



FACING THE GOSPEL TRUTH

ABOUT TODAY'S CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

breakout presenter notes

LENGTH:

50-60 minutes

SUMMARY:

When it comes to lifelong discipleship, how's your church's children's ministry doing? Really? Awana recently released 10 critical research findings that express the pain points and passion areas of faithful kidmin leaders across the U.S. As it turns out, despite its best efforts the church has a great discipleship disconnect on its hands. If you love kids and families, lead or serve in children's ministry or are responsible for key discipleship ministry decisions in your church, this breakout is for you. Find your voice in the research as you take a deeper dive into a timely resource, *The Gospel Truth About Children's Ministry: 10 Fresh KidMin Ministry Findings* by Matt Markins and Dan Lovaglia with Mark McPeak (Awana 2015).

Note: Use the breakout summary above to promote the session in your church or children's ministry. Visit awana.org/thegospeltruth to learn more about the research, purchase copies of the book, and download free resources. It is important for presenters to be familiar with the research in The Gospel Truth About Children's Ministry prior to leading this breakout. This resource is recommended reading for participants, but not required in advance.

OUTLINE:

- Intro & The Problem 10 min
- 10 Fresh Findings 25-30 min
- Suggested Solutions 5-10 min
- Discussion / Conclusion 10 min

SUPPLIES:

- Video Projector with Sound
- PowerPoint Presentation File
- Handout (1 for each participant)



Awana conducted research to evaluate the heartbeat and effectiveness of children's ministries across the U.S. The findings presented in this breakout follow the outline of what's presented in *The Gospel Truth About Children's Ministry: 10 Fresh KidMin Research Findings* by Matt Markins and Dan Lovaglia with Mark McPeak.

Intro & the Problem (10 mins)

Introduce yourself and the breakout topic, *The Gospel Truth About Children's Ministry: 10 Fresh KidMin Research Findings*. Let participant's know this session presents nationwide research conducted by Awana in the U.S. Remind them that purchasing or reading the book in advance is not a pre-requisite.

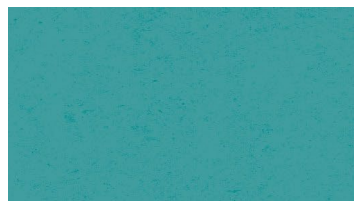
Encourage participants for choosing to invest time in discovering what's on the minds and hearts of children's ministry leaders. This research represents very real desires, experiences, and frustrations in the lives of dedicated people who desire that all children will come to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ.

Illustration: Facing the Truth

- The Power of Mirrors
 - Share a brief story about looking in the mirror and noticing something that needed changing (i.e. food stuck in your teeth, a smudge on your cheek, hair needing to be cut).
 - Mirrors tell the truth whether we choose to believe it or not. Looking in the mirror can be powerful when we choose to face the truth we discover.
- *The Gospel Truth About Children's Ministry* can serve as a mirror for us in church leadership and ministry with kids and families...if we choose to respond to the truth we face.

Ask: Are you ready to find out and face the truth about what the children's ministry leadership community is saying? Let's watch this together.

Play The Gospel Truth Promo Video
[01:21, embedded in slides]



INTRODUCTION & THE PROBLEM

WE HUNDREDS ASKED OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY LEADERS AND DECISION MAKERS...

"So, why did you become involved in ministering to kids?"

"How about impact? How are you seeing the results you hoped to see?"

"How's it going ministering to the kids?"

Introduction & the Problem

Clearly something is going on in children's ministry. Kids and families show up week after week. Programs keep running and plates keep spinning. Yet, is what's going on what we hope is going on?

- We know the church is commissioned with making disciples – something that starts in the home and gets reinforced in the body of Christ.
- The most recent research highlights the greatest hopes and fears of many when it comes to lifelong discipleship.
- It's time for us to face the truth – the children's ministry community has spoken!

Three Big Questions

Explain:

- There were three major categories of questions that Awana asked children's ministry leaders and decision makers.
 - The first was regarding motivation: "So, why did you become involved in ministering to kids?"
 - The second was about effectiveness: "How about impact ... are you seeing the results you hoped to see?"
 - And the third was related to satisfaction: "How's it going ... ministering to the kids?"
- These weren't the only questions asked, but it was very much the heart of this research. The desire was to find out: "What's going on in today's children's ministry and what's most needed to serve children, families, leaders, and churches?"
- Nearly 1,000 children's ministry leaders and decision makers spoke into *The Gospel Truth About Children's Ministry* research by Awana.
 - It's important to know that this was a two year study conducted anonymously by a research firm and includes both quantitative survey results and qualitative focus group responses.
 - It's also important to know that roughly 50% of respondents use or are familiar with Awana programming and curriculum. The other 50% of respondents are not associated with Awana. This means the findings are not biased to Awana customers.

Overall, an unsettling reality was expressed by many leaders who hinted at a major disconnect between what's happening and the reasons they became involved in the first place.

Many fear that in the overwhelming busyness of running a children's ministry program, we may have lost sight of the priority – making disciples of kids, parents, and leaders.

So, What's the Problem?

(Fill-in): Children's ministry leaders describe a discipleship disconnect.

"Overall, an unsettling reality was expressed by many leaders who hinted at a major disconnect between what's happening on their watch and the reasons they became involved [in children's ministry] in the first place." (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 13)

Explain:

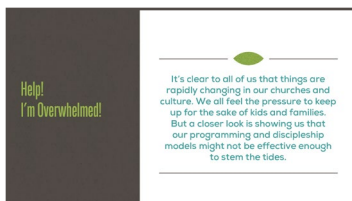
- Many children's ministry leaders step up to serve kids and families for the sake of lifelong discipleship.
 - Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."
 - Children's ministries pray this will be true but they won't find out for sure until 5, 10, 15, 20 years later!

The Children's Ministry Community Has Spoken

"Many fear that in the overwhelming busyness of running a children's ministry program, we may have lost sight of the priority – making disciples of kids, parents, and leaders." (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 17)

Explain:

- Too often, once kidmin leaders get involved in weekly ministry with children, their priorities shift in order to keep programs running smoothly, parents happy, and pastors pleased.
- The research indicates that children's ministry leaders are clear about the purpose of children's ministry: make disciples.
- Unfortunately, passion areas (i.e. evangelism, discipleship, biblical community, lasting life change) end up at odds with very real pain points (i.e. complex programming, expensive and inflexible curriculum, lack of leaders, sparse budgets, and more!).
- The priority of "training up children" becomes an aspiration rather than an actual outcome of children's ministry efforts.



Help! I'm Overwhelmed

"It's clear to all of us that things are rapidly changing in our churches and culture. We all feel the pressure to keep up for the sake of kids and families. But a closer look is showing us that our programming and discipleship models might not be effective enough to stem the changing tides." (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 20)

Explain:

- Change is all around: kids, families, churches, culture, technology, media, and more...everything is changing and changing rapidly.
- Throughout the research, children's ministry leaders communicated "this is hard" and "we need help."
- Honestly, it's tough to face the truth of what children's ministry leaders across the U.S. are saying...unless hope and help is on the way!



Why Research? At Awana We're Listening and Want to Help

- Nationwide Quantitative and Qualitative Research in 2013 & 2014
- U.S. Children's Ministry Decision Makers (50% Awana & 50% Non-Awana)
- 95% Confidence Level in Statistic Validity
- More than 1,000 children's ministry leaders and decision makers have spoken.

[Note: This slide does not require much explanation. It's included for those who are interested in some of the specifics about the research methodology and data set.]

Ask: Now that we have a better understanding of the problem, are you ready to face the truth about what the research commissioned by Awana found?



10 FRESH KidMin RESEARCH FINDINGS

Let's explore what children's ministry leaders are saying!

1

Whatever You Do, Remember It's Still All About the Word of God.

Love for the Bible: Importance

Importance of helping children develop a love for studying and knowing the Bible



2

Lifelong Discipleship Is the Outcome for Which We're Looking.

Making Disciples: Performance vs Importance

Importance versus performance of producing children who are committed disciples



10 Fresh Findings (25-30 mins)

10 Fresh KidMin Research Findings

Let's explore what children's ministry leaders are saying!

[Note: Each research finding has 2 slides – a title slide and support slide. Pace yourself and your presentation. Be sure not to get bogged down explaining any one slide. Limit your presentation to 1-2 minutes per slide, if possible.]

Finding 1:

(Fill-in): Whatever You Do, Remember It's Still All About the Word of God.

- Discipleship must be grounded in a personal relationship with Christ through His Word. Children's ministry leaders recognize the significance of the Bible as fundamental to disciple making.

Explain:

- Nearly 5 out of 5 (avg. = 4.81) respondents believe that children's ministry must help children develop a love for studying and knowing the Bible. It's a very important part of a person's ongoing, lifelong relationship with Christ. (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 30)

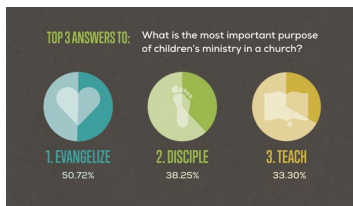
Finding 2:

(Fill-in): Lifelong Discipleship Is the Outcome for Which We're Looking.

- There are a lot of great programs out there for kids (i.e. school, sports, music, drama, camp, etc.), but children's ministry's primary purpose, what matters most, is making disciples – kids who know, love, and serve Jesus Christ for life.

Explain:

- The Gospel Truth* research helped identify what matters most in children's ministry – what's "important." Additionally, the research attempted to figure out how well these good intentions are becoming reality – "performance."
 - The gap between "importance" and "performance" is what really stood out when the data was analyzed.



- When it came to the desired outcome of lifelong discipleship, children's ministry leaders revealed they were falling shy of their #1 ministry purpose by 1.3 points. (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 33)
 - [Optional Illustration: This gap may not seem like a lot, but imagine ordering a pizza expecting 10 slices only to have the delivery guy show up with 7 pieces and red sauce on his chin!]

Finding 3:

(Fill-in): The Starting Point in Discipleship Is the Gospel: Leading Kids to Know Christ.

- You may be surprised, but the centrality of evangelism and the good news of Jesus Christ – the transforming power of His life, death, and resurrection – is not as clearly present in children's ministry as expected.

Explain:

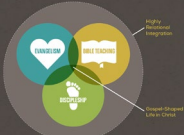
- Children's ministry leaders recognize making disciples as the #1 purpose in all they do.
- More specifically, they indicated that evangelism, discipleship, and teaching the Bible are the top 3 ingredients to ensure kids, families, and leaders come to know, love, and serve Christ. (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 37)
 - You'll notice these three pie charts don't add up to 100% when added together. That's because each pie chart is out of 100% for that individual response.
- 50.72% of responses indicated Evangelism as important
- 38.25% of responses indicated Discipleship as important
- 33.30% of responses indicated Teaching the Bible as important
 - Evangelism, discipleship, and teaching the Bible surfaced based on what respondents said mattered most in children's ministry and then were ranked accordingly. These responses were provided consistently and unaided, without any prompting by the research team.

4

Emphasis on Evangelism and the Centrality of the Bible
Is How We Make Lifelong Disciples.

The Most Important Purpose of Children's Ministry

The Bible must become the life-giving source of truth and instruction. All of this happens in the context of relationship.



Finding 4:

(Fill-in): Emphasis on Evangelism and the Centrality of the Bible Is How We Make Lifelong Disciples.

- To clarify, God is the one who grows disciples. Our calling is to make disciples in obedience to Christ's commission in Matthew 28:18-20. However, we join with God as His witnesses, and evangelism and the Bible are essential to this effort.

Explain:

- Based on the responses, children's ministry leaders believe "The Bible must become the life-giving source of truth and instruction. All of this happens in the context of relationship." (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 41)
- Evangelism, Discipleship, and Bible Teaching work together in the life of every disciple, but this always happens in the context of Christ-centered, Gospel-focused relationship. Unfortunately, the research indicates that we can't presume that children's ministry programming is keeping all of this in balance.

5

It Really Does Take a Village:
Discipleship Is Relational and Engages the Family.

Partnering With Parents/Caregivers: Performance vs Importance

"We can plan all we want, but if we can't awaken the parents to the importance of partnering with us to teach their child, it won't get very far!"
- Research Respondent



Finding 5:

(Fill-in): It Really Does Take a Village: Discipleship Is Relational and Engages the Family.

- The value of biological and spiritual family working together cannot be emphasized enough when it comes to lifelong discipleship. It's unwise to assume that disciple making happens just at home or church – both are vitally important.

Explain:

- This chart demonstrates a significant issue for churches and children's ministry leaders. Most everyone agrees (4.67%) that church and home needs to work together in the lives of kids. Yet, the performance rating is only 65%. This is a problem! (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 44)
- "Partnering" is a key word in this research finding.
 - "We can plan all we want, but if we can't awaken the parents to the importance of partnering with us to teach their child, it won't go very far." – Research Respondent
 - The best children's ministry leaders agree that a partnership between church and home is necessary for children to know, love, and serve Christ.



- It's important for churches and children's ministry leaders to resist blaming and shaming parents into involvement. It's time to step into each other's shoes for the sake of kids, families, and lifelong discipleship.

Finding 6:

(Fill-in): We're Struggling to Develop Kids Who Can Navigate Culture and Live Out a Gospel-Centered Faith.

- Obviously the world we live in today is different from the world we lived in when we were kids. There's a lot of research and opinions out there on this, but the fact remains: navigating culture and living out faith in Christ isn't easy no matter who you are or where you live.

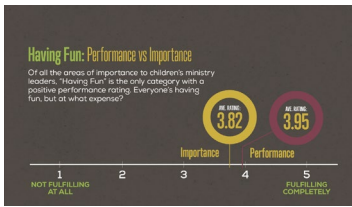
Explain:

- On this slide are three of many similar responses from children's ministry leaders and decision makers. There's a resounding desire to help kids form a biblical worldview in light of the world they live in daily...and there's consensus that this challenge is daunting. (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 49)
- Fact: children engage in multiple worlds (i.e. home, church, sports, media, internet, etc.) and are exposed to various worldviews of other people (i.e. family, friends, teachers, coaches, etc.) every day.
- Children's ministry has the opportunity to come alongside kids and families to help them walk with God in Christ-centered community when these worlds and worldviews collide.

Finding 7:

(Fill-in): Children's Ministry Leaders Are Afraid We May Have Sacrificed Substance for Fun and Entertainment.

- While most of the findings in this research aren't "groundbreaking" per se, Finding #7 just might surprise you. No one is saying "fun" isn't important, but in light of the rest of the research, let's just say: "Houston, we have a problem!"



Explain:

- We already covered the fact that evangelism, discipleship, and teaching the Bible are at the top of the list when it comes to what matters most in children's ministry. Other factors made the list, including "having fun," but it was #9 in order of importance.
- What this chart shows is that the average importance rating for "having fun" was 3.82 out of 5 and it's performance is 3.95 out of 5. What's this mean? Apparently "having fun" isn't the highest value in kidmin, but it's the only factor that isn't under-performing according to children's ministry leaders. (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 53).
- In other words, of all the areas of importance to children's ministry leaders, "having fun" is the only category with a positive performance rating. Perhaps this is because it's the most obvious to see – kids have smiles on their faces, parents are going home with the right children, pastors are confident in what's happening in the children's ministry wing.
- Everyone's appears to be having fun, but at what expense? Is lifelong discipleship also happening? Unfortunately, based on the research, no one knows for sure.



Finding 8:

(Fill-in): We Need a Program That Can Meet Digital Natives Where They Are.

- How many of you are now wondering, "What's a digital native?" If that's the case, you're most likely a "digital immigrant." Digital natives are kids that have grown up with touch screens since birth.
- Perhaps you've seen the YouTube video of the baby getting frustrated while trying to scroll through a print magazine (<http://bit.ly/BabyBrokenTablet>). Welcome to the "Hey mom! Where's the iPad? Generation."

Explain:

- Children's ministry leaders – many who are digital immigrants – need relevant approaches that will connect with and appeal to digital natives. (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 56-58)



9

We Need Flexibility So We Can Customize to Our Purpose and Needs.

- Digitally delivered and accessible
- Intuitive for today's children and their parents
- Built using technologies they use everyday
- There's a spectrum between digital access and digital native: "access" has to do with where materials are housed or delivered, whereas "native" has to do with how materials are experienced. In other words, emailing or downloading a Word.doc or PDF file is very different from reading an e-book or using a touchscreen. Children's ministry has yet to catch up to how kids are interacting with content and community in school, on social media, and so on.
- There's a need to bridge the gap between parents, leaders and kids when it comes to discipleship and technology. How this will happen in favor or support of lifelong discipleship has yet to be discovered.

Finding 9:

(Fill-in): We Need Flexibility So We Can Customize to Our Purpose and Needs.

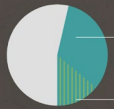
- Because every setting is different, one of the highest values of children's ministry leaders when it comes to purchasing resources is "Can I customize it?" (Of course, the other big question is: "How much does it cost?")

Explain:

- "What would you say is the most important decision making factor when you are considering using a children's program or materials for your church?" (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 61)
 - The tipping point question when it comes to children's ministry is really: "Is the material Bible-based and can I adapt the material to my program?" (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 62)
- The research identified flexibility as foundational for kidmin leaders. While many want plug-and-play solutions, most find that curriculum providers rarely make programs and resources that work "as is" right off the shelf.
 - Kidmin leaders don't want to spend lots of money on materials they can't use or don't need. On the other hand, they want enough options presented in a simple, user-friendly format that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out. (Rocket scientists sure get a bad rap!)

10

Children's Ministry Leaders Are Ready to Change If Curriculum Providers Can Serve Them With the Right Resource to Help.



Are you seriously considering a change in your children's ministry programming in the next year?

46.66% = YES

Those of you considering a change, what would you be most likely to change?

30% = CURRICULUM/MATERIALS

Overall for total sample regardless of church size, denomination, or current children's ministry programming.

RESEARCH IN SUMMARY: THE CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY HAS SPOKEN

Today's Children's Ministry Must Focus On or Provide:

- Strong biblical foundation
- Centered on the Gospel and evangelism
- Focused on making disciples
- Highly relational
- Integration of church and home
- Appropriate leveraging of technology
- Flexible and adaptable programming support and curriculum

Finding 10:

(Fill-in): Children's Ministry Leaders Are Ready to Change If Curriculum Providers Can Serve Them With the Right Resource to Help.

- Question: What percentage of children's ministry leaders are looking into changing their kidmin programming in the next 12 months?
- [Invite participants to guess before moving on to the next slide.]

Explain:

- From the children's ministry publishing perspective, this stat is shocking. Basically 47% of children's ministry leaders are considering a significant programming change in the next year. And, 30% of those would swap out their current curriculum for another resource. (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 64)
- New resources are needed to address present day needs being faced in children's ministry. Fortunately, *The Gospel Truth* research provides some insights into what's most important and what's needed.

Research In Summary: The Children's Community Has Spoken

To sum up the research, children's ministry leaders need and want solutions that will ensure lifelong discipleship happens in the lives of kids, families, and leaders. For this to happen, they indicate several factors must be in place for resources to be viable options.

- Today's Children's Ministry Must Focus On or Provide (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 66):
 - Strong biblical foundation
 - Centered on the Gospel and evangelism
 - Focused on making disciples
 - Highly relational
 - Integration of church and home
 - Appropriate leveraging of technology
 - Flexible and adaptable programming support and curriculum

FRESH AWANA SOLUTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1

Suggested Solution One: The GREAT Life

Know. Love. Serve. Christ. Together.

A new relational discipleship curriculum coming Fall 2017 - perfect for Sunday morning!



The GREAT Connection
is the sweet spot of discipleship.

- The desire for new resources is high, but they must be cost-effective, customizable, and culturally relevant.
- Children's ministry across the nation knows what matters most and has spoken in a collective voice.
- Awana is one ministry that is listening. And, with 65 years experience in evangelism and discipleship in the lives of kids, Awana is poised to serve the church and children's ministry leadership community like never before.

Suggested Solutions (5-10 mins)

Fresh Awana Solutions for Consideration

(Fill-in): Suggested Solution 1: The Great Life

Based on *The Gospel Truth* research, Awana is developing a renewed approach to disciple-making and introducing a simple, relational discipleship experience.

Explain:

- The Great Life is a Christ-centered integrated discipleship curriculum for use anytime, anywhere. It is a weekly relational experience that starts in the home and is supported at church so kids, peers, leaders, and parents will come to know, love, and serve Christ together. This small group curriculum is for children ages 5-11 and brings the Old and New Testament to life in simple, creative ways. Discover if this newest offering by Awana is right for you at awana.org/thegreatlife.

We also encourage you to check out our latest offering: AwanaWeekends (visit awana.org/awanaweekends to learn more.)

2

Suggested Solution Two: Flexible Awana Club

One Size Does NOT Fit All.

The mission of Awana is simple: to reach more children with the Gospel and help them become lifelong followers of Christ. That mission is unwavering, but our methodology is highly adaptable.

awana.org/30daysfree

3

Suggested Solution Three: MOZO Technology

Turn Minutes Into Meaningful Ministry



awana.org/mozo



(Fill-in): Suggested Solution 2: Flexible Awana Club

One Size Does Not Fit All. This may have been true of Awana in the past, but not any more!

Explain:

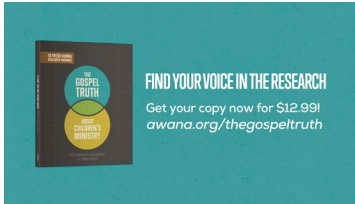
- “The mission of Awana is simple: to reach more children with the Gospel and help them become lifelong followers of Christ. That mission is unwavering, but our methodology is highly adaptable.” (*The Gospel Truth*, pg. 76)
- Equipping YOU to reach kids with the gospel and discipling them for the long haul...that’s what we do. But we know that looks different for every church and organization, so we’re ready and waiting to connect you with a team of experts who will ask questions, listen carefully, then craft custom solutions to meet your very specific ministry needs.
- Visit Awana.org/30daysfree to learn more about how Awana can serve any children’s ministry.

(Fill-in): Suggested Solution 3: Mozo Technology

Awana is 100% committed to serving churches so kids will come to know, love, and serve Christ. One of the biggest needs is to have readily accessible tools and resources for effective ministry.

Explain:

- Ministry happens not just in big moments, but in small moments—moments that are too often lost when a leader is distracted by administrative tasks. It doesn’t have to be this way. Your children’s ministry needs technology tools with relationships in mind. Mozo, the new digital toolbox from Awana, streamlines the processes of Awana clubs, turning those minutes to ministry. Learn more online at awana.org/mozo.



Discussion/Conclusion (10 mins)

Awana.org/TheGospelTruth

- Available for purchase directly from Awana
- \$12.99 each

[As time permits, discuss some or all of the following questions as a group in order to clarify questions from participants and point them toward action steps for ministry with kids and families.]

Discussion:

- Which finding was most surprising to you and why?
- What portion of the research did you agree with most and why?
- Were you disturbed by any of the research findings? Explain.
- In response to this presentation, what is one area of children's ministry that you know you need to address? What is the issue and what needs to change?
- What is one step you will take at home or church to strengthen lifelong discipleship now that you've faced the truth about today's children's ministry?

Conclusion:

Remind participants how important children are in the kingdom of God. Consider reading Jesus' words in Matthew 18:1-6. Challenge participants to write down and follow through on one next step in response to this research. Close in prayer.