary childcare to household children. Adults living in households where the youngest child was between the ages of 6 and 17 spent less than half as much time providing primary

childcare to household children—**49** minutes per day. Primary childcare is childcare that is done as a main activity, such as providing physical care or reading to children.”

“Saying no to items and options reveals the significance of yes...When we’ve committed to a church, we’ve said no to every other place and people and yes to the family of God that is our local church, imperfections and all!” (P. 207)

Albert-László Barabási: “**Time** is our most valuable nonrenewable resource, and if we want to treat it with respect, we need to set priorities.”

Parents are uniquely positioned to not only instruct their children in this but also live it out by being committed to saying “yes” and perhaps more importantly “no” to the right things.

Parents need to make the most of the natural **rhythms** of life—birthdays, bedtimes, meals, car rides, movie nights, milestones and rites of passage.

EXERCISE: Identify 10 ways to bring discipleship into your family’s daily and weekly rhythms.

“**Forming disciples happens in the midst of life, not outside of it.**” (P. 212)

Everywhere and anywhere is the right place for parents to disciple their children. Kitchen islands, dining room tables, road trips, playgrounds, backyards, food courts, school pick-up lines, naptimes, mornings, evenings, anytime, and anyplace.

Helpful Questions for Parents to Consider:

- How does your family make decisions regarding what to say “yes” to?
- If you were to audit a typical week, how much time is taken up by activities?
- If you could press reset on your calendar, given the goal of forming children with lasting faith in Jesus, what would you do differently?
- What’s one activity or commitment that you would say no to right now if you could?
- What are some natural rhythms in your home where faith formation can easily take place?

Language: Discipleship as Dialogue

Parents need to learn how to dialogue with their children.

Future Forum Idea: Model for parents how to integrate dynamic conversations in the home in a way that speaks to the presence of Jesus in their everyday lives.

Idea: Pastor Bartley made a point of taking his kids on a lunch date every few months. He picked them up from school and let them choose the fast food restaurant where they would eat. For an hour they would just catch up, with Bartley doing most of the listening.

Parents don't have to teach their preschooler words or phrases like "hypostatic union," "substitutionary atonement," or "theophany," but they do need to have even the simplest of conversations about God's love, Jesus as their Good Shepherd, and the fact that the church is a family.

Equally, it's important for parents of older kids to not just expect **blind** obedience for faith in Christ without dialogue.

Helpful Questions for Parents to Consider:

- Are you looking for ways every day to have conversations with your children that ultimately speak to who God is?
- What are some rites of passage children's ministries and families can design to create intentional rhythms?
- Are we trained to spot God and training our kids to do the same?
- Are you more prone to simply talk to your kids about the truths of the Bible rather than engage with them in discussion? Why or why not?
- Are you asking your children open-ended questions about where they're seeing God? Are you sharing with them areas where you're seeing God as well?

Community: Discipleship Takes a Team

The home that builds a discipleship team around each child creates multiple connection points that form a foundation of Christian faith.

Parents need to be even more strategic than the management of a professional sports franchise in constructing a team around their children. No one becomes a disciple in isolation.

Community and divine fellowship are indivisible from Christianity; it's within the divine DNA, yet in the twenty-first-century evangelical West, and in most of the Western world, isolation and loneliness are the norm.

According to the National Center for School Mental Health, in 2021, "25 percent of girls reported having made a suicide plan."

Sherry Turkle: "Digital connections ... offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship."

Parents need to take stock of the adults in their children's lives or those in close proximity to their families and play a little fantasy football in order to create a team of people around their children.

These could be family members, neighbours, coaches, teachers, ministry leaders, mentors, etc. The key is that one is forming a team of individuals they would want to see their child become like.

Helpful Questions for Parents to Consider:

- Who are you doing life with? Are there people you can call in the middle of the night if you need something?
- Who are the leaders you would love to see your child emulate? Perhaps they're local, perhaps they're somewhere else, but as you think about your child, who would you like to see them become like?
- How are you going to set expectations for the home team to come around your child? What are the natural rhythms that exist and how can you capitalize on them?

CONCLUSION

We need a new map for child discipleship.

Our ministry needs to look more like Mr. Rogers (relational) than Disney (entertainment).

We do not want to overswing the pendulum and make our ministry unattractive to kids.

The new map is all about:

- Faithfulness and Lasting Faith
- Community
- Gospel and Scripture Engagement

Parents and Children/Youth Ministry Leaders need to work together in child discipleship.

Parents need to be intentional about their own discipleship and about discipling their children at home.

Children/Youth Ministry Leaders need to be intentional about equipping parents to effectively disciple their children at home.

Moving forward, Renew will be putting more emphasis on empowering parents.