



Aim Lower Journal

a global conversation
about mission,
discipleship
and children

Aim Lower

Making Children a
Priority in Mission

Think Smaller

Helping Children Engage With
Jesus and Serve Him

Give Up

Working Together For
The Sake of Children

Go Have a Cup of Coffee

Relational God, Relational People -
Community Changing Ministry to Children

The Child Faith Map

10 Signposts on the Journey of
Faith for Children

Jesus and the Child

His Radical Message About Children

ISSUE 1

ABOUT US

Aim Lower is powered by the Global Children's Forum [GCF]. GCF is a partnering network of over 100 organisations, large and small, local and international, who have come together around children and the gospel. We adhere to the Lausanne Covenant in matters of Christian belief and seek to live out God's kingdom values in all we do

We first gathered in 2008 to respond to the needs of the more than 2 billion children in the world with these questions:

- ★ How can we be more effective in reaching these children with the good news of Jesus?
- ★ What can we do together that we cannot do alone?

Our ultimate goal is that every child would have the opportunity to meet Jesus and be encouraged and equipped to follow Him daily.

With 2/3 of the world's children untouched by our current efforts, something has to change – quickly. As a result we challenge each other to think Biblically about ministry with children, and to explore the best missional thinking from around the world.

As we combine this with an environment of creative and innovative thinking, wonderful new ways of doing ministry with children, leaders, churches and families are emerging and being shared.

All this is done through servant-hearted, global partnering. Our desire is to see effective tools and innovative thinking readily available to the whole Body of Christ.

In order to facilitate this, we seek to make all our resources available free of cost and copyright restrictions. We encourage you to change and adapt

them to fit your local situation and share them back with everyone so that we can all learn from each other. We also share things anonymously so that our individual organisations and personalities will not come between God and his work.

Technology allows people from around the world to continually work together on projects and explore new ideas. However, GCF partners regularly gather for face-to-face meetings. About every two years we have a larger global gathering. Between these times, smaller groups convene as the need arises. We try to move these gatherings around the world in order to enable a wide variety of people to attend.

However, these gatherings are not the only way to participate. You can sign up to follow Aim Lower activities:

- ★ Email (news updates sent out every two weeks),
- ★ Facebook (Aimlower)
- ★ Twitter (@AimLowerGiveUp).

On the aimlower.com websites you will discover many resources and ministry models – translate them, use them, improve them, add to them and pass them on to others.

You can discover the online version of the Aim Lower Journal at aimlowerjournal.com

We know we are not the only answer to the global challenge of evangelism and discipleship of children. We think of ourselves as yeast that helps the whole batch of dough rise.

Although small, we seek to serve in such a way that every church and every organization can benefit from our efforts.

Will you join us in this mission?

WELCOME

We want to start conversations about mission, discipleship and children. This first edition of our journal has many links to our aimlowerjournal.com website. We've asked many questions and offered you many discussion questions. We believe in passionate, strong opinions, but we also believe in listening.

Let the conversation begin.

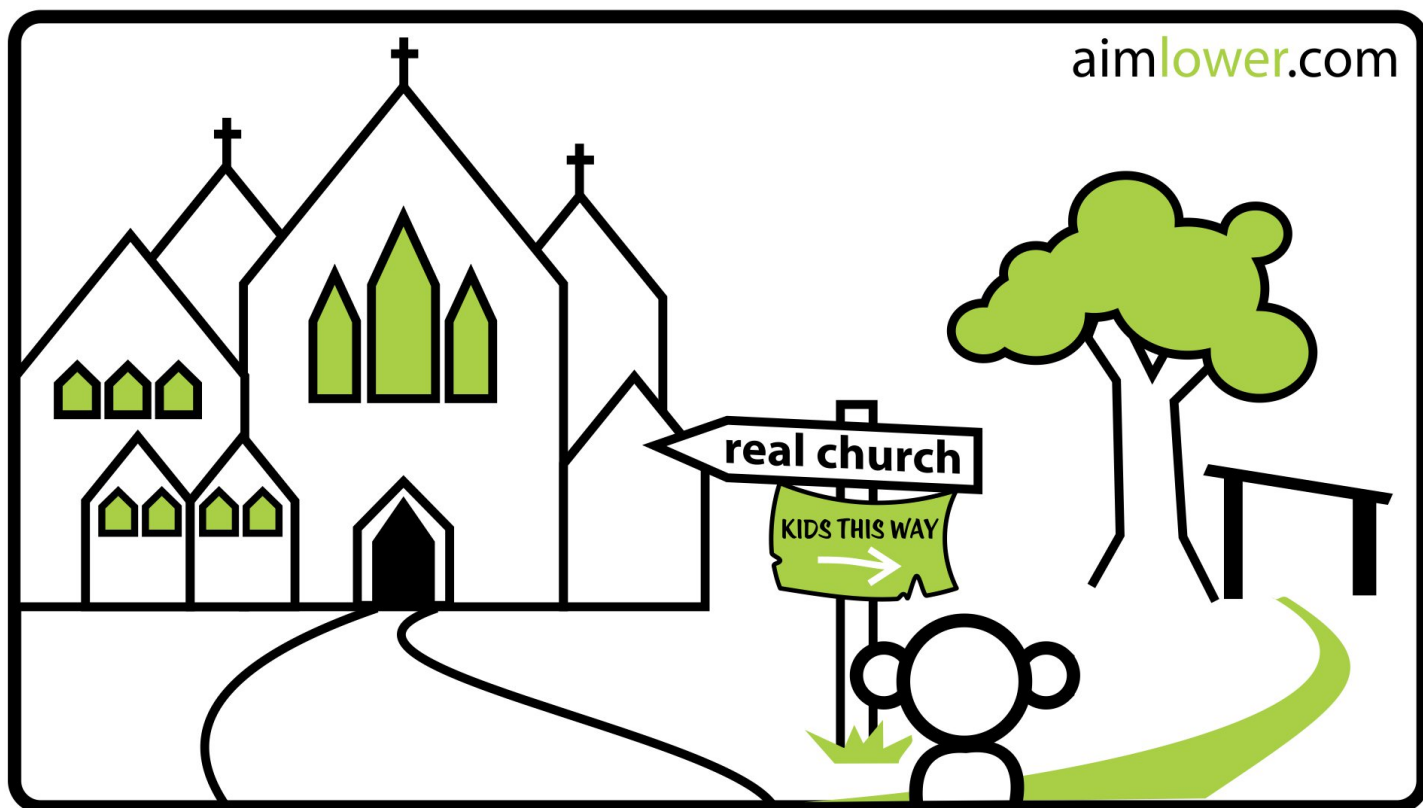


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IN THE NEXT EDITION.....

THERE WILL BE MANY THINGS INCLUDING RESOURCE REVIEWS AND NEWS ABOUT MISSION, CHILDREN AND DISCIPLESHIP.

YOU COULD BE A CONTRIBUTOR - E MAIL JOURNAL@AIMLOWER.COM FOR CONTRIBUTOR GUIDELINES



IMAGINE ANOTHER WORLD

Aim Lower, Think Smaller, Give up and Go Have a Cup of Coffee. These are the taglines of the popular viral video about mission to children

It doesn't make sense...

How can we tell the story of Jesus to the 2 billion+ children of the world if we stop our busy activity and reduce our goals?

It doesn't make sense... but it will!

It all began with a dream.....

Imagine a world where all children are safe and live in hope. A world where every child has the opportunity to be all that God intends them to be. A world where they are given many opportunities to respond to the love of Jesus Christ and to share that love in words, hope, healing and comfort.

Imagine a church that values children so much that they willingly commit the resources necessary to reach and nurture their younger generation. A church that champions the efforts of children to

make a difference to their community and to their world.

Imagine families that delight in accompanying children on their faith journey and are equipped and encouraged to do so in a church community that shares that responsibility.

Imagine theological institutions where all disciplines acknowledge the importance of children in their courses and advocate for children in their circles of influence.

This was the dream for the future that motivated a group of children's

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workers who met together at the Lausanne Forum for World Evangelisation in 2004. The way that they envisaged making the dream a reality was through the body of Christ working together with the understanding that we can accomplish far more together than we can ever accomplish alone. And we need to – 2 billion children are waiting for this dream to become a reality.

Read on to discover why thousands of children and adults, churches and Christian agencies around the world are working together to bring fresh insights and resources to the vital task of mission and discipleship with children.

And the strategy is simple: Aim Lower, Think smaller, Give up and Go have a cup of coffee

It makes sense.....

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An extraordinary fact about human beings is that the older they become, the more set in their ways they are. So in the process of growing up, children acquire values that will shape their lives. George Barna, the American researcher, claims that the values that a child has at the age of 14 are most likely the values that he or she will die with. This likelihood is not lost on advertisers, educators and others who are influencing

children.

This openness of children also means that if a child believes and follows Jesus as a young person, they are likely do so throughout life. On the other hand, if a person does not have the opportunity to hear about Jesus as a child, they will most likely never follow Him.

If God designed all of us, including the children of the world, for a relationship with Him and to be equipped to follow and serve Him throughout their lives, then surely we - as the global body of Christ – need to affirm that one of our main goals is to introduce children to Jesus and to disciple them in such a way as to encourage deep, long-lasting and community-engaging Christian faith.

What is the reality? If you formed every person on the earth into a very, very long line, one in every three would be a child under the age of 15. However, **right now only 15% of global mission giving goes towards children**, even though 60-80% of all responses to the Gospel are made by children. While children are currently being reached from every angle by political parties, other faiths, secularism, corporations, consumerism and a myriad of other causes, the church is struggling to

prioritise this young generation.

But things are changing as more and more people and churches, denominations and agencies, realise that it's time to Aim Lower.

IT'S HAPPENING

Since 2004, we have been witnessing God placing children on the agenda of the church at every level. A significant milestone in 2010 is to be found in the Cape Town commitment, the declaration that was issued at the end of the Lausanne Congress. In it, the call to take children seriously is clearly stated:

All children are at risk. There are about two billion children in our world, and half of them are at risk from poverty. Millions are at risk from prosperity. Children of the wealthy and secure have everything to live with, but nothing to live for.

Children and young people are the Church of today, not merely of tomorrow. Young people have great potential as active agents in God's mission. They represent an enormous under-used pool of influencers with sensitivity to the voice of God and a willingness to respond to him. We rejoice in the excellent ministries that serve among and with children, and long for such work to be multiplied since the need is so great. As we see in

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the Bible, God can and does use children and young people - their prayers, their insights, their words, their initiatives - in changing hearts. They represent 'new energy' to transform the world. Let us listen and not stifle their childlike spirituality with our adult rationalistic approaches.

We commit ourselves to:

A) **Take children seriously, through fresh biblical and theological enquiry that reflects on God's love and purpose for them and through them**, and by rediscovering the profound significance for theology and mission of Jesus' provocative action in placing 'a child in the midst'.^[81]

B) **Seek to train people and provide resources to meet the needs of children worldwide**, wherever possible working with their families and communities, in the conviction that holistic ministry to and through each next generation of children and young people is a vital component of world mission.

C) **Expose, resist, and take action against all abuse of children**, including violence, exploitation, slavery, trafficking, prostitution, gender and ethnic discrimination, commercial targeting, and wilful neglect.

This significance of this

statement is that it pulls together the threads of diverse conversations that have been taking place across the years in recent decades.

Since the early 1990s, **Viva** been a contributor to global thinking and practice around children and a strong campaigner for children at risk. In 2008, the **Global Children's Forum** took up the challenge to look across the global children's ministry landscape and ask: 'what are the paradigms that need to be addressed for vastly increased effectiveness in evangelism and discipleship of children?' and 'what could we do together that we could not do on our own?'

The 4/14 Movement (birthed in 2009) is a 7-year initiative that urges the global church to reach and raise up a new generation that can experience personal transformation and can be mobilised as agents for transformation throughout the world.

The *Now and Next Theological Conference on Children* in 2011 and the *4/14 Missiological Conference in 2013* are indications of the extent to which 'Theologies of childhood' and 'Child theologies' are re-shaping the thinking, mission and practice of the church.

All of these initiatives are exciting developments on behalf of children and we are encouraged by the support that has been received from the **Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance**.

CHILDREN ARE

An excerpt from 'There are no Unreached Children', written for the Lausanne Congress Cape Town 2010.

Children are...

Children are no remote or obscure people group. The Church today may not be looking for children, but they wouldn't have to look far to find them. They are found in all countries, in all socio-economic categories and among people of all cultures

Children are precious in God's sight. As we begin to read Scriptures with the child in the midst, we are seeing that children are not just present, but prominent in Scripture. Indeed, there are more than 1500 references to children and childhood (including orphans, parenting and training). Very often children and youth are found playing important, even crucial roles in the outworking of God's plans.

To God, children are:

A sign - they are God's blessing

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(Psalm 127:3) and are missed when not part of the covenant community.

In need of teaching - they are to be treasured and taught at home and in community (Deuteronomy 6, 11).

A symbol - they illustrate the relationship God wants with adults (Hosea 11:1, Matthew 18:2-3).

Worthy of protection - God is on the side of the vulnerable (Psalm 68:5; James 1:27). When children are neglected, abused, victimised, God grieves. Jesus strongly advocates for their protection (Matthew 18:5-6, 10).

Worshippers - they are designed to praise God (Psalm 8:2). Children praise Jesus even when adults reject

him (Matthew 21:15).

Fellow-agents of God's mission - Jesus said to let the little children come unto him for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as them (Matthew 19:14).

Examples - they are examples of the simple dependence that God's Kingdom requires of adults (Matthew 18:4).

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Unconditionally loved - Jesus has a blessing for children brought to Him: no demands, no challenges, not even a story! (Matthew 19:13-15)

A focus in God's ministry - Jesus heals children (Luke 7, 8); welcomes them (Mark 10); uses children as examples of humility (Luke 18:17); warns of judgement for those who harm them (Matthew 18:5-6, 10) and values them (Matthew 18:12-14).

Children are a suffering people group. Almost one third of the world's population, approximately 2 billion people, is under the age of 15. Most of the world's children, 88% of under-18s, live in the less developed world.

Experts estimate that 1 billion children will be born in the decade from 2003-2013 and over 90% of them to mothers and fathers earning less than \$US1 a day.

Extrapolating from population statistics, approximately 1 billion children live in parts of the world where they may never have heard of Jesus.

Children are open to the Good News. Many Christian leaders today can point to an awakening to faith in their childhood.

It seems that by age 13, one's spiritual identity is largely set in

place. This is the basic premise of an idea called the "4/14 Window".

Unofficial studies in many contexts strongly suggest that the openness of children to the Good News is present in cultures and societies around the world, regardless of religious or cultural background.

Any serious mission strategy will include careful and appropriate efforts to reach children and young people.

Children are shapers of their world. Many groups are seeking to use them to advance their agendas. For example, most advertising to families targets children because they have the power to influence family decisions. We must protect them from harmful and manipulative influences and guide them to the Truth found in Christ.

Many people who came to Christ as children attest that it was friends or peers who most strongly influenced them in their faith decision. This means that not only are children a significant mission field, they are also an important mission force.

The Bible is full of examples of children and young people who were used by God to do and to reveal significant things, including Miriam, Samuel, David, Josiah, Esther and Timothy, to name just a few.

Children are ready for any challenge. Indeed they thrive on tackling the seemingly impossible. We must respect their abilities, welcome their talents and nurture their gifts. They have a sensitivity to God's voice and an eagerness to serve God's purposes and are not restricted by preconceived ideas of what is possible or practical.

THINK SMALLER



**Ideas have consequences.
How do we take the biblical
idea of the faith of the child
and start to think smaller**

*Scripture Union staff member
Wendy Strachan offers a perspective
on the child faith journey and asks
some provocative questions.*

In 1780, one man with a big vision and a simple idea changed the way the church thought about children. In England, Robert Raikes had a passion to change the lives of children living in poverty. The tools he used were to combine *biblical instruction* with *social action* in the form of *popular education* for working children. Under God's hand, the Sunday School movement was born and the idea sparked a fire. Within 5 years, 300,000 unchurched children had been touched by it. For many, it was the beginning of a

life-long transforming faith in Jesus.

I wonder if the missions movement itself was influenced by some of these children.

More than 330 years later, big vision and simple ideas are still the keys to effective mission amongst children.

The vision needs to be big – there are 2 billion children in our world and they are not just 'souls to be saved' but children created in God's image who deserve to become all that he intends them to be.

The ideas need to be simple - so

THINK SMALLER

simple they can be shared and implemented wherever children are. They may be simple – they are not simplistic! The key questions still remain:

How do we effectively disciple children for a faith that will fit them for life now and as they grow older?

Since we cannot apply a ‘one size fits all’ approach, what are the simple discipling ideas worth sharing because they have proved useful in the variety of contexts where children are found?

Let’s explore some of the ideas God is using. One simple idea is that every child is prayed for. Not only the children in our homes, our churches and our neighbourhoods. Imagine the difference it would make if we pleaded with God about the despair or confusion in which children live. Imagine the directions God might take the church if in humility we looked to him for solutions. Praying for every child is a simple idea that is taking root around the world. I wonder how we could incorporate this idea more centrally into the missional focus of the church...

Another simple idea grows out of the realisation that many children – probably the majority – have never met a Christian though they might already have pre-conceived ideas

about them. So let’s introduce children to the people of God (or is it vice versa?). Not to connect them into our programs to fulfil our goals – but to listen to their stories, concerns and aspirations. Imagine the barriers of prejudice and ignorance that would be broken down. Imagine what would happen if genuine relationships began to form between children and adults.

I wonder how evangelism would be different if we prioritised friendship on our ‘agenda’ with children.....

Imagine how a child’s faith might grow if they encountered compassion from God’s people. A simple idea – but an essential one. Words are only one part of the good news. It is unhelpful simply to tell an abandoned, abused, neglected child that God created her as unique, and God loves her.

It is unhelpful simply to tell a child soldier that God forgives and can satisfy his human longing for acceptance. It’s unhelpful simply to assume that an affluent child whose material needs are met is in no need of compassion. Children need to be clothed, fed, sheltered and loved unconditionally by the people of God. Perhaps only in and through such compassion can an experiential space be created for an encounter with God that will grow into a life-

long faith. Demonstrating compassion is not a means to an end. Nor is it expressed in the unequal relationship between a generous giver and a grateful recipient.

I wonder what questions arise for you as you offer Christ-like compassion to children....

As children see faith demonstrated in the Kingdom actions and attitudes of God’s people, some will begin to wonder: ‘What might it be like to live my life with this God?’. Whether or not they belong to a community of faith, they benefit from being surrounded by it in such activities as camps and clubs. Faith has the opportunity to grow as children witness faith in a community, noticing how God’s people follow Him and interact with others.

I wonder what aspects would be most likely to impact observant children and lead them in the direction of God .

Woven into all these encounters is the opportunity for children to respond to Jesus and his message, as the story of God is unfolded naturally to them. It will – in careful and appropriate ways – include Jesus’ invitation into his Kingdom. The Gospel is intentionally shared: a simple pivotal idea. Do we breathe a sigh of

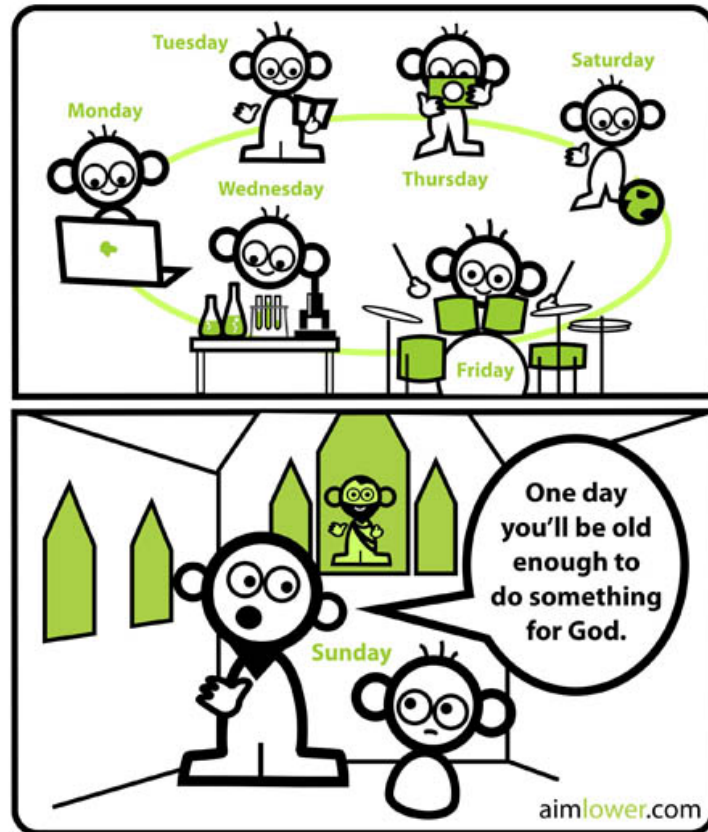
THINK SMALLER

relief at this point? Surely the task of evangelism ends with proclamation? But how can our mission amongst children end once the message has been heard – or once a child has responded? Or worse still, how could it end if a child has not responded? And how could we expect that an overt response from a child would indicate to us all that God is doing in his or her life?

I wonder whether we have created an artificial between evangelism and discipleship when Jesus' invitation is to follow through life.....

The Gospel does not focus on a one-off decision but a life-long relationship with Jesus. If we are serious about discipling children for a faith that grows up with them, then our missional task is long-term one: mature spirituality in all its dimensions, a faith robust enough to flourish in life's experiences. Unfortunately, it's easier to produce activities than to accompany a child on their spiritual journey.

Have we replaced mentoring friendships with educational programs that focus on knowledge and rules (an approach



the Pharisees might have endorsed) or with high-energy entertainment that keeps our children occupied while ignoring the fact that it has not stemmed the drift of children from the church?

How can we be satisfied with approaches to discipleship that focus on rules more than the adventure of living life with Jesus? How can we be satisfied with prioritising fun over relevance when we children need to know how to make wise choices in everyday life?

I wonder if we could - for example - recover the lost art of simply spending time with children - talking, laughing, exploring their tough questions

together, being a witness to each other's lives.

Since faith is personal but not solitary, the ideal is that children have the opportunity to belong to a local community of Christian faith. Let's not ignore a simple biblical idea: the family is, for some children, their first community of faith. Parents are the best disciplers of their children and we should never rob them of that privilege. But for many children, a key community

for discipleship will be a local church – one where children are not seen as disruptions or performers but where they participate in its intergenerational life of worship and service. For still other children, it would be impossible for them to be found in a church building. We need to trust God for creativity!

If we took into account the variety of circumstances children find themselves in, **I wonder what different shapes of 'Christian community' might emerge that would provide long-term discipling for children.....**

Spiritual maturity involves children in discovering their God-given gifts.

THINK SMALLER

As children grow in faith and love, we will discover that they – alongside us – are actively serving God in his Kingdom. ‘You can do that when you are older’ is the impression we sometimes convey – when we could be releasing them to become involved in God’s mission now.

I wonder what would happen in the church and the world would be if we took this simple idea seriously.....

In 1780, Robert Raikes dared to imagine a different world for children in England. Can we dare to imagine a different world for all 2 billion children today? A world where every child.....

- ★ is prayed for
- ★ is introduced to God’s people,
- ★ has the opportunity to thrive in safe loving relationships,
- ★ encounters compassion that changes her circumstances,
- ★ experiences faith in community,
- ★ is given the chance to respond to the love and forgiveness of Jesus,
- ★ belongs to a faith community and grows up into mature ‘child-like’ faith using their gifts to serve the Kingdom and through that, their

communities.

If we think that is beyond the realm of possibility, the parable of the mustard seed reminds us that with God, the impossible becomes possible. Simple ideas can accomplish huge vision if both are from the heart of God. And the means that God uses to extend these simple ideas to every child in the world, is his people, his church.

A church that can no longer default to its current paradigms in the face of the numbers or needs in the 21st century. A church that ought not default to its ‘activist’ mentality offering easy or quick ‘solutions’ when we are called to long-term discipling. A church that listens to God – and through him to each other and to his children.

Imagine if, in humility, we listened together – all over the world. Imagine if we trusted that Christ is equipping his Body with all the creativity and resources needed for the task. Imagine if we understood that the best ideas often grow in places where the church has the least material resources. Imagine the simple ideas that we would discover God has already been germinating and watering all over the world.

Imagine if we worked to share those ideas freely and openly with each other, not content to protect

our ‘part of the Kingdom’ but to celebrate wherever and however children are being encouraged to follow Jesus and to serve their communities both in the church and way beyond its walls.

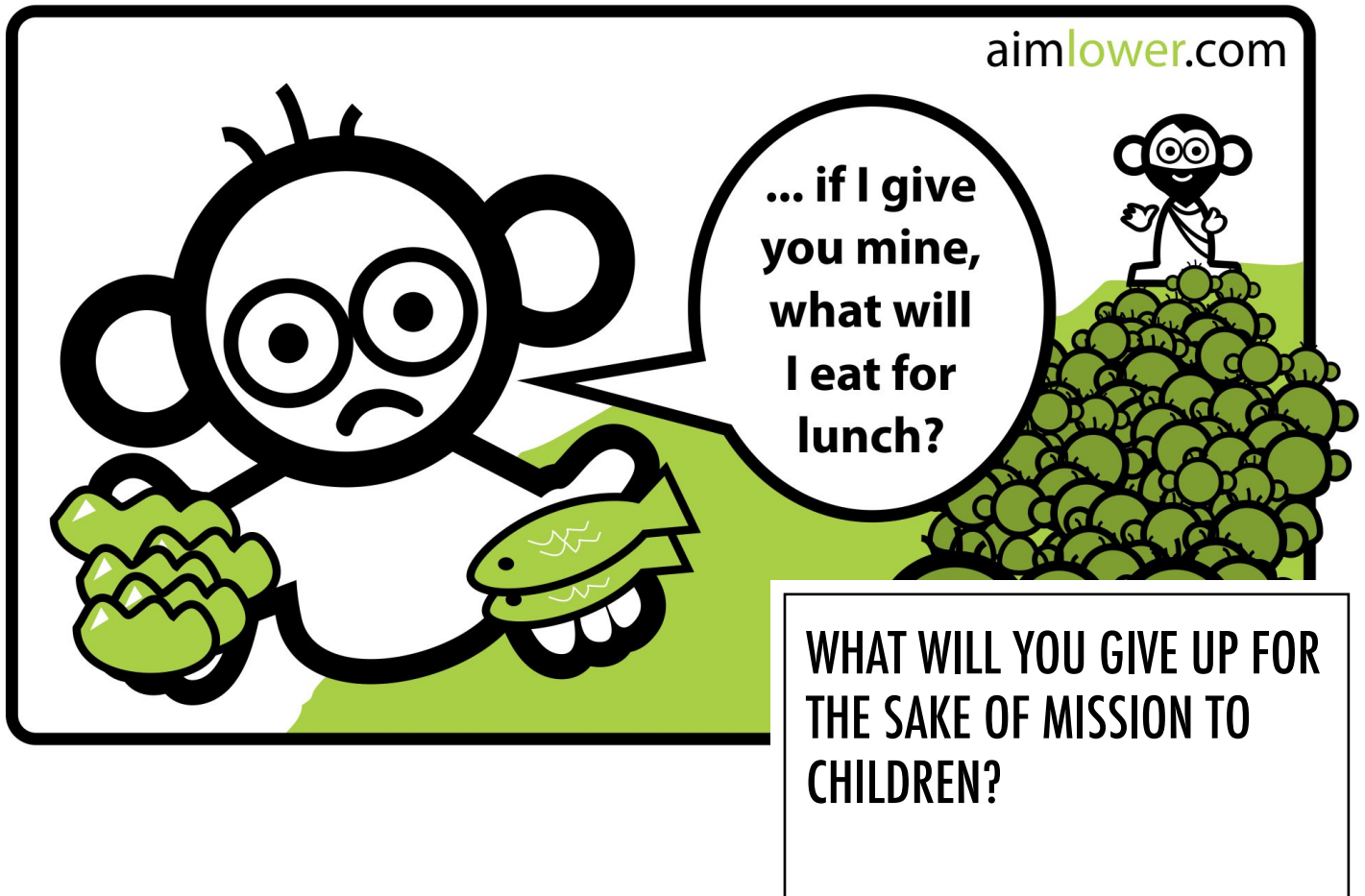
Be encouraged: God is using simple ideas in the hands of His people, to reach the 2 billion children living in our world – one at a time. Simple ideas are being shaped, shared, adapted and multiplied into different contexts all over the world. Local churches, whole denominations, para-church agencies, children and adults, are sacrificing their individual ambitions and generously partnering together with God and each other to accomplish this very big vision.

It’s profound. It’s demanding. It’s rewarding. It’s simple. It’s the Kingdom in action. It’s happening now. I wonder how partnering with others is changing the way we engage in mission with children in the church, your denomination, your organisation.....

I wonder what impossible dreams will become possible as we continue to put aside our differences and worked together as the one body of Christ – for the sake of the children.

I wonder if we are ready for the adventure that God will take us on – together.

GIVE UP



WHAT ARE OUR VALUES?

Here are some ideas to reflect on

Kingdom-focused

We seek God's kingdom. The one that Jesus pointed to and taught (see especially Matthew chapters 5-7). We acknowledge that together we are part of one body under Christ, being and belonging to one church, as we see in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. In partnership we acknowledge our interdependence by learning from one another. Here we encounter unity, building up the whole body, not our individual

organisations, and here we experience God's blessing, like the precious oil we read about in Psalm 133.

We also reflect the reality that ultimately we are 'jars of clay' (2 Corinthians 4) each with a shared 'treasure within'.

Free and Open

Working in partnership will involve many small and simple paradigm shifts. One of these is the commitment to making the best ministry materials freely available to all who need them. Here are 2

principles you might like to explore.

Open Access – this is about making resources freely available and accessible by whatever means possible. Free cost is one aspect and copyright free or copyright released is another.

Open Source – this takes open access another step by releasing the source principles, documents and concepts for other to take and build on.

It allows for each culture to add, subtract, refine, improve and copy towards the goal of even better,

GIVE UP

local and contextualised resources to be developed.

Diverse

Our mission vision comes from Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go and make disciples of all nations".

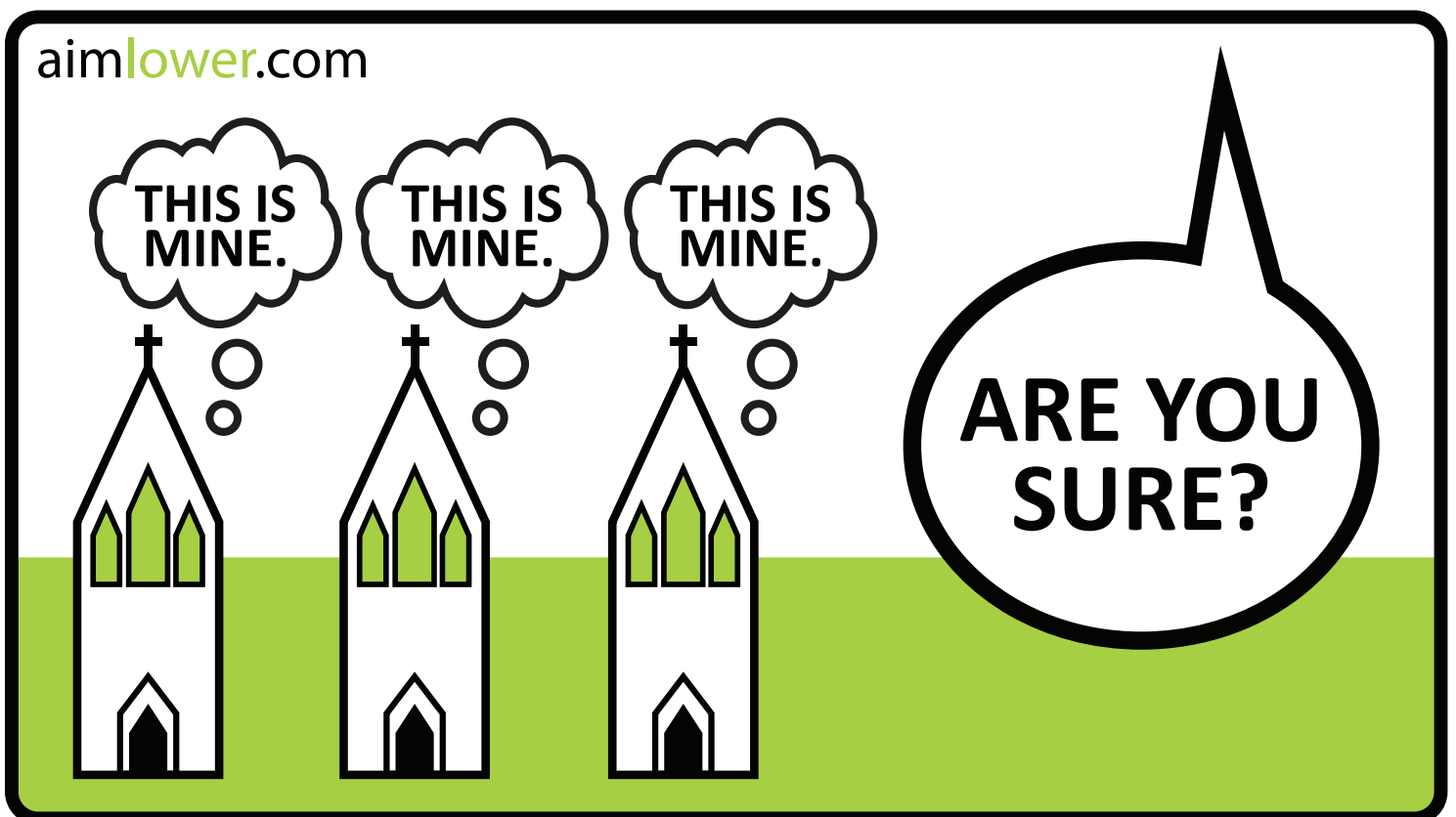
The method of achieving it is found in Jesus' prayer: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17: 23 NIV)

common mission.

We need to believe that Jesus' commission cannot be done in exclusive or separate ways alone.

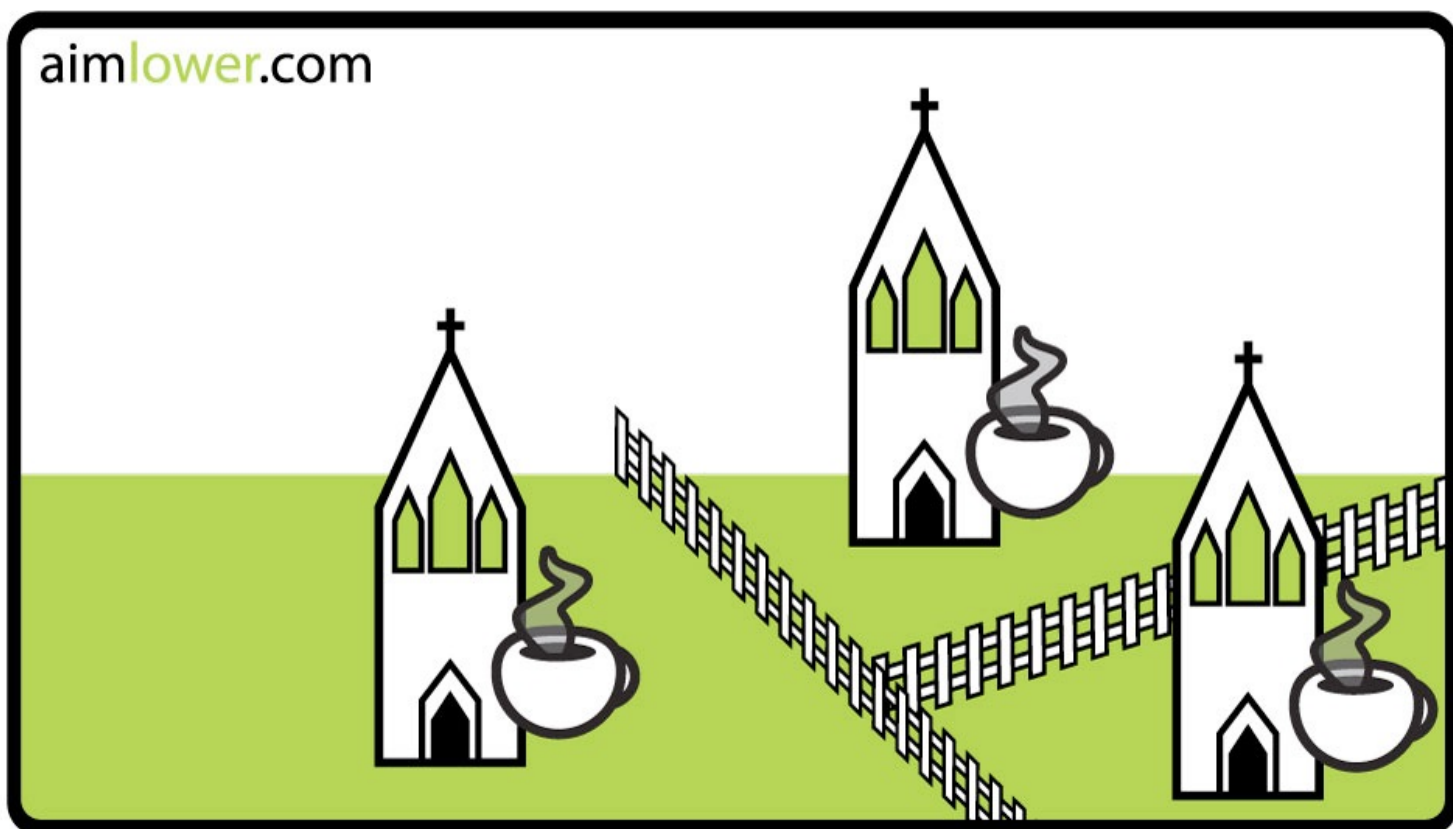
Nor does one context or culture have all the answers necessary for the mission.

The diversity in our cultures, churches, ministries and individuals



should not be a threat, handicap or obstacle in achieving our mission; rather it can be a stimulant that adds effectiveness and richness to our

GO HAVE A CUP OF COFFEE



MISSION TO 2 BILLION + CHILDREN NEEDS PARTNERSHIP TO BE TRULY EFFECTIVE - IT STARTS WITH 'A CUP OF COFFEE' (TOGETHER)

The most effective way to reach children is through the witness of the local church. But the local church will need to work in partnership with others in many areas if it is to be truly effective.

We will often partner with others to create resources, undertake training, advocate for children with church and government and take part in compassion projects.

We can enter these partnerships with idealism about the results without thinking clearly about the foundations that will ensure the projects have a long life and good fruit. As you think about partnerships in your nation the following guidelines may help you establish a firm foundation.

PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATIONS

Relational

Michael, a friend of ours, has shared with us a helpful insight about partnering with others. 'Recently, I have

GO HAVE A CUP OF COFFEE

been enjoying a new kind of partnering in my city and nation, called Relational Partnering.

The foundation of the partnering is relationship, as opposed to projects, events or Issues.' Here, God is our first Relational Partner. In Jn.14:15, Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey what I command."

Jesus encourages us to love one another. In Jn.13:34 He says, "... As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Further, in - Mt.18:20, He promised His presence when we come together - "Where two or three of you come together in my name there am I with them."

In 1 Corinthians 12 we're reminded that we're a body though we're unique and diverse in function. Strong relationships, honest trust and a commitment to long term friendship is the basis for seeing good things happen.

Jesus started with a diverse group of fishermen and tax collectors and discipled them into the greatest world-changers that ever existed.

Sacrifice & Servanthood

"Those of us who are strong ... strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" (Romans 15:1,2 The Message)

In response to the vision of Nehemiah, the perfume-makers, the priests and the goldsmiths, to name a few, made sacrifices to serve the greater need – working together to build a wall.

Today, it is the 'least of these', the children of our world, who urgently need a 'wall' to protect them from injustice, inequality, inaction and insecurity.

And they need more than walls – they need people who will journey with them, build them up, help them make sense of life and faith, so that they can grow as

disciples of Jesus and know the 'life to the full' that Jesus spoke about.

Humility

A word that our world shies away from, but a word that Jesus embraced and lived out. In Philippians 2: 1-18 we are encouraged to have the same attitude as Jesus who, even though He was God, never sought for influence or equality but instead became a humble servant.

He traded the highest place for the lowest place. He didn't complain, argue, blame, or boast, but instead was pure, sacrificial, and servant-hearted.

As we seek the Lord's heart together, as we dream, plan, and execute, let's ask Him to build into us these same characteristics that He modelled this so well for us.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." (Philippians 2: 3-4 NIV) Let us ask God to help us help one another and not only think about our own areas of need or expertise.

May we work as His Body and the family of God that we are.

CHILD FAITH JOURNEY



WHAT HAPPENS *as* CHILDREN DISCOVER JESUS?

*HERE are 10 signposts on the
journey for your reflection and
response*

All around the world there is a fresh focus on ministry to children. While many remain unreached by the message of Jesus **they do not remain unreached by other ideas and other religions.**

As the church seeks to clarify how we can reach out with fresh passion to the rising generations we are looking again at the biblical patterns, seeking to understand God's heart for children and the timeless mission ideas that we find in the life and work of Jesus.

In 2004 a group of people participating in the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation gathering in Pattaya, Thailand created a 10 step scale that reflected their experience of ministry with children and what they had observed of how they discover faith in Jesus.

As those who advocate for children we want to engage our pastors, denominational leaders, bible college lecturers and our fellow children's workers in fruitful dialogue about the biblical

patterns of mission and discipleship with respect to children. So we are taking hold of the 'Pattaya Scale' and using it as a foundation for a range of mission resources about ministry with children.

A major part of our focus is on **children who are not usually involved in church communities.** How do we reach them and their families? How do we help them grow in faith and become all that God created them to be? We're calling this

CHILD FAITH JOURNEY

exploration of mission ideas the Child Faith Map at this time although as the idea develops so might the name!

We believe that there is huge value in seeking the wisdom of many as we attempt to put flesh on the bones of these mission ideas. So we're also saying that this project is in 'Beta.'

If you use new software on your computer or phone you will often find that it is in Beta. This means that the ideas are good and the software is stable but before declaring it finished and ready for the widest possible audience the designers want to test it out with real people. Their feedback will make it better and those who use it in future years will have a better experience.

So this idea is in Beta. We invite you to help us refine it and make it robust. We believe that ideas have consequences. We want these ideas to help bring salvation and restoration to the 2 billion+ children of the world today. Join us in this important conversation about mission.

You can join in the conversation at aimlowerjournal.com

The Child Faith Map

The 10 key ideas that the faith map is exploring are described

from the perspective of the child. The place of the family and a local church community in the life of the child are also foundational principles that support the mission ideas that we explore.

Being prayed for

As we seek to communicate the good news of Jesus we believe that the Holy Spirit goes before us to prepare hearts. We also believe that prayer often goes before our invitation to turn from rebellion against God and enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus instructs the disciples to pray a pray of blessing as they enter new places. Jesus blesses the children brought to him. Jesus heals sick children on 4 different occasions.

How might we pray before reaching out to those children who do not know about Jesus? How can we help Christian children pray for the not yet believing friends? Many people are willing to be prayed for – including children. Many children outside the church are willing to pray and often do.

So, how do we pray for and with children?

Meeting God's People

Where did the children and adults of Jesus day encounter him and the disciples? While some will

have first discovered him in the synagogue some will have found him at the workplace, in the town square, around a meal table or at a wedding.

As we venture into new places with the story of Jesus children will often encounter us in school lessons, in sports activities or through acts of compassion. Not all these activities will have an explicit declaration of the Christian gospel at their heart but they will be building trust between us and our local communities and witnessing to our desire to serve Jesus and others.

So, what are the places that children encounter your churches life and witness in the wider community? How are we reaching out to them?

Developing relationships

Part of what Jesus did was to engage people in conversation. His communication had a different dynamic when there was 12 people listening to the times when there hundreds and perhaps thousands.

What activities help promote these quieter conversations when trust is deepened, tough questions answered, new skills encouraged.

If we are helping bring education to children about drugs, sexuality, life skills, creativity, sport or the

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Christian religion *are we allowing space for conversations and small group work?*

Encountering Lasting Compassion

Christianity has changed culture around the world by being committed to communities. We want to help establish frameworks in local societies that will encourage positive outcomes in terms of health, food, clothing, water and wellbeing.

We seek to live out the call of Jesus to clothe the naked, feed the

hungry and bring water to the thirsty (Matthew 25:46). We are called to rescue those who might otherwise perish.

Children are often the most vulnerable in these situations. Our commitment to community transformation authenticates our message about Jesus and his special compassion for children. When we welcome these children in his name, it is as if we we're welcoming him.

Is our mission to children part of a long term commitment to unconditional

compassion?

Experiencing faith in community

For many children the weekly meetings of a conventional church or small group are not part of their normal experience. As they and their parents come to trust the Christians in their midst they often become willing to let the children attend activities that have worship, prayer, bible reading and teaching at the heart of the programme.

These bible clubs, summer camps,

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Sunday schools, sidewalk bible clubs allow the children to experience the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives as they are directed to the story of salvation through Jesus and all the other themes that are explored alongside that.

So, how do we help children explore what it means to be part of a worshipping community?

Responding to Jesus Message

The child will have seen the story of God's relationship with humanity unfold in many different ways through all the different types of contact with Christians they experience. They will be beginning to grasp the idea that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we find the key to the story of humanity being reconciled to God.

We will then invite the child to turn from their rebellion against God and embrace the life of the Kingdom of God. (Experience suggests that in pioneer church planting the whole family often enter the Kingdom alongside the child)

Their decision will be rooted in a rich communication of Christian truth to them and the provision of a Christian community to nurture them.

Joining a Christian community gathering

Christian community comes in many shapes and sizes. Jesus had 3 close friends, 12 disciples, 72 evangelists and at least 500 other followers. The child needs to find spiritual nurture in an intentional Christian community so that they can find guidance on their Christian journey. There are many different ways this can happen but the long term ideal of our mission task is the integration of children into a multi-generational Christian faith community. *It will not always be easy but we should still pursue that goal.*

Maturing spiritually

Christian community will help children discover positive spiritual disciplines with respect to understanding the Bible, prayer and the growth of Christian character. These things will be taught and modelled by others so that the child is provoked about seeking to see the fruit of the Spirit at work in their lives.

We are rooting the child in the wisdom of God

Discovering God given gifts

The child is not merely the recipient of religious information but has the potential to be an active participant in the life of the Christian community in ways

appropriate to their age and understanding. We note that Jesus engaged the high priests in conversation at the age of 12 and that Samuel and Joseph were used to bring the word of the Lord to nations at a similar age.

How will we help them discover these gifts?

Participating in Christian witness to their locality

In what ways will we encourage our children to serve and contribute to the life of the Christian community? As the child grows they can be given increasing responsibility for tasks in the life and witness of the church. Entrusting them with responsibility prepares them for a life of service to God and others.

This willingness to create opportunities for children to participate in responsible servanthood is the hallmark of Christian communities that become established in their locality.

Are we releasing the generation to discover their roles on God's behalf in the church and in the community?

Help us develop this framework. Join the discussion at aimlowerjournal.com

MENTORING



HOW CAN WE PASS ON FAITH AND *wisdom* ACROSS *the* GENERATIONS?

From generation to generation

In a survey published in the UK in April 2010 (Aquafresh ‘Mum’s Wish List’, 2010) two thousand mums were asked who they would like their children to grow up to be like, and one thousand children were asked who were their top role models.

The results made interesting reading, with a couple of surprises. Of the mums questioned, 15 per cent named Sir Richard Branson as the person they aspired for their children to be like, closely followed

by JK Rowling (11 per cent). **However, 20 per cent of six to sixteen year olds named their parents as the ultimate role model for them** (followed by Cheryl Cole, David Beckham and Hannah Montana).

Being a child may well have more challenges to navigate than at any time in recent years – and growing in faith through childhood presents even further challenges. Increasingly, the need for good role models within the church is key in helping children and young people to make

right choices and learn to live well, so that they are equipped to find a safe path to maturity.

Over recent years this has been an issue that has occupied much of my thinking as well as my practice. As I read the big story of the Bible it strikes me that God’s intention has always been that one generation should serve as a role model to the next, demonstrating what it is to be part of the people of God. The concept of role models or mentors is not a new thing.

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What is mentoring?

Mentoring is actually based on one of the oldest models of learning, with its roots way back in the golden era of Greece, many centuries before Christ was born.

Mentor was the name of a character in Homer's *Odyssey*, who in his later years befriended King Odysseus. When Odysseus left to fight the Trojan war, he appointed Mentor to watch over his son, Telemachus. So the word 'mentor' was adopted firstly to describe the method of teaching both professional and manual labour skills to the next generation, and more recently to define the process of encouraging growth in others.

There are many ways of defining mentoring, but I favour this one:

“Mentoring is an intentional relationship in which one person helps another to grow in their faith by sharing the God-given resources of skills, wisdom, knowledge and experience.”

Of course there is a wide spectrum of mentoring relationships, from a once in a while catch up to structured formal meetings. The degree of formality will largely depend on the age and stage of the young person or child involved.

Often, when I talk about this subject in relation to Youth and

Children's ministry, it's not too long before this question is asked: “Mentoring is all well and good, and obviously a really useful tool ... **but is it biblical?**”

Good point. If you were to look up the word in a Bible concordance, I can pretty much guarantee that you wouldn't find it. Even in the modern paraphrase *The Message*, it only appears three times (Proverbs 5:13; Isaiah 54:13; James 5:10). The word 'mentor', then, isn't a biblical word, but the concept of mentoring is woven right through the Bible, throughout the Old Testament in the lives of the patriarchs and prophets and through the New Testament in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles – as well as in the instructions for churches that we find in the epistles.

Some of the relationships are quite short-term and are about passing on wisdom and advice; some focus on instructions about hearing and responding to the word of God; some are simply concerned with sharing life together. All of them involve some kind of commitment between two people.

Is this not 'discipleship'?

In previous generations, mentoring may well have been described as 'discipleship', and I think that discipleship still plays a large part in what we mean by 'mentoring' in the

Christian context. As a friend of mind, Paul Wilcox, puts it: “mentoring is discipleship with a kick!”. This kind of relationship has always been part of the Bible's story, but it seems to me that in recent years we have lost sight of it. Much has been done to improve the way churches provide for children and young people, recognizing that they have distinct learning needs, and so on. But over the last fifty years or so I think there has been a tendency to become more concerned with education than with spiritual formation – or, if I'm honest, more concerned with entertainment than spiritual formation!

We can only begin to fulfil the great commission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations if we start investing in the lives of young believers.

When I started working as a youth and children's pastor in a local church, I was desperately looking for the one 'great thing' that would attract and keep children and young people. When I'd been at the church for about a year, I took some time away to think through the future direction of the youth and children's ministry. I went armed with my Bible and a notebook, **ready to hear from God some master plan that would transform the nation, but the only phrase that kept**

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coming to my mind was, “Spend time with them”. I have to admit, it took me a while to realise that this was God’s master plan and, in fact, always has been.

As we read through the Bible, we can see that it’s there right from the start. Deuteronomy 6:6-7, for example, commands parents to talk about God’s laws to their children – not in a classroom context but in everyday life. It’s as if God says,

“Do you want the next generation to share your values, the values I gave you? Then they’ll have to see those values demonstrated in your life so consistently that, no matter what you do, they shine out of you.”

Mentoring is not parenting – let’s be clear about that – but in some respects it uses the same “when you are at home and when you are on the road” method that God gave to

parents in Deuteronomy 6. The effectiveness of this kind of training is backed up by Proverbs 22:6, where we read, “Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it.”

When God wanted to communicate with his people in a definitive way, he didn’t create a programme. He sent his son – Emmanuel, the God who is with us, who invested time in

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his followers and taught them to be like him.

In many ways the whole issue of mentoring isn't really about youth and children's work at all.

It is about a way of life, a way that God intended from the start, and a way that Jesus has called us all to follow, as we realize that it is our responsibility to be involved in making disciples of all people.

Spiritual formation is never about how many training programmes a church runs or even about the quality of those programmes. It is about the quality of the people with whom children and young people are interacting and the overall spiritual and relational quality of the community of faith.

"Every community influences its children, for good or for ill. What elements come together to create a community that nurtures a vital, healthy growing faith in children and in adults?"

Both the character of the people who gather and the activities the group chooses determine whether or not it becomes a health-giving community." Children Matter, May, Posterski, Stonehouse and Cannell (2005, p131)

Whole church responsibility

"Somewhere in our sincere quest to help children know and love God

and live a life in the way of Jesus, we've lost our way. Somehow in spite of all the good things happening in our church's ministry to children over the last two decades we've forgotten what spiritually shaping these young lives is really all about and how to do it." Postmodern Children's Ministry, Ivy Beckwith (2004, p11)

We've lost our way. I think that reflects quite accurately where we are at as a church in relation to children. Don't get me wrong. Many, many good things are happening in churches up and down the country in the groups that are being run for children.

However, I do wonder whether in professionalising the discipleship of children, we've delegated this responsibility to the expert few, or those who feel 'called' to work with children, rather than seeing it as the heart of what it means to be human, caring for the next generation.

And inadvertently in this, we have perpetuated the consumer mentality that is so prevalent in the church. When we think that children's ministry is something that we have a choice about doing, we are in an unhealthy place.

That's not to say that the whole congregation should be involved in those activities and groups run

specifically for children, but as a whole we are all involved in their lives as spiritual role models, as those they observe and live and worship alongside.

As they watch us they are making judgements about God. And out of the 'all of us', there are 'a number of us' who can be involved in a more structured way, and then 'a few of us' who will do the week by week work of leading the children's groups and activities.

If children belong only to a children's group or a midweek club, with their peers and the few adults who lead them, the formative influence in that child's life is limited.

John Westerhoff believes that faith cannot be taught; it can only be inspired. Such inspiration comes as "faith is expressed, transformed and made meaningful by persons sharing their faith in a community of faith." Will our Children Have Faith?, Westerhoff, (p19)

What do children see as they observe their community of faith at worship, in conversation, in welcome? All these things communicate very clearly to children what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We are naive to think that because we 'aren't gifted with children' that we're not communicating something to them

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about God and faith. (But hey, I'm preaching to converted here!)

This is where mentoring or intentional role modelling comes in. Children need more than just their parents for adult relationship.

“The Christian formation of children is fostered through a variety of relationships. Children need to know and be known by adults who care about them, invest in them, and give them opportunities to see adults as Christians. Healthy, warm

relationships with both men and women contribute profoundly to children.” Children Matter, May, Posterski, Stonehouse and Cannell (2005, p145)

Community Vision

For a church community to be effective in nurturing faith I think there a number of things that the whole church need to get hold of but my top three would be:

A God worthy of belief – what kind of god are we teaching about and demonstrating relationship with? Is our god worthy of praise

and trust?

An understanding of children as the people of God too – what we believe about the place of children and the kingdom will hugely affect how we welcome them.

A commitment to shared responsibility for nurturing children – it's not just the role of parents – God has placed children within a community of faith for a reason.

Images of mentoring

So, the position of role model

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belongs to all God's people, but a number of us will have the opportunity to be more intentional.

Mentoring takes on a number of forms and there are several images that we can use to illustrate the role that a mentor plays in the life of a child or young person:

Coach: A coach is someone who cheers you on in a race or match, critiques it with you afterwards and provides encouragement and pointers for the way ahead.

Guide: A guide lays out options and choices for you, for the different paths you may want to follow. They point out possible dangers along each path but never tell you exactly what to do.

This is important: as tempting as it may be, the mentor's role is not to tell what to do, but to help those they are mentoring to gain the skills to make good decisions for themselves.

Sponsor: In the mentoring context, the sponsor can open doors to people, ideas and opportunities to which the young person might not otherwise have access.

Spiritual parent/role model: A spiritual parent in no way tries to take on the role of parent, but does offer intentional care and encouragement in nurturing faith. The Apostle Paul at times in the

epistles talked about himself in this context, and also the need for more people to take on this role.

The approach that is taken will depend largely on the child or young person and what is appropriate for their age and stage.

As a youth pastor I established an official mentoring scheme for the teenagers in the church (you can read more on this in **Growing Young Leaders, CPAS**), but for those under 11 we had more of an informal mentoring structure where each leader in the children's ministry has particular concern for two or three children, and other adults (recruited appropriately through the church's safeguarding policy) also got involved.

All of these relationships were developed with the involvement of parents, who for the most part openly welcomed the investment of other adults in the lives of their children.

For some people it helped them work out how they could be more effective godparents, recognising that much of what is being asked of a mentor is relevant to their situation.

Skills

Children most definitely need to be taught the things of the faith (and also have opportunity to teach and

demonstrate the things of the faith!) but they also need to see this lived out in the lives of those who claim to believe it – that is when it comes alive, when it is inspiring, when they see something of the people they would like to be.

Not people who are perfect, but people who are taking seriously the abundantly generous grace of God, who are honest about their failures and their need for forgiveness, and who are seeking to live out the things they are teaching. People that they can share their life with.

This can start out quite informally, in partnership with families that we're already close to, and then as children grow older in a more structured and formal relationship.

Discover more, including a reflection on what Paul's letters to the Thessalonians tell us about mentoring by visiting our website: aimlowerjournal.com

This article was written by Ruth Hassall. She works in a vibrant church in the West Midlands in the United Kingdom.

She is responsible for spiritual growth and formation strategies and practices for the whole congregation. She previously worked for the Church Pastoral Aid Society.

KEY TRENDS



In a paper offered at the Lausanne Congress in Cape Town 2010 several key action points emerge. They were offered with important questions to fuel further conversation. Read them here and continue the conversation at aimlowerjournal.com

We offer the following principles for action, based on emerging trends we have identified. We sense a global movement of God calling the body of Christ to disciple children more effectively.

1. Disciple for deep and long-lasting faith.

There is an increased realisation that while the future of the church begins with child evangelism, it is accomplished by discipling and training children as ministry partners today, and developing them as the Christ-following leaders of

tomorrow. Relationship development between children who are new in their faith and Christians who are further along the path is a key to this process.

- ★ What does it really mean to ‘reach’ the 2 billion children of the world and help them to be all that God intends?
- ★ What role are you, your family, your church or your agency playing in this task?
- ★ How could we equip children for long-lasting faith?

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- ★ How could we equip more people for the task of discipling the world's 2 billion children?
- ★ What examples from your context provide encouragement in relation to discipling children for long-lasting faith?
- ★ What examples from your context cause concern in this regard?
- ★ What are the implications of prioritising the discipleship of children for the way we conduct church?

2. Partner with others within a Kingdom agenda.

There is an increased realisation that partnership is vital to fulfilling the Great Commission, including the task of discipling the world's 2 billion children, as no single church, denomination or agency has all the answers or the capacity to do this.

Families, churches, denominations, resourcing agencies, missions and care agencies are catching a global vision of Kingdom-minded partnerships for the care, evangelism and discipleship of children.

In the manner of our partnerships we must return to the Kingdom values of servant leadership, humility, prayer, integrity, generosity

and global equilibrium.

For discussion:

- ★ What encouraging examples can you share from your context in relation to partnerships for the sake of children?
- ★ What examples from your context cause concern in this regard?
- ★ Who do you need to connect or partner with in order to disciple children in a more lasting and effective way?
- ★ How can we effectively equip and partner with families for the task of discipling children?
- ★ How could the universal languages of culture be harnessed for evangelism and discipleship amongst children and partnership within the body of Christ?

3. Reflect on children from a Biblical perspective – in Churches, Seminaries and Bible schools.

There is a sense that equipping Christian workers to care for children and youth is a significant challenge and opportunity for Churches, Seminaries and Bible schools in the coming years. Many seminaries are approaching this not

as a new fad or diversion from other worthwhile training, but as the best way to achieve what they have already set out to do – equip the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.

The intent is not only to produce leaders who are better equipped to care for, evangelise and disciple children, but also to produce leaders who understand the significance of the Church's holistic ministry to children, and who can influence others at all levels and in all contexts on behalf of those children.

For discussion:

- ★ To what extent are our churches, seminaries and Bible schools including children in our teaching?
- ★ What are some of the roadblocks to taking children seriously? (Is it eschatology? Is it a certain understanding of discipleship? Is it a 'disconnect' between theology and practise?)
- ★ How could we practically work together to address some of these roadblocks?
- ★ What are some of the most significant theological questions regarding children?

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4. Recognise and encourage the potential of children.

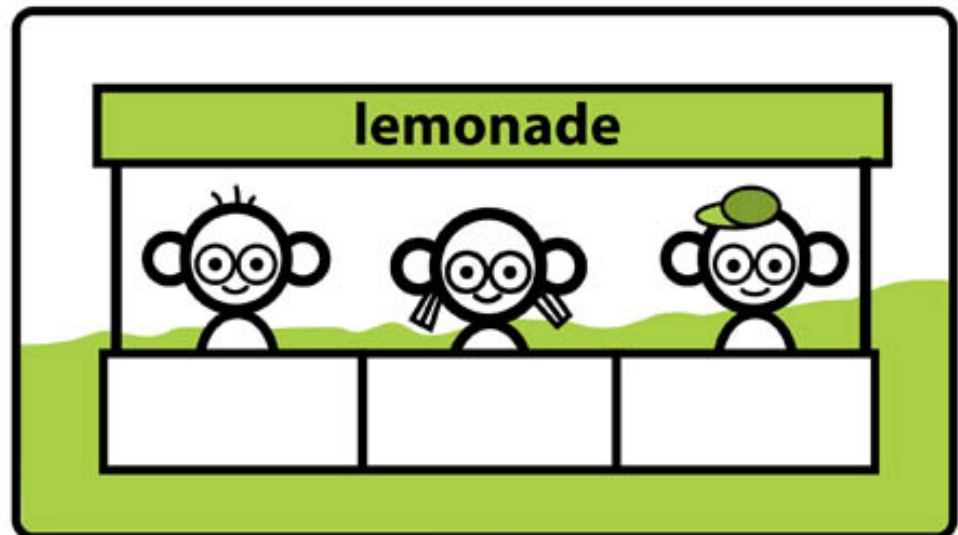
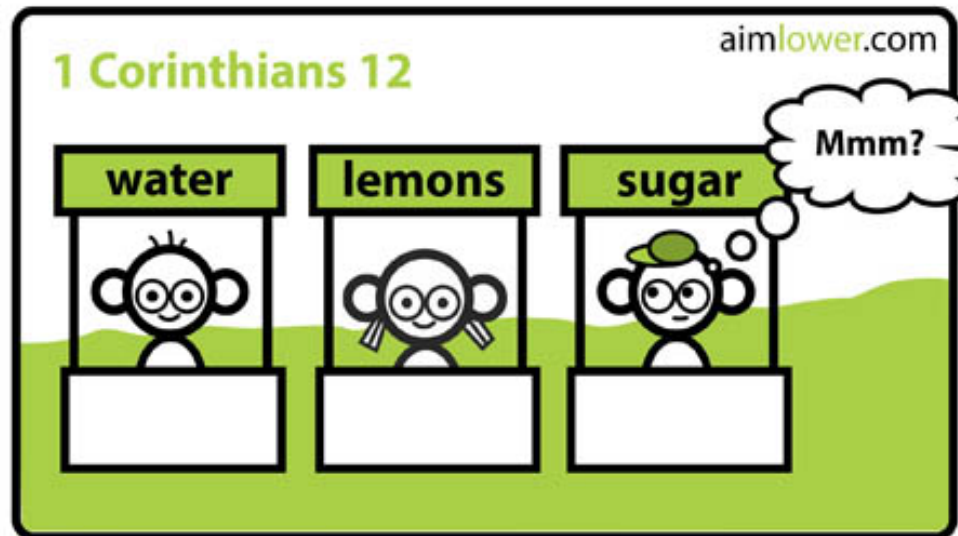
The potential of children is clearly understood by political groups, marketing companies, environmentalists and people of other faiths and there is an emerging concern that this understanding be reclaimed by the body of Christ because it is our heritage.

If children can be encouraged to develop their God-given gifts and abilities in the context of relationships with more mature believers then their faith will be grounded in everyday life and our discipleship efforts will be longer lasting.

On another level, children are being understood within mission circles as important partners with us in mission. On yet another level, many of the world's current challenges are so dire that realistically they will take several generations to solve and the real hope for change lies with our children and theirs.

For discussion:

- ★ What encouraging examples can you share from your context in relation to encouraging the potential of children?
- ★ What concerns do you have with regard to this?
- ★ How could we promote



missions strategies which appropriately estimate the importance and contribution of children?

- ★ How could we encourage children to identify, use and develop their God-given gifts and abilities in order to promote long-lasting faith?
- ★ How could we equip and deploy children for influence and impact in mission? How could we, in the manner of

our evangelism and discipleship, equip children for mature future leadership within the body of Christ?

- ★ How could we, in the manner of our evangelism and discipleship, equip children to have a role in community transformation?

5. Share and contextualise resources.

In the light of the enormity of the task of discipling 2 billion children,

KEY TRENDS

and the reality of the lack of resources in many quarters of the church for this task, there is an increasing spirit of generosity and sharing with regards to resources for the care, evangelism and discipleship of children.

It is also increasingly being recognised that resources have tended to be developed in certain parts of the world and distributed in others, and that moving forward together we must facilitate the development and sharing of appropriate, contextual material in and from all parts of the world.

For discussion:

- ★ What resources do you have for effective evangelism, discipleship and care of children?
- ★ Have you considered tithing your intellectual property so that others within the body of Christ could have access to high quality resources?
- ★ How could research be conducted and shared to help build momentum, focus and partnership around the needs of children?
- ★ What role should context and culture play in the nature of resources used and developed for evangelism, discipleship and care of children?

- ★ Do you have access to resources in your language?
- ★ Do you have access to resources that are appropriate for your culture and context?
- ★ What role could you play (or what help do you need) in creating, developing, sharing, translating or facilitating such resources?
- ★ How could we harness technology for resource distribution, evangelism, discipleship and care in innovative ways?

6. Adapt to the technological context of children.

While stark contrasts still exist between urban and rural situations, there is an increasing awareness that the technological context of children is a significant forum in which to reach children.

While adults may migrate to this context, children are becoming citizens of this context from the youngest ages.

Children from all over the world are becoming more alike as a result of globalisation and the internet.

Technology greatly magnifies the impact of globalisation, individualism and secularism on children, but it also opens up incredible opportunities for mission

as well as opportunities for grounding the faith of children in everyday life.

For discussion:

- ★ How could we disciple children more effectively to thrive as Christians in this context?
- ★ Have we considered encouraging children, as our mission partners, to help us adapt to the technological context?
- ★ What encouraging examples can you share from your situation in relation to the technological context?
- ★ What concerns do you have with regard to this?

Got wisdom to share on these key trends? Join the discussion at aimlowerjournal.com

RADICAL JESUS

WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN OFFENDED BY JESUS WORDS ABOUT CHILDREN?

Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:3

They seem so mild to us. Of course, we think. But they were hard words for some to hear. It would challenge their very ideas about life, society, learning and faith.



- ★ If like some you had learnt the 630 laws and studied the commentaries and listened to the oral tradition, what would you think of this call to a relational faith?
- ★ If you believed that the child could not keep the law and like his mother only needed to pray once a day, what would you make of these 20 words that upended your understanding of the order of things?
- ★ If you came from a nation that revered animals and buried children as sacrifices in the corner of buildings to ward off evil spirits, what would you make of these words?
- ★ If you lived in the seat of power in Rome, where there were 6 different social classes of men, what would you think of this faith that gave status to the faith of a mere child?
- ★ If you were a freedom fighter, at war with Rome what value would you put in a faith that proclaimed peace and championed the child?
- ★ Are we ready to hear again the words of the prophet Jesus as he affirms again the status of the child in the eyes of God, as he does so often in the Gospels?
- ★ Are we ready for Jesus radical message about children?

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