



PARTNERS WITH CHILDREN IN MISSION **WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?**

Jesus and Children -
Discovering Patterns for
Ministry

Discipling a Child - What
Does it Really Mean?

Family Ministry -
Rediscovering the
Domestic Church

Issue 2

ABOUT US

The Aim Lower Journal is facilitated 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 the cause of 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

THE AIM LOWER JOURNAL

*PART OF A GLOBAL
CONVERSATION ABOUT
MISSION, DISCIPLESHIP AND
CHILDREN*

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 (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 part of the yeast that will help the whole batch of dough rise. Although small, we seek to serve in such a way that every church and every organisation can benefit from our efforts.

Will you join us in this mission?

In This Issue



WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in the Aim Lower Journal. We are seeking to encourage a rich conversation about mission and discipleship among children. You have a part to play in that.

The articles here are just part of the dialogue. We hope that you will participate in the discussion by responding to the articles via www.aimlowerjournal.com.

At the website you can leave comments or suggest further insights. We also welcome submissions for future editions. (E Mail us at journal@tahilla.com for submission guidelines.)

We hope to produce three editions a year to help maintain the pace of discussion. For many children around the world the issues of salvation, justice and wisdom for living are urgent and will impact their everyday lives.

We also want to make the journal accessible in multiple ways.

- The full journal on the web
- The full journal in ebook format
- The full journal as PDF.
- (Also each article as PDF)

We also hope in the medium term to produce the journal in a magazine format for tablet computers.

Go to www.aimlowerjournal.com for more information about the different formats and to interact with the articles.

Dave Roberts - on behalf of Global Children's Forum

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The Cape Town Commitment and mission to children

The Cape Town Commitment document arose out of the 2010 gathering of the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelisation. This event, which first took place in 1974 occurs about every 15 years and helps set the agenda for mission thinking in the following decades.

Part of the task of groups such as the Global Children's Forum is to help contribute to the event and help others apply its insights.

At a gathering in Lausanne in May 2014 Dave Roberts, a GCF participant, applied the document to children's ministry in 5 ways:

The birthrates in our communities are going to change the religious climate of the world over the next 30 years. Among the recent research on the effect of falling birthrates emerges the analysis of Eric Kaufmann who published his research in *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth*.

The exception to the falling birthrates, he notes, are moderate or highly devout Christian, Jewish and Muslim families.

He says 'It is not that fundamentalists have suddenly begun to have more children. It is just that others are having fewer'. He also notes that while not all the children will follow the religion of their parents they will tend to drift away slowly in a more religious society, over decades, rather than simply rejecting outright the faith of their communities.

This will mean that there will be significant change in social, religious and cultural climate of many nations around the world. There will be an urgent need to equip our leaders and church members for life in a more religious but more diverse society.

The Cape Town Commitment calls us as follows

Understanding other worldviews

We urge Church leaders and pastors to equip all believers with the courage and the tools to relate the truth with prophetic relevance to everyday public conversation, and so to engage every aspect of the culture we live in.

Ministry to children will mean many different types of conversation in a highly diverse society. What resources do we need to provide to the church to help foster helpful responses to children and families from other faith backgrounds, who might form a larger part of our society in the years ahead. As this type of encounter becomes more common we also need to hear the words of the Cape Town Commitment with respect to:

Ethical Evangelism

We commit ourselves to be scrupulously ethical in all our evangelism. Our witness is to be marked by 'gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience.' We therefore reject any form of witness that is coercive, un-ethical,

deceptive, or disrespectful.

What might this mean in your town or nation. Can you identify the issues that might arise in ministry to children who come from non churchgoing or other faith families. What about other faith perspectives within the broader umbrella of Christianity. How might people be equipped to be ethical in this sphere?

Another area of change may concern schools as a more religious society seeks greater influence in education. As we think about the future of ministry to children are there thinkers, forums and gatherings in our nations that will help us contribute to the debate about schooling and religion?

These forums will need to think carefully about the Biblical perspective on the child. The Cape Town commitment calls us to:

Make Children Visible

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'.

Could you and others create resources, events, networks and courses that might advance the goal above.



What would a 5,10 and 15 year plan for the above look like in your nation? There will need to be concrete actions and a commitment to training those who lead our churches and work with children. Once again the Cape Town commitment notes:

Training

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.

Focus on two words in the above statement.

Train - make an inventory of training in your nation. What is covered well and what is missing in that training

for local church workers. Who are the key influencers already and how can their efforts reach more people?

Holistic - Are you are aware of ministry models in your nation that are orientated towards children and their families. How many are social care projects, how many are community building - such as sport and how many are focused on Bible orientated activities? Does one model predominate?

This reminds us to reflect on the role of the church as an advocate for the child: The Cape Town Commitment reminds us:

Advocacy

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.

Are there projects in your nation that seek to address the issues noted in the paragraph above? How can the local church respond to and take action about these issues in their locality and in their nation? How might you or your network of churches deepen their understanding of these issues and respond within their local communities?

Discuss this item and your responses at www.aimlowerjournal.com

International Summit on Children at Risk Taking Place in 2014

We are at an unprecedented time in history as the Global Church rises up to seriously address the importance of children, especially children at risk.

Major developments in the Global Church community in the past several years demonstrate a new commitment to mission to, for and with children. The 2010 Lausanne Cape Town Commitment (also called CTC) includes a Call to Action on behalf of Children.

In the nearly forty year history of the Lausanne Movement, the CTC is the first Lausanne document that calls on the Church to esteem the value of children and youths in the plan and mission of God.

In addition, some of the most flourishing and thriving movements and networks of the Global Church are speaking and working collaboratively on behalf of children.

These and other movements and initiatives in diverse sectors are drawing awareness to the overwhelming issues of poverty and preventable illness afflicting children, epidemic proportions of child abuse, and widespread exploitation.

Thus, the emergence of the Lausanne Call to Action on behalf of Children at Risk, coupled with the flourishing work of key international movements, confirm that now is the time to act.

Lausanne leaders and the key players of these global movements need to engage in productive dialogue and build upon synergistic energy to push for concrete and practical actions to address the



issues affecting children at risk around the world.

Even major secular organisations such as UNICEF acknowledge the critical role of the Church on needy and vulnerable children. It is imperative that the Church be salt and light by leading the global and biblical charge to demonstrate the love of Christ through effective, holistic, and transformational mission to and with the least of these - the children.

Purpose

The Lausanne Consultation on Children at Risk is designed to raise awareness of the needs and initiatives noted above, and to engage sustained, collaborative actions within the Global Church community to fulfil the Cape Town Commitment Call to Action on behalf of children at risk.

A major output of the consultation will be the production of the Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) on Ministry with Children-at-Risk and a Conference Declaration.

Objectives of the Consultation:

- Submit a report of the key theological and missiological reflections related to children at risk;
- Describe practical ministry models that demonstrate praxis based on sound child development practice and theological reflection;
- Outline broad action plans involving multi-Movement collaboration among Lausanne issue groups and global networks; and
- Gather the commitments and affirmations of participating leaders to move the global Church forward in seeing God's purpose for fulfilled and realised for children at risk around the world.

Consultation Title: Lausanne Consultation on Children at Risk.

We will bring you further news on this consultation as the event and its outcomes unfold.

The Max7 Internet Resource

7 Ways max7.org could help you in your work with children.

max7.org is a Global Children's Forum project and is part of the 'Open Source' ethos of the overall partnership. There are at least 7 very practical things you could do at the site. These could enhance your local ministry or help you help others in training situations and with resource materials

1 Find resources in your language

There are many languages now available on the site with resources varying from several to several hundred, depending on the language. You can also help by translating resources into your mother tongue if you have the skills to do that.

2 Find a curriculum

The best resources help you guide your children through a bible overview over a period of several years. If you need to find this type of teaching resource Max7 will guide you to several. It also gives you resources for other contexts such as sports ministry and kids games.

3 Seasonal Resources

Many more people engage with church life during the special festivals such as Easter and Christmas. Max7 will give you access to a wide range of resources related to these and other festival such as Harvest. This may be helpful if you looking for new resources that are inexpensive.

4 Training Materials.

There are 2 types of resource that you can find. There are training outlines that will help you resource others. You can also do what many do and make their own compact disc from material downloaded from the site. They then copy that disc and distribute it to those attending the event. For those working with more limited resources there may still be the opportunity to download resources and print them locally.

With the growth of mobile phones and smart phones people could also be directed to the web site to get



the materials direct.

5 Activity materials

Sometimes you may want printed materials for the children that you can print locally. Search the site for the subject that you are focusing on and you will often find activity sheets that are relevant.

6 Advocacy for children

As we seek to encourage others to support and enable work with children in the church and in the community we may have eloquent words and great printed materials. A video can often help us start that conversation. Search the site for the two very well known animations, *Aim Lower* and *Today*. Both are great discussion starters

7 Great animations

There are a number of high quality animations of key biblical parables, including the lost sheep story. These have great musical backgrounds but no speech so that someone in your community can read in your language.

Visit www.max7.org and use the search facility to find what you need.

Releasing a Sense of Wonder

We will intentionally seek out and promote to our children, (via home and church) music, reading and other cultural expressions of a Biblical faith. We will by this means impart a sense of wonder; a God centred way of seeing and a joy in believing. We do this as a response to the theft of their innocence by some aspects of mass media culture. We will also seek to help our children discern popular culture, recognising and responding to that which seeks for truth, and rejecting that which celebrates evil or deception.

Culture that Uplifts

If there is one area of contemporary life that has been a constant irritant in the church's spiritual wounds, it is popular culture.

Churches routinely disapprove of it. Parents are often in inner turmoil as they wrestle with how to cope with the conflict it can cause in the home.

If we are to help parents we must first establish our stance on culture from a biblical perspective. We must then help our children learn to be discerning about culture. Our final task will be to promote and encourage positive culture.

A biblical view of culture

Discussing this could take many pages. Let me briefly state a perspective.

God has created us in his image. As he created humanity and all that surrounds us, he constantly reflected that it was good (Genesis 1). He revealed his word through majestic poetry, highly pictorial prophecy and dramatic historical

dealings with the people of Israel. The temple he allowed Solomon to build was visually magnificent - as is the vision of heaven which unfolds in the book of Revelation.

Many Christians are however wary of the arts. This is often rooted in the incursion of Greek thought into Christian thinking. This elevates the mind and the spirit and denigrates physical reality.

It strongly encourages the idea that some activity is sacred and some secular. This leads many to believe that the church must not use 'the methods of the world' or 'the devil's music'.

This does not do justice to either history or Scripture. History suggests that the pioneers of radio in America were Christian broadcasters. The first widely distributed popular book was Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. (Huge publishing houses such as HarperCollins, Hodder & Stoughton and Bertlesmann all have their roots in Christian publishing companies of the last century.)

In reality what often happens is that the church expresses and communicates about God and Jesus creatively, giving their creative gifts back to God as an act of worship. The rest of society will, however, use those same art forms for idolatrous purposes.

The church is not using the world's methods ~ the world is abusing God's good gifts. The 'people of the Book' should not hesitate, therefore, to use books, music, art, dance and a variety of forms to express their worship to God and the view of life that flows from it.

Learning to discern

There will nevertheless be much about popular culture that deeply disturbs. Owners of a satellite dish will know that the selection of music channels available gives a 24-hour platform to the innocent and the idealistic alongside the inane and profane.

Helping a child think carefully about the latest pop video is a way of blessing them. **If you help them think by asking them a question,** they will begin to 'own' their decisions about what they listen or watch.

If you explain the wisdom behind your thinking you begin to **help them understand the world, not merely follow your commands.** A child who knows 'why' is much more likely to make the same decision when they are away from your influence.

We also understand that real dialogue flows when the young person knows that the adult is not merely highlighting the negative and has taken the trouble to do the research about what a item of art may be saying..

Positive Culture

It's tempting for Christians to cynically dismiss the material produced by Christian companies. Some would say that it doesn't have the production values or artistic breadth of mainstream culture. The reality, however is that Christian media companies around the world are now producing material to a high standard.

They are winning respect in the mainstream arena. *Veggie Tales*, a long time staple of the Christian



video market (25 million sales), crossed over to mainstream cinema release in the United States.

Bob Walisewski (Focus on the Family), comments:

'Not only will families leave theatres giggling, they'll also be primed for some God-centred conversation about compassion, forgiveness, mercy and second chances.'

He also speaks highly of the film's artistic values:

'It's not just the exploration of biblical truth, though, that makes me a big fan of Jonah. It's also because of its snappy animation, quirky - and familiar - veggie characters, entertaining story lines and snazzy musical numbers unpredictable enough to be cool to even a few teenagers. Jonah's writing and production value stand head-and-shoulders above the crowd.'

For example, each and every song in this first Veggie movie easily competes with A-list Disney fare. Such professionalism deserves a lot of praise.'

The film made it to the USA Top 10. Nor is 'crossing over' the only way that material produced by Christians will make an impact. Two mainstays of mainstream culture, *Lord of the Rings* and *Wallace and Gromit*, both reflect their creator's worldview and provide an alternative to the negative and occult worldview of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* or Phillip Pullman's overtly anti-Christian *His Dark Materials* series.

Tolkein, writing from his Christian perspective, details a vast battle between good and evil. *Wallace and Gromit* is both whimsical and nostalgic, but it has won its committed Anglican creator Nick Park three Oscars. Its strength is not that it has a strong message, but simply that it is very funny without being offensive.

There are many others we could mention. such as the inspiring animation of *Miracle Maker*, or the massive sales of the *StoryKeepers* videos. *StoryKeepers* offers animated version of 47 key biblical

incidents. The brainchild of an English vicar, they have outsold Disney video releases on occasion. The *McGee and Me* series, which examined moral themes from a Christian perspective, also crossed over into the mainstream and was screened by the BBC in a prime-time children's slot.

The *Friends and Heroes* series also bought high production values to biblical storytelling and was shown on the BBC in the UK.

Churches can become ambassadors for wholesome culture by stocking books, music and videos on church bookstalls, or by promoting them from the pulpit and encouraging people to purchase them from their local Christian store.

Dave Roberts

Dave is a member of the GCF facilitation team and a writer himself.

Grandparents, Family Support & Spiritual Formation

Alison buried her face in her grandad's cardigan and smelt the same aroma of soap she remembered as a child. Now, aged 15, she felt comfortable that at least some things hadn't changed. But she also felt ashamed, that at her age, she still needed the reassurance of her Grandad's presence through all that had happened.

Her Dad had just left home. He had never even said goodbye. Her Mum was angry, confused, saying things about Dad that left Alison upset and angry too. Her brother didn't seem to care. There was nowhere to go except to Grandad. There, in his arms, she felt safe. She felt there that the family still existed. She discovered there some hope for the future.

Grandparents today

Alison's story is not unusual. Grandparents are taking on an increasingly important role in caring for young people, and stabilising families in time of change. For example there are over 13 million grandparents in the United Kingdom at present. Each grandparent has an average of 4.4 grandchildren. The monetary value of their care for grandchildren, in the UK alone, amounts to over £1 billion each year. This kind of care has increased in the past two generations, from 33% to 82% of children who are now being cared for in some way by grandparents. The increased divorce rates, the

growing number of single parents, in some nations, high house prices and the need for two incomes for each family, all suggest that the trend to increased involvement of grandparents will continue.

The good news is that grandparents have never been fitter, healthier, better educated or more mobile. Their life expectancy is higher than ever before in many developed societies. The amount of time grandparents can offer to their children's families is a hidden treasure created by longer retirement. Some grandparents are bridging the gap with recent technology - the number of grandparents with mobile phones has increased, and the use of email means that young people can have direct access to grandparents even from the other side of the world.

Their role

Bridging the gap across the generations is one of the vital roles that grandparents offer. One writer has described the role as a gift between two people at opposite ends of the life journey. **The real value of grandparents lies in their presence rather than their actions.** Simply being there is enough. They become friends with their grandchildren, as advisors, storytellers, confidants. They can help to heal the inevitable tensions between parents and their children. Being a grandparent is no easy task. It is a vocation with very different

demands from parenting. Grandparents are not usually the primary support for their grandchildren. They have to wait for their role to be offered to them.

They have to bite their tongues many times as they see parents making different choices to their own. They have to watch big mistakes being made, and be humble enough to help pick up the pieces. They have influence but little day-to-day authority.

They feel deeply connected, but may not be consulted. They offer stability to others, but may not feel secure themselves. Grandparents live out a vocation that weaves the threads of family through generations, but that weaving is often in the background, beneath the surface of the busy life of young families.

The spiritual dimension

The spiritual side of a grandparent's role can often be over-looked. As they look to the last third of their life journey grandparents have much to reflect upon. Looking back at the experience of life puts them in touch with a longer view, a wiser outlook and a richness that can be offered to younger generations.

The frustration of their role lies in having to wait for the right moment to share such wisdom and richness. That too is part of the spiritual challenge grandparents face, waiting patiently for those rare, almost magical moments, when they



connect across the generations with their grandchildren. Those moments are spiritual experiences that can make the waiting worthwhile.

The relegation of grandparents to the family substitute bench, the acceptance of a support role, the need to wait for moments to share wisdom and support, all demand humility and acceptance from grandparents. Those qualities then weave back into their own spiritual journey, and join grandparents to a deeper human journey shared by all the family.

The need for grandparents to reflect and to pray for their children and grandchildren is huge. Their ability to make sense of their own lives in terms of the Gospel, in terms of the cross and resurrection, is the best way to hand on faith to their grandchildren.

Patterns of wisdom, practical help, patience and spiritual depth are still needed today from grandparents. Children, growing into our increasingly fractured society, need these rocks of common sense, humour and spiritual depth more than ever. In our Christian churches,

such older members have a respected role, living out a Gospel faith with patience, courage and wisdom on behalf of the young.

Children like Alison, in her Grandad's embrace, will be forever richer, wiser and healthier because of their goodness. God bless all grandparents.

David O'Malley

Chaplain, Thornleigh College,
Bolton, UK

JESUS AND THE CHILD - A JOURNEY FROM CAESAREA PHILIPPI TO JERUSALEM

I'd like to invite you to take a walk with Jesus and his disciples from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem as he made his last preparations to equip his disciples for ministry, including child ministry.

Caesarea Philippi was on the slopes of Mount Hermon, north of the Sea of Galilee not far from the present day Damascus. The journey we are embarking on with Jesus took him from near the very north of the area in which he ministered to near the south, from a centre of pagan worship to the heart of Jewish celebration and sacrifice.

It is difficult to keep track of Jesus' life story when we focus on single verses or passages and so we can miss emerging trends or links. Do you remember what happened immediately after the stunning revelation on the Mount of Transfiguration that confirmed in an unforgettable way the truth of Peter's declaration?

The father of a boy who was suffering from seizures, probably a form of epilepsy, confronted Jesus and told him that his disciples hadn't been able to help his boy. They asked Jesus why they were powerless in this situation and, as Jesus explained why, the journey began on which we now embark with them.

When we look at this, we notice that he led by actions and example, not simply by words. That is how we

will best teach and equip others. The process is as important as the content of the Gospel.

Jesus & childhood

I have argued elsewhere that a theme running right through this climactic period of the ministry of Jesus is that of children and childhood. It seems as if every incident and all teaching is compared and contrasted with childlikeness. I am not going to expound this now but my exposition is set within this understanding of the narrative.

So let's begin our walk with Jesus. For some perhaps the idea of a pilgrimage will resonate, even possibly suggesting for some a forerunner to the Stations of the Cross. I want to share from this passage eight insights into the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven taught by Jesus that are axiomatic in our ministry among children, young people and families.

The critical importance of faith and prayer

As far as we can ascertain, it was on Mount Hermon that Peter, James and John saw the transfigured Jesus with Moses and Elijah and it was in the shadow of this snow-capped peak that the father brought his son to Jesus. Jesus healed the boy. The disciples, who had been unable to

help, wanted to know why they couldn't rebuke and drive out the demon.

Jesus spoke of their lack of faith (Matthew) and the need for prayer (Mark). The two responses form an integrated truth: faith and prayer are inseparable. They are the bedrock of our mission with children in every setting.

As I have pondered this response of Jesus, it has begun to dawn on me that the overwhelming importance of prayer and faith was not just something that Jesus reiterates in his teaching and mentoring of his followers but was incarnated in his life and ministry.

In John's gospel we have the privilege of eavesdropping as Jesus prays. Later we will enter into the wrestling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsamane.

But this was accompanied by the profoundest faith in history. He has just told his followers that he must suffer and die and that he will be raised to life on the third day. Have you stopped to reflect on the faith of Jesus?

I'm not sure what the writer to the Hebrews has in mind when he summoned up his great catalogue of people of faith by referring to Jesus as the author of our faith (Hebrews 11:2) but, in using a word applied to Jesus as the author of life and salvation, perhaps we should pause to let the significance of this



moment in his ministry sink in.

Notice before we move on, the faith of those who brought people to Jesus, including the father of the epileptic boy. Until we can also pray 'Thy will be done' our interventions are loose canons!

We should seek to find the agenda of our heavenly Father in the life of a child or family. Our primary task is to discover the Mission Deo and to join Him in it, not to seek to enlist His assistance for our own endeavours!

The necessity of changing and becoming like little children

By heading south we have now arrived at Capernaum, the well-known town on the shores of Lake Galilee, where Peter's house was situated, and one of the centres of

the ministry of Jesus. It was the place where he had healed so many as the sun was setting and so fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah.

So what do we make of this text? The meaning of this teaching is commonly misunderstood. Usually people make a list of the attributes of children (for example: they are trusting, questioning, reliant and dependent on others) and then seek to apply them to adults.

We must be very careful if we do this that we don't read our adult and cultural preferences into children! A primary question concerns whether we are prepared to change or not.

If we are not, then we are unlikely ever to enter into God's way of doing things.

So, let's ask ourselves whether we are allowing Jesus to change us. Then comes the issue of becoming

like children and I want to admit that I am becoming steadily less sure what it means as I study its meaning with others across the world.

We certainly must avoid sentimentality in our responses and ideas. Perhaps it has something to do with having open and enquiring minds; being ready to learn and to obey, to grow, to change, to wonder. Put practically, it may be about being ready and willing to pray the Lord's Prayer:

"Our Father in Heaven ... your way of doing things take precedence, your will be done ... " "You are the potter: I am the clay."

Welcoming children in the name of Jesus and so welcoming Jesus Himself

We are still in Capernaum, with the fishing boats moving silently across waters of Galilee clearly visible as Jesus speaks. Some years ago I was asked a question that cut me to the quick. I had already given more than quarter of a century to caring for children at risk in my family home, Mill Grove. The (angry) questioner challenged me: "Do you really want to be in this ministry?"

I immediately knew from my instinctive defensive reaction that he had touched a raw nerve. The result was a deep pondering of my calling during which I realised that I had reservations and possibly regrets that must have affected my relationship with the children and young people I sought to help.

Over time I began to learn what it was really to welcome children in the name of Jesus: to be open to them with my whole being. And I have come to recognise those parents, teachers and carers who have opened their hearts to children; who love and respect the children they are alongside.

When we are open to children, really joyful in our ministry, then we will find that we have welcomed Jesus. If so our work is a great privilege. This interpretation is an antidote to a spirituality that focuses on the pilgrimage and identity of self. In such a case, ministry among children might be a way of meeting our own needs rather than theirs.

Understanding how abhorrent child abuse is to God

With barely a pause, Jesus changes mood dramatically. It could well be

that these words of Jesus are his most angry and condemnatory. And as he speaks he surely points at Galilee. That is where the ripples of the person drowned with a millstone around his neck would forever be lodged in the imaginations of the listeners to his dire warning. It's so hard to read and hear them that we often simply omit them.

Don't you shudder when you hear of child abuse by church leaders and the attempts of some to cover it up? Can you imagine how Jesus feels or who can sound the depths of sorrow in the Father heart of God (the title of the hymn by Graham Kendrick) about this?

But this is not restricted to specific acts of abuse. It includes everything that might cause children (little ones) to sin. Have you considered the world we have allowed to be created for twenty-first century children and the pressures on them to sin?

Think of child soldiers who steal, murder and rape in their hundreds of thousands. Think of the tens of millions of child prostitutes. Think of the children of the rich who grow up to envy the possessions and wealth of others and long to have it. Consider those who are 'branded' around the world by trans-national corporations and marketing machines.

Think of corporate and institutional paedophilia. In all these cases and so many more, children are being led into sin. How does God see the modern world developing around us, given His primary concern for children, little ones, the weak and the vulnerable? And where does that leave us?

Question from child at risk:

"Why do you go to church? You know everything in the Bible, and you are good, so you don't need to go!"

Reply from carer:

"I go to kneel down and ask God's forgiveness not only for the sins that know I have committed but also for the systems and institutions that I am allowing to be created and not challenging that cause little ones to sin."

It's a sobering thought.

Valuing each child as an individual of inestimable worth

The water of Galilee is still lapping near the feet of Jesus but now it is the hills, particularly to the east, richer in colours and textures as the afternoon turns to dusk, where the listeners now focus their attention.

Don't overlook the fact that the story of the one lost sheep in Matthew's Gospel is set in the context of children and little ones and that it begins with a 'reference to the guardian angels of children.

There is also a moral: see that you do not look down on these little ones.

There have been some varied Christian reactions to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but something that underpins the document is a sense of the dignity and worth of each child.

It is salutary to reflect on the fact that this is why we are all alive in Christ today: because God sees each one of us as of eternal, value and sent Jesus as the Shepherd to search for us and bring us to our Heavenly home on his shoulders.



Jesus

Search

Allowing children and their families and friends to come to Jesus

Jesus now leaves Capernaum and Galilee and wends his way south along the River Jordan but on the East side known as Transjordan and Perea. He would have passed the place where he was baptised and it is not fanciful to consider that it was near such a spot that this next incident occurs.

John the Baptist at first resisted the request of Jesus for baptism before allowing the authority of Jesus to take precedence.

This is one of the eight elements where we probably think we can move on without much need to reflect. Surely we all agree on this point? What controversy could there possibly be?

Well, the disciples, having been

taught specifically by Jesus all that we have just considered, actually tried to prevent people from bringing children to Jesus!

And sadly it is not difficult to find examples of churches and Christians who have, intentionally or not, done this down through the centuries.

We have tended to overestimate our own skills and importance and to underestimate the significance of the direct relationship between children and their Saviour. What if people bring children to Jesus outside our office hours? What if they have some very strange ideas?

What if they need, in our view, education and medical help? Please don't lightly assume that you and I and our ministries have been innocent in all this.

But rejoice that when children do find their way to Jesus, he

welcomes them and blesses them beyond our comprehension.

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Author - Keith White

This article has been printed and given as a lecture in many different contexts.

Dr Keith J. White is Director of Mill Grove where, with his wife Ruth, he is responsible for the residential community caring for children who have experienced separation and loss. He is Chair of the Child Theology Movement and founder of the Christian Child Care Forum.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH - PARTNERS IN MISSION?

The past decade has seen a significant awakening on the biblical and strategic importance and potential of children and youth as both objects of and agents for world transformation. A wealth of new initiatives and publications has raised awareness of the needs, the promise and the possibilities represented by this large, needy and receptive 'people group.'

Christian literature is welcoming the emergence of this new discourse with enthusiasm. Churches are being challenged to engage with children both inside and outside the walls of the church, especially those who live in poverty, oppression, abuse and exploitation. Increasing numbers books and other resources offer new and profound insights into the topics of children and childhood in the Bible, child theology, children and mission, and children and leadership.

Toward the last part of the 1990s and early 2000s the Church witnessed the birth of several major initiatives, commitments and movements for and on behalf of Children, especially those who are at high risk. Among them were Viva networks for Children at Risk and their Cutting Edges Conferences, the Oxford Statement of Children at Risk in 1997, the Godly Play Initiative (1997), the Holistic Child Development Program in Penang, Malaysia begun in 2001, the Child Theology Movement which was also born in Penang, Malaysia in 2002 and followed by numerous Child Theology Consultations in many areas of the world. Children's Church Movement, Children's Prayer

Movements, Children's Spirituality Conference in June 2009, the Transform World 4-14 window initiative in September 2009, and more.

Each of these movements and initiatives has grown significantly in the past decade. The Viva Networks have worked with more than 85 network initiatives in 40 countries, helping 1.2 million children. The Holistic Child Development (HCD) graduate program, begun in the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary in Penang, Malaysia in 2001, is now being fully or partly adopted by and associated with some 120 seminaries in 65 countries globally.

Of course, there is nothing new with Christians and Christian organizations caring for children in poverty and orphans. The Roman Catholic Church, Salvation Army and Organizations such as Compassion International and World Vision have been caring for children in poverty and orphans for a long time. What is new though the awakening in the past decade, is a better understanding of the biblical significance of children and of God's heart for children, including their role as 'signs' of the Kingdom.

There is also a much greater awareness of the receptivity of children and youth, and of their potential as a force for mission and transformation. And, there is more attention, responsiveness and commitment on the part of churches (and seminaries) to care holistically for children, and to tap into their capacities, abilities, promise and possibilities.

Biblical Stories

Awareness of the potential of children and young people have led many people to begin reading Scripture differently - with the child in focus. Many passages, long overlooked, are found to include children in significant ways, often as important change agents, and often in roles where adults and even nations are influenced or transformed.

While readers have often disregarded passages highlighting children, it seems that they have never been insignificant in God's scheme of things. God has always had heart for children. And He has always had a high regard for the capacity of children to understand the faith, and viewed them as willing and gifted instruments for revitalization and renewal. A few instances will hint at the wealth of biblical material now being revisited.

The Young Slave Girl

Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel . . ." (2 Kings 5:13-15)



This surely is one of the great world mission passages of the Old Testament. Jesus made a reference to this story in his sermon early in his ministry days, delivered at his hometown, Nazareth (Luke 4: 47).

The output of the counsel given by the young captive girl to Naaman and his wife was Naaman's miraculous healing. The outcome of the healing was the acknowledgement by this great Aram Commander, that Yahweh is the only God in the whole world. This confession formed the core of the Israelites' confession of faith (Deuteronomy 6: 4-6). And surely getting the peoples' of the earth to have make the same "Now I know!" declaration that Naaman made, is even today what our missionary enterprise activity is all about.

It would be great if we had the record of how this life changing experience and confession impact Naaman's family, and on Ben-hadad II, the King of Aram, his vast army,

and the people of Aram as a whole. Did it have an impact on the relationship and reconciliation between Aram and Israel? Considering Naaman's position in the army, reputation in society, and his closeness to the King of Aram, it is possible to speculate that this holistic transformational experience impacted people beyond his immediate family members.

Unfortunately we do not have such record at hand, but the author of the 2 Kings later recognized Naaman as a great man, courageous soldier, a man highly respected and the instrument in God's hands. Through Naaman's leadership God gave victory to Aram.

An Israelite young captive girl initiated the whole episode. She had certainly acquainted herself with the things of God and the ministry Elisha was undertaking. The fact that Naaman, the second person in command in Aram listened to her the first place is

remarkable. As Esther Menn notes, this narrative presents a sustained and ironic contrast between what appears "big" and important, and what appears "small" and insignificant."

We do not know her name, her exact age, what happened with her parents and siblings when she was captured, how long she served Naaman's wife. "...the child in introduced simply as "little," as if that is the one thing that matters, her smallness in the midst of everything might, powerful, and gross.

Naaman and his wife listened to this young slave girl and seek permission from the King. The King of Aram elevated the little girl's suggestion into something of an international crisis when he sought to turn it into an economic and political transaction, but he wisely chose to believe the information given by this young girl and encouraged Naaman to take the

the journey to Israel.

If not for this girl's spiritual insight and courage to counsel the great general, Naaman would have gone home the same person, with leprosy all over his body. If not for the compassionate determination of the little girl to see the great general of Aram experience holistic transformation, the enmity between the two nations, Aram and Israel might have deepened. Indeed who knows how many people and children might have died and suffered had there been war between them.

The little girl's knowledge and faith in Yahweh and her familiarity with the work of God through his servant, Elisha were two things which enabled her to significantly impact her nation and generation, even while she was still very young. Even living in foreign land with a low social status and limited freedom, this young girl was able to make impact that lead toward holistic transformation in the life of Naaman and his family which potentially creating reconciliation and peace between two hostile nations.

Josiah, the greatest King and reformer

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left (2 Chronicles 34:1-2).

Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did--with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses (2 Kings 23:25)

Josiah became the 16th king of

Judah when he was only 8 years old. The author of the 2nd Kings considered him a great reformer and the most committed King in Israel's History. By the time he was 16 years old, he began to seek the Lord and commit to serve Him wholeheartedly. In the years that followed Josiah purged the land of Israel and removed all the detestable idols from all the territory belonging to the Israelites (2 Chronicles 34: 3-7, 33).

His walk with his God from a very young age allowed him to accomplish wonderful things for his people. During his reign he restored the temple of God and renewed the covenant between the people of Israel and God.

He humbled himself and repented on behalf of the nation of Israel, igniting a significant spiritual revival among the people. The author of 2nd Chronicles sums up his greatest accomplishment: "He had all who were present in Israel serve the Lord their God. As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord, the God of their fathers" (2 Chronicles 34:33).

Saving the day

There are many biblical accounts of God using children and young people to save the multitudes and even nations in very critical times in history. The story of the young and relatively unknown David defeating Goliath and saving the nation in one of Israel's most humiliating days is one great example. If it was not for David, Israel would have had fallen in the hands of the Philistines.

Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." (1 Samuel 17:33)

Another teenage orphan girl in captivity, Hadassah or Esther, who selflessly and courageously saved her people from extinction, continues to be remembered by the Jews even today, as they celebrate the Purim (Esther 9: 29-32).

In the New Testament, as God uses a young boy with five loaves of bread and two small fish to feed five thousands men (excluding women and children) he illustrates compassion for the needy and makes a resounding statement about faith and resourcefulness.

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" (John 6:8-9)

Children welcomed and deployed for service.

Such biblical examples of God deploying children in His service could be repeated at length. Moreover reading Scripture with the child in focus shows vividly that God values children, accepts their worship, and doesn't hesitate to deploy them to stimulate faith and obedience in children and adults alike. For examples,

The story of **Samuel** gives a picture of God speaking directly to a child (1 Samuel 3) and then through him, demonstrating that God does not use only adults.

Jesus own spiritual growth as a boy of 12 years involved participation including interacting, listening and asking questions among the teachers in the temple courts in Jerusalem.

Jesus underscored the ability of children to comprehend spiritual matters when he praised God the

Father for revealing such truths to “little children” (Matt.11). Jesus rebuked the chief priests and teachers of the law for questioning children’s participation in worship and their perceptive recognition of Jesus as they sang “Hosanna to the Son of David” quoting from Psalm 8 “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Matt.21 cf.Ps.8).

Surely children are both present and prominent throughout Scripture, and fully a part of God’s redemption and redeeming plan.

Many people view children with a perspective of the future as if they are persons in the making. The Bible however, sees children and youth as full and complete person both now and in the future. God relates, engages and uses children in many of the same ways he uses adults. It may be argued that Children have even better capacity than adults to relate to and engage with God. Indeed, Jesus asked the disciples to learn from children on how to relate to the truth,

“I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Luke 18:17)

Children and transformation

It is not only in biblical times that God has deployed children as his willing instruments. Throughout Christian history God has always used children. In great historical revivals of John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, D.L. Moody, the French Huguenots and others, children played significant roles and active participants. The role and form of their engagement varies over time but even today, God continues to use children in a significant ways. Go to the [aimlowerjournal .com](http://www.aimlowerjournal.com) website to discover stories that are illustrative of the significant roles children and youth are playing today in mission and transformation.

Both the biblical studies and the contemporary case studies illustrate the

timeless principle of biblical wisdom, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

Human mental, personality, and identity are mostly formed during early childhood. Significantly, faith formation and faith decisions are also most often made in early years. In the mid-nineties, Bryant L. Myers published research which reveals that nearly eighty-five percent of people, who make a decision for Christ, do so between the age of four and fourteen.

Dan Brewster and others began in 1996 referring to that “window of receptivity” as the 4/14 Window. During the 20th century, children and early teenagers at this age bracket represented the single largest source of new believers for the American Church.

The Journal Ministry Today (January-February 2008) extensively reported a new movement of Church engagement with children both in the US and abroad. An increasing numbers of local churches across nations are recognising that children have far more spiritual potential than church leaders had realised.

This new awareness is igniting a spiritual revolution in these churches. Many children and young people are no longer coming to church only to be entertained. Rather, given an opportunity and a challenge, they come to worship, contribute and be equipped for the ministry. Children are no longer seen as primarily the “mission field” but as effective agents of mission (<http://www.ministrytodaymag.com>).

Read more at www.aimlowerjournal.com and participate in the discussion surrounding this article.

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IT'S TIME TO TAKE CHILDREN & YOUTH SERIOUSLY

Children are all around us. Every human is or was once a child. Children are the most numerous needy and most people on the planet. Never in history have we had so many children among us and never have so many of them been at great risk.

Children aged 15 and under comprise one-third of our world's six-billion people. In developing countries children make up nearly half the population. Another one billion children may be born in the next decade, very many of those into families living in extreme poverty.

- The Church today may not be looking for the children, but they wouldn't have to look far to find them. Children are no remote or obscure people group. They are found

In all countries, in all socio-economic categories and among people of all cultures.

- In all communities: in its families, its schools, its markets, its playgrounds....
- In marginalized subcultures: children with special needs, in prisons...
- In 'at risk' situations where circumstances increase the likelihood that they will not have the opportunity to hear the gospel.

- In areas not easily accessible to the gospel.
- In resistant circumstances: children who have been harmed or neglected by those representing the Christian faith.

Climate Change

While the church has always done an 'OK' job of Christian Education, understanding children in the context of global evangelism and mission is relatively new. Understanding children and youth as perhaps the key strategy for church growth, for missions and for furthering the kingdom, is a very new idea.

The reality of the '4/14 Window' may be the fuel that provides new 'wind in the sails' for the church ministry and mission in the 21st century. An emphasis on children and youth could be a re-energizing focus comparable to the 10/40 Window. Wess Stafford reminds us that

"Every major movement in history has grasped the need to target the next generation in order to advance its agenda and secure its legacy into the future. Political movements (like Nazism and Communism) trained legions of children with the goal of carrying their agenda beyond the lifetimes of their founders.

World religions have done the same with the systematic indoctrination of their young—even the Taliban places great emphasis on recruiting children. ... It seems that, historically, the Christian evangelical movement is one of the few that has allowed children to remain a second-rate mandate—the Great Omission in the Great Commission."

It is happening. The last decade has witnessed a 'climate change' in attitudes and openness to children and their role in the church and in mission. There is only a slight breeze in some quarters, but everywhere the winds are gaining strength. Open the 4/14 Window, to feel the climate change upon us - a climate change we can all believe in.

It's time.

It's Time to Read Scripture with 'the Child in the Midst'

One thing that will bring about that climate change is a rediscovery of children in Scripture. Some Christian leaders think the Bible says very little about children. However, as they begin to read Scriptures with "the child in the midst," they see that children are not just present but prominent. Children and youth are found playing crucial roles in the outworking of God's plans.



Whatever the realities of a child's life, God regards them as precious. To Him, they are:

- **A sign.** Children are God's blessing (Psalm 127:3) and are missed when not part of the covenant community.
- **A symbol.** Children are illustrations of the relationship God wants with adults (Hosea 11:1, Matthew 18:2-3).
- **In need of teaching.** They are to be treasured and taught both in the community and home (Deuteronomy 6, 11).
- **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.** Children are designed to praise God (Psalm 8:2). Praise is not something they will learn to bring when they are older - it is their role now. Children give praise to Jesus even when adults reject him (Matthew 21:15).
- **Agents of God's mission** Children are not only the ones who follow, but the ones who God sends to lead (Isaiah 11:6). God chooses children as key figures in the biblical narrative: Isaac, Moses, Samuel, David, Naaman's wife's maid. God chooses to enter this world not as a king, rabbi or high priest but as a baby.
- **Examples.** Jesus uses children as examples of the humility and dependence that the Kingdom of

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Note: This is an adaptation of a paper he wrote that was published as a chapter in "Emerging Mission Movements, edited by Dr. Bambang Budijanto, (Colorado Springs, C o m p a s s i o n International), 2010.

God requires of adults (Matthew 18:4).

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

For years Christian leaders have read Scriptures and never noticed the children. One can get very lofty degrees in theological institutions and not see much less reflect on the wealth of biblical material focusing on children. And yet some of the most significant acts and revelations of God came through them. Their faith and obedience was often central in the outworking of God's purposes.

There are vast new vistas of understanding and wisdom awaiting church and missions leaders who re-read Scripture with the child in the midst!

It's Time for Meaningful Theological Reflection on Children

A rediscovery of children in Scripture will inevitably lead to more theological reflection on children and childhood. Just as Liberation Theology, and African, Asian and Feminist theologies have changed our paradigms, so Child theology has the potential to cause a fundamental ground shift in the way our generation -- and perhaps future generations -- understand the Bible.

As they begin to interpret Scripture differently, seeing the children, Child Theology may open

new territory for the church and the seminaries and theological institutions that teach it.

We must tread carefully, of course. Many who are aware of the significance of children are activists. We see their pressing needs and the potential of children and youth, and we urge aggressive, purpose driven action on their behalf. We are usually not given to patient, rigorous theological reflection.

But Christian action and interventions on behalf of children should be well grounded in theological soundness. Theological reflection can serve a necessary and constructively critical function within the growing movement. If we value activism because it gets things done, and devalue theological reflection because it is time consuming and difficult, neither our practice nor our theological foundations will be secure. The foundations of our practice will be suspect and ultimately vulnerable in the rough and tumble of critical scrutiny.

Dr Keith White, founder of the Child Theology Movement, and many other are now engaging in theological discussions on children. In March, 2011, more than 100 theologians, seminarians, mission leaders and others met in Nairobi to explore what the Bible says about children, and what new insights may be gained by looking at Church, Mission, Seminary Curricula and other disciplines through the lens of the child

It's Time To Think Strategically about Children and Mission

Most people who will ever make a decision to follow Christ will do so as a child or a young person. This is the basic premise of the "4/14 Window." It is no longer just a catchy

phrase, but an established fact, and one which is now being understood and deployed in mission circles around the world.

Viewing missions as an adult orientated pursuit, and underestimating the importance and the contribution of children in the Mission of God, we are ignoring the most fruitful mission field. The reality of the 4/14 window means that any serious mission strategies will include careful, appropriate efforts to reach these groups.

However, just because children and young people are remarkably receptive to the gospel, doesn't mean that we our missiology and our approaches can be shoddy or careless, juvenile or childish. Just as any of us view our children as belonging to our own faith, so we must respect the fact that children and youth in all cultures and religions are part of caring families and religions and cultural traditions. If anything, we must be even more creative, caring, and cautious, and more sensitive and thoughtful as we seek to make the 4/14 Window a more intentional part of our mission strategizing.

One indicator of the missiological significance of children may be inferred in the prophetic warning in the last verse of the O.T. "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else, I'll strike the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:6). When walking the slums of any major city, it takes neither imagination nor deep theologizing to see that the land is stricken with a curse. consequent turning of the hearts of the children to their fathers, which will turn this curse into a blessing.

We also intuitively observe both theologically and practically that

the restoration of the damaged relationships between fathers and children.

While global development efforts may alleviate some of the suffering, we know that food and medicines will not remove a curse. Blankets and clothing will not remove a curse. Nor even will education and employment will remove a curse. For a curse is a spiritual thing and its removal demands a spiritual intervention. It is turning the hearts of the fathers to the children – holistic mission -- and the consequent turning of the hearts of the children to their fathers, which will turn this curse into a blessing.

One other point. Let us not leave the impression that our missiological interest in children is only because they are the most receptive of 'people groups.' They are also very effective instruments and agents for mission. How important it is for mission leaders to grasp the reality and significance of the agency of children in their strategies and plans for effective mission!

It's Time for High Level Reflection on Children in Seminaries

Equipping Christian workers to care for needy children may be the single greatest challenge and opportunity for seminaries and Bible schools in the coming decade. 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.

Beyond just responding to the Scriptural mandate, real-world relevance demands that seminaries equip students with a mindset to

understand and care for children. Christian theological institutions are the "production line" for developing the leaders for the next generation.

Today more than 50 seminaries have begun or are planning courses or programs which will ensure that their institutions produce leaders who understand the significance of the Church's holistic ministry to children, and who can influence others at all levels on behalf of those children.

There are many vital reasons for Christian theological institutions to consider programs to equip leaders and practitioners for Children at Risk (CAR) ministry. It is clear that relevance in the "real world" demands that seminaries equip students to care for CAR. Including programs on holistic ministry to children will ensure that these institutions produce leaders who understand the significance of the Church's ministry to children in poverty, and who can influence others at all levels in their countries on behalf of those children.

Experience shows that providing programs on holistic ministry to children can have a revolutionary effect on students and on the institutions themselves. Dr. Sunny Tan, the Academic Dean of MBTS says:

"The key leaders in the seminary have a new vision for the strategic significance of children in their own equipping and mission strategies."

It's Time to Harness the 'Clean Energy' of Children and Youth

Children and young people thrive on challenges. But much of what passes for children's ministry in churches today is geared to entertaining rather than equipping or challenging them. We must ask,

what are our children not doing and not learning while they are being entertained?

Dr. William Damon notes that "By systematically underestimating the child's capabilities, we are limiting the child's potential for growth. In withholding from children the expectation to serve others . . . we are preventing them from acquiring a sense of social and personal responsibility. We are leaving the child to dwell on nothing more noble than gratifying the self's moment-by-moment inclinations.

Paradoxically, by giving the child purposes that go beyond the self, an orientation to service results in a more secure belief in oneself.

Dr. Bambang Budijanto notes, children and youth represent an enormous untapped pool of influencers with sensitivity to the voice of God and willingness to do His bidding. God can and does use children and young people—their prayers, their insights, their hands, and their feet—in changing the hearts of humankind. They represent 'clean energy' to transform the world.

Global leaders of the Church and Mission need to tap into this new, 'clean energy.' They need to elevate their thinking about the potential and possibilities of children and youth, and to challenge, encourage and equip them to use their gifts and energy as agents in transforming the world.

Could there be a more exciting and life-changing challenge than learning about the world, sharing God's love for its peoples, and yes, transforming a generation?

It's time!

Respond to this article at www.aimlowerjournal.com

WHAT DOES A DISCIPLINED CHILD LOOK LIKE?

After writing about "Developing a Biblical World View in Children" for a magazine I have not been able to get this question out of my head.

If our job as children's pastors is to do what Matthew 28:19 tells us to do, (and I believe it is) "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations", then what does a disciplined child look like?

How can we tell where we are hitting the mark if we have not defined and determined what a disciplined child is in the first place?

Mr. Webster says that a disciple is a follower.

Alan Root in his book "Disciplinification!" defines disciplinification in three ways

- The travels of a disciple.
- The practiced habit of "following"
- A made up word which simply means the life-changes made to become more and more like Jesus each day.

Character & habits

So if our job is to make followers who through life changes and good choices cause them to be more like Jesus, then what actions, habits and character traits should a twelve year old Christ follower possess?

For years I think we've been guilty of using faithfulness as the major evaluation if a child has been disciplined.

If a child was faithful to attend plus participate in loads of other children's ministry activities and programming then we would send them into the youth ministry and feel like we succeeded. In a few years we would look them up in the youth group and find they were not there and wonder what did the youth pastor do to make this child lose interest?

I have said for years that those of us that teach kids should think of ourselves as foundation specialists. But anyone who has ever built any kind of building knows that the type of foundation you build has everything to do with the type of building you can build.

Building Together?

In construction you start with the building plans and then determine what kind of foundation does it need for what you are building. In children's ministry I think many of us have been guilty of designing the foundation then saying to the youth ministry now go fit your building on the foundation we have built, but never one time sitting down and working together toward the end result.

Sometimes the problem has started long before we promote them into the youth ministry even from one department or ministry to another within the total children's ministry. Because we are sometimes very territorial we haven't worked as

a true team and prepared them for the the next age group.

Instead of looking ahead we have focused on the present which centres on and around our own ministry responsibilities. When we help other departments and ministries around us be successful then we'll be successful.

We are all on the same team working toward the same goal. You can't be part of the church's mission without every ministry that makes up the church working on the mission statement and only then breaking it down for their age groups.

With the end in mind

Stephen Covey in his book "7 Habits Of Effective People" said it this way, "Habit number 1 is to start with the end in mind."

Why don't we as staff and ministers sit down together with our next generation ministries and our lead pastors and just plan backwards.

What do we want a young adult to know as a part of the congregation then let's back up and look at the college ministry and see what we need to teach there. For this to work we have to then look at the Senior High Ministry then to the Middle School Ministry then to the elementary ministries.

Then working backwards we evaluate our preschool and nursery ministries to see what should be learned.

Did you notice I didn't use the word taught? I believe just because teaching takes place doesn't mean learning accrues.)



We must get in the habit of defining and evaluating what we do and the results those actions are yielding if we are going to be successful at discipling children.

This is just the first step in making this process a way of life at your church. Years ago I set down with my youth pastor and I asked him what do you want the sixth graders I promote into your youth ministry to know and be? That was a question that took some time to develop. I also think that this list could and would be different from church to church.

The bottom line is this, make a list. If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time. Make it a matter of prayer and work on your list as a team. It's more than getting children "saved". It's time we all move past just getting children saved and help them to live saved. Discipling is all about how each

day gets lived by someone who is saved. Luke 2:49-52 tells us about Jesus at twelve.

It says that he had a desire to be about His Father's business. It also says he was obedient to His parents.

It's also says he continued to grow in wisdom. (That's understanding and knowledge of the Word.) I believe this with all my heart the voice of wisdom and the voice of the Word is always the same.

He also grew physically as well as grew in His relationship with God and with others. I believe this should also take place with those we seek to disciple.

No matter what you place on your list the children you lead won't become those things if you don't do four important things:

Jim Wideman

Jim has been helping others on their leadership journey since 1983 by providing practical, proven resources for ministers and churches.

See more at: <http://kidzmatter.com/what-does-a-discipled-child-look-like-anyway/>

How can we obey Jesus? It's simple - we must know His word and do what it says. That's the art of being a disciple. I believe our kids can be saved and live saved and have a desire to be about their Father's business more so than desiring the things of the world

Number 1

We must become all of those things. My mom used to say, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander!" What we expect others to do we must become these things first. I never want to forget that when I point to others there are three fingers pointing back to me!

Number 2

Place others who will also serve as models before those you lead. A disciple cannot be made without someone who is willing to be an example. Jesus said something powerful in John 14:9 "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." Think about that, it's almost mind boggling. Jesus modelled the Father so others would know God. Could children understand what God is like from us? They should!

Children must have someone who is willing to say, "Come follow me as I follow the Lord" Gone must be the

day of saying do as I say not as I do. We must be willing to set an example and model to both kids and adults.

Number 3

Give those you lead what the Bible says about each of the things you want them to do to be a true follower of Christ Jesus.

Number 4

Give them opportunities to do these things. Learning is more than sitting and listening it's all about doing. I never apologise for giving people an opportunity to serve and put what they are learning into action.

My dear friend Alan Root goes on to say in "Disciplification!" that Jesus doesn't expect us to live the Christian life. Alan writes "It's so simple we have a hard time getting it. You see the Christian life is lived

by dying. Dying to having to have everything your own way that is." To be a follower means you are not leading you are be obedient.

That means we obey Him. How can we obey Jesus? it's simple we must know His word and do what it says. That's the art of being a disciple. I believe our kids can be saved and live saved and have a desire to be about their Father's business more so than desiring the things of the world. We know we have been successful at making a disciple when kids and leaders drop their weapons and surrender to Jesus' control.

To me the proof of the discipleship process is in the living. It's not what you know or what you feel, or what you think, it's knowing Christ, walking by faith, thinking the Word and doing exactly what it says. That's the mark of a disciplined child!

REDISCOVERING THE DOMESTIC CHURCH?

Domestic Church is a way of describing spiritual activities taking place in a home setting. It has been practised across the centuries, although not always called by this name. At a time when faith in the homes of many Christian families consists of bedtime stories and prayers, Domestic Church is a way of tapping into the spiritual potential of all the other activities they do together.

Despite parents sometimes feeling they have little influence on their children, we know that we absorb many of our values for life, including spiritual ones, from our parents. Thus it could be proposed that an efficient strategy to influence the lives of children for Jesus should be to encourage, inspire and equip their parents to disciple them in their own Domestic Church.

By taking a fresh look at Domestic Church, it may be possible to find a different perspective on our work with children and families, as well as some new ways of doing it. It could allow us to focus on a 'ground up' strategy which may not look glamorous or yield dramatic results in one event or one year, but could radically increase the impact of our children's work and our churches within our communities.

Firstly, we will consider why Domestic Church is not common practised, then what the Bible has to say about it. In order to place it in a context, we'll then look the place Domestic Church plays in different Christian traditions, followed by a brief look at what a contemporary Domestic Church might involve and

some of the questions which could emerge. In conclusion, we will give some suggestions of actions we might take to inspire and enable participation in a contemporary version of this ancient tradition.

Why have we not practised Domestic Church?

The juxtaposition of the words 'domestic' and 'church' reveals something about how we think of church. The word is perhaps more synonymous with buildings, services and large groups of Christians. However, if the church is the body of Christ, this allows it to exist anywhere people who love Jesus are found, including in a home.

That this is not readily part of our thinking could stem from the tradition of 'serious' religion taking people away from home, for example into monastic orders, the priesthood or as a missionary or being conducted by an ordained or priest-like figure. We have forgotten that "where two or three come together in [His] name" [Jesus] is with them" (Matthew 18:20). When we get together as families, there is always two or three or more of us!

In church, we often run separate programmes for children and adults, and some activities are better suited to age-specific groups. However, the uptake of all-age services shows a shift towards people enjoying the benefits of worshiping and learning together. Although these services are notoriously hard to do well, many of their trickier elements are absent

when planning something for a Domestic Church, due to the smaller 'congregation' and the intrinsic shared intimacy. Yet this area is not something which seems to have been explored as much.

We can see that Domestic Church may require quite a shift in mind set, but has the potential to have higher gains. Let us next consider what the Bible says about Domestic Church.

What the Bible says about Domestic Church

In the Bible, many of the spiritual events and activities took place in someone's home. For example, Joseph's dreams (Genesis 37:3-11) and miracles performed by both Elijah and Elisha (see 1 Kings 17:7-24; 2 Kings 4:1-37) to name but a few.

Jesus also performs healing miracles in people's homes, for example Simon's mother in law (Luke 4:38,39) and Jairus's daughter (Luke 8:51-56). He also shares meals with people in such a way that they meet God, for example the sinful woman at the Pharisee's house (Luke 7:36-50), Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:30-32).

As well as stories of God's activity in people's homes, the Bible also talks about various rituals and festivals which take place there. The annual Hebrew festivals of Unleavened Bread, Harvest and Ingathering (Exodus 23:14,15) each



home-based element, with some being almost entirely based in the home. For example during Passover, the fast from yeast and the extensive celebration meal take place at home. It's interesting that in the recent resurgence of celebrating Passover meals among Christians, many meals happen in church buildings, rather than in homes. It might be interesting to look into some of the reasons for this, as they may hold keys to why people find Domestic Church difficult.

As for New Testament rituals, one of the earliest descriptions of what Christians did together was to break bread in homes (Acts 2:16), and Paul's letters show that at least some if not all of the early churches were home-based (Romans 16:5; 23,24; 1 Corinthians 16:5; Philemon 1,2). We see then that for people in Bible times, home was a significant place of spiritual activity, both in terms of rituals and their faith interacting with their daily lives.

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We will now trace the concept of home-based spiritual activity across different Christian traditions.

Domestic Church in different Christian traditions

Since Bible times, churches have grown larger, making it difficult to meet in people's homes. But throughout the centuries people have still referred to Domestic Church, if not in those words. For example, John Chrysostom (born 347) talks of the household as 'a little church' and Augustine writes about the head of households in a role similar to that of a priest.

Domestic Church is a more familiar term within Catholic Tradition, as reflected in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1965) which say that "the family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children." LUMEN GENTIUM, Chapter 2.

More recently, the UK Catholic church has launched a multimedia resource pack called 'Home is a Holy place' with the aim of "recognising and responding to God's presence at home with our families" (www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk). The materials acknowledge each act of kindness, of patience, forgiveness, of joy and celebration as a spiritual act.

This does not undermine talking about and celebrating faith rituals, but living our faith is an essential and difficult activity, and one which most families are probably better at than they might imagine.

The concept of Domestic Church is also recognised within the Orthodox tradition where each

family is the smallest unit of the Christian community. This is reflected in an Orthodox wedding where the couple are given crowns to wear. One of the meanings of this is to remind them of their roles as leaders of their own Domestic Church.

Within the Protestant tradition in more recent times, many people have considered it the role of the Sunday School to nurture children's faith. However, Sunday Schools were first developed in England to teach poor children literacy, and only later involved Christian content.

As the national tradition of sending children to Sunday School has diminished over the last 50 years, these groups have become mainly for 'churched' children. But with only 1 or 2 hours a week, they are poorly placed to be the primary source to help children come to a living, life-long faith.

While Domestic Church has existed through the centuries, it is not currently meeting its full potential to transform lives, especially within protestant churches. So if this were to happen, which might a contemporary Domestic Church look like?

What contemporary Domestic Church might look like

As we saw in the Biblical model, Domestic Church should involve both spiritual elements in every day routines and specific activities or rituals designed to help them meet God through the Bible and prayer. It needs to include nurture of the different elements of faith:

1. information to help people

- believe with their minds
- experiences to help them trust with their emotions
- opportunities to imagine and operate their will
- activities to enable them put their faith into action.

Bible and prayer activities should be creative and use different learning styles. Routine and flexibility should both be used to encourage regular times of meeting with God while also keeping things fluid, fun and appropriate. For example, what Domestic Church looks like in term time may be different from the holidays. What it looks like when the children are at Primary school probably should be different when one moves into Senior school.

It might be useful to adapt and adopt some Hebrew, Catholic and Orthodox home rituals, since these traditions have more of a history in Domestic Church. For example, the Hebrew Shabbat or Sabbath meal offers a very tangible opportunity for families to share a spiritual meal together. For more details and other ideas, see *The Heavenly Party* by Michele Guinness.

Some people believe all the functions of a local congregation should be displayed in a Domestic Church. It is certainly best to have a holistic approach, including elements of teaching, worship and outreach, praise, thanks, repentance and intercession. However, not all of these elements need to be present all the time. Just as local churches have different flavours and different emphasis' at different times, so too should Domestic Churches. If people are given freedom to explore and express their faith in way which are meaningful to them, they will

become evangelists for the activities they do and the God they meet through those activities.

Having looked briefly at what a Domestic Church could look like today, let us address some of the questions it might raise.

Questions which could emerge

Could Domestic Church exclude people living outside of the traditional family unit, either with or without children?

Traditionally, Domestic Church refers to a couple or a family. However, home is wherever people live, and while as children's workers we are focused on the spiritual nurture of children, the concept of Domestic Church and its value can apply to any home. Indeed, the sort of activities which families might use might only need slight adaption to work in adult-only homes.

Could focus on Domestic Church diminish focus on 'un-churched' children?

If a change in allocation of resources is needed to assist Domestic Churches, the suggestion would be to reassign resources already aimed at helping children and adults attending church events.

It should also be noted that a functioning Domestic Church should lead to family members being able to share their faith more easily both in and outside the home. Most families have contact with un-churched friends for whom the Domestic Church

homes could be a place where they are able to meet God in an informal, relevant setting, either through the words and actions of the host family, or perhaps through joining in with relevant spiritual activities. The latter is especially possible at times such as Christmas and Easter, as well as with regular rituals families might use such as a Shabbat meal or Christian element to a birthday celebration.

What should the balance be between congregational and Domestic Church?

This will be different in different home and church situations. However, currently the general leaning is very much towards congregation, and so any work we do to redress that balance would be bring more balance.

How can we shield children from heresy or bad teaching in a Domestic Church setting?

This is a difficult question, because by definition, church without clergy requires a level of licence. It could be suggested that Domestic Churches be monitored in the same way as other church groups such as small groups and children's work. This would be mainly through relationship, and interaction between Domestic Churches.

This question also links in with the question of congregation/Domestic Church balance. If trained teachers, worship leaders, clergy and the like recognise the importance of Domestic Church, the input they give people within a congregational setting should

help to keep Domestic Churches out of heresy.

It is also important to recognise that churches do not consist of individuals with identical theology or expression of faith. If Domestic Church is an expression of the personal faiths of the individuals in that home, this will inevitably mean that some of the teaching and worship in a Domestic Church may not fit snugly with the congregational church to which individuals are all members.

Actions we might take

Here are just a few suggestions:

- We need to find and be good models of Domestic Church, allowing others to be part of it whenever they are in our homes.
- Parents need encouragement and nurture in their faith, as although children can sometimes be the drivers to faith activities, without an inspired parent, Domestic Church for families will be hit and miss.
- Our services and events need to be run in recognition that Domestic Church is an essential place of faith development and love of Jesus. This means our teaching and liturgies (whether formal or informal) need to be accessible and reflect people's every day experiences. Our suggestions of how to live a life of faith need to include practical ways of living out our faith at home.

Discuss this article at

www.aimlowerjournal.com

Children & The Digital Age



Raising Children in a Digital Age: Enjoying the Best, Avoiding the Worst

Dr Bex Lewis

Lion Hudson
9780745956046

In this new and thought provoking book Bex Lewis offers a mix of practical advice and introductions to new services, plus resources, questions and strategies for helping us raise this generation. It's a starting point to find a solution that works for you and your family, not a one-size-fits-all instant cure. I think it would be helpful for all kinds of families to read & work through - whether you have concerns or not.

It's like having a guidebook for a foreign land, helping you navigate paths through unfamiliar territory and spot the landmarks, ideas, resources you will need. I'm not a parent, so I don't have to deal with children's digital problems on a daily basis (though heaven knows I have enough of my own making!) so on a very superficial level, Bex's book has helped me to see what some of the pressures look like that today's teenagers are facing.

I tend to want to read past headlines, which we are encouraged to do: for every toddler 'addicted' to an iPad, there are probably a hundred using such a tool sensibly and beneficially. There is so much negativity around kids' use of digital that this book is like a breath of fresh air, recommending sensible strategies for both parents and children. And as you might expect from an academic researching digital media, Bex provides the actual evidence to counter the scaremongering and headline-grabbing half-truths.

Understanding a bit more about how the world is for those who are either not completely immersed in it, or are unquestionably so, was illuminating. There probably isn't room in the book for everything, but I might have wanted to see the arguments about sex and porn online to be framed in a wider context - Bex acknowledges the society we live in has 'relaxed' standards in these areas - but for children on- and off-line, are there wider

conversations to be having. I suspect there are, and that the digital manifestations are but one part of a media that puts sex, and body image, first.

Some of the advice is obvious: talk to your children. Perhaps that's only obvious to me as a non-parent, not dealing with a recalcitrant teenager who resents my interference. Bex offers some good advice on how to start those necessary conversations at any age, not just about the absolute rules about who can use what websites, but about truth, suitability, and provenance of online content.

There are ideas and examples from parents dotted throughout the book to help understand how people have been tackling problems already. Bex suggests talking to one's children not as a quick fix, but as a long-term investment in time, trust and openness.

The book finishes with a helpful jargon-buster and further resources. In fact there are lots of resources throughout the book - following up on half of them would probably take as much time again as reading the book in the first place. But - that's necessary, in my opinion. If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well - and what job is more worth doing than steering children through to adulthood?

Reviewed by Sara Batts

Edited from her slightly longer review at www.sarabatts.co.uk

The Child in Christian Thought

This book will soon have graced our shelves for 15 years. Many have been written since which explore in even more depth its key themes. So why review it now? Well, for one thing many may not yet have come across it. But there are some other reasons why you may want to set aside some time to read it.

It makes you think

The various chapters are written by different Christian scholars and cover a wide diversity of important figures, from the early church fathers right through to figures from the last 100 years. As you read through you get a very clear picture of the roots of debates about Christian discipline and nurture that continue to this very day.

For me all of this was formative. I help facilitate training for those who work with children and had been running on instinct much of the time until I read this book.

What was great about it was that it made me happy and sad. You will need to be ready to feel the same. It is not a book of ready answers and polite theology. Some of the of the people you meet in it's pages you will not like, others will help shape your life and ministry.

This is one of the strengths of the book. It helps you refine your own thinking, discover new directions for reflection and research and really start to explore what the long term foundations for your work are.

It was a symbol of a new era

The book should also be seen against the backdrop of wider developments in the Christian world. As the new technology of the internet and email quickened the pace of communication, global movements of thought and action could spring up and find influence much quicker.

While there had been reflection on children and mission in previous generations it had been muted in recent times - but began to

gather pace in the late nineties. with popular movements such as *Sidewalk Sunday School* and multiple family orientated projects emerging into view.

Another group called the *Child Theology Movement* would soon emerge. It was the right time for a book such as this. Many of us wondered how we could help change the understandings of church leaders, Bible college principals and our own staff about child spirituality, mission to children and the biblical patterns which underpinned these insights.

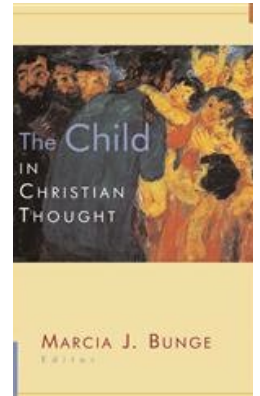
Passionate pleas for action can open the door for change but the hard work of looking at scripture and church history has to be done and then applied to the current situations in our towns and districts. This book suggested that this was possible and that the fruit of that reflection could be substantial. It made change plausible and suggested to the door keepers of church life that there was substantial theology to be wrestled with and lived out in our local churches and family homes.

Who will it help?

It is a 527 page book. It is not for the faint hearted or the time poor. Your local church volunteers would not thank you for making it required reading.

It also requires a certain security about one's own day to day theology as one is introduced to divergent views of the human condition and the spirituality of the child. The readers who may benefit will be highly motivated people who lead projects or ministries or hold responsibility for children within denominations. It will also benefit those undertaking study courses with respect to children and family ministry.

There are some books that echo through the decades, rich with insight for new readers. This is one of them.



The Child in Christian Thought

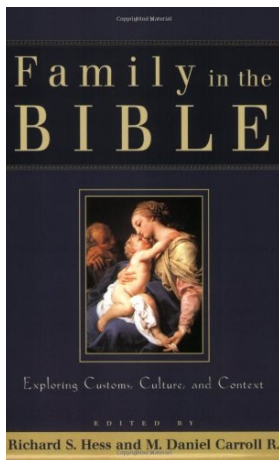
Edited by:
Marcia Bunge

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Reviewer

Dave Roberts is the editor of the Aim Lower Journal. He has 20 years experience in children's ministry training and helped establish Europe's biggest annual children's ministry training event.

Family in The Bible



Family in the Bible

Edited by Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll

Published by Baker Books (2003)

Reviewed by:

Lynn Alexander

Children and Family Pastor, Morningside Baptist Church, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

This is an unusual theology book as it consists of a collection of short chapters considering a “specialised subject” in great detail. That subject is “family”.

Part One is a walk through the Bible from Pentateuch, the Historical Books, the Wisdom Literature and the Prophetic Literature.

Part Two examines family in the Gospels and Acts and the Epistles. It should come as no surprise that this part of the book is much, much shorter than the first part!

Of great interest to me as a children and family pastor, and as a theologian, was that the contributors are not children’s specialists; they are Professors and Principals of Old and New Testament in longstanding academic faculties from all over the world.

Unique Perspective

The book does something unique in academic literature - it attempts to appreciate the role of the family as the central element of society in the biblical worldview. It does so systematically, examining all pertinent parts of Scripture.

In our current political system in the UK successive governments have also described the family as the building blocks (central elements?) of society. The customs and life of the family are evaluated in the light of the culture of the time.

The UK’s own Professor Gordon Wenham writes one of the chapters, on Family in the Pentateuch.

This is an important chapter as it sets the stage for the rest of the book. He sweeps through the first five books of the Bible and examines some of the passages we know very well about instruction to children within the context of family.

So, for example, the pattern of family life in the Pentateuch describes a large body of

people: social order is demonstrated where everyone cares for the other and lives in harmony with the other, in larger units rather than as individual families.

This has an interesting application to today’s expressions of gathered church - no longer is discipleship and nurture of faith only the job of parents; but of the “clan”; the wider community of faith.

Challenging Chapters

The reader may find some of the chapters challenging. Reading Professor Westfall’s essay on how Jesus both strengthened and challenged family life in the New Testament was hard going; she reminds the reader of Jesus’ call to abandon relatives to follow after him.

Of great interest in this chapter is the historical examination of the role of women in Greco-Roman culture, and how Christianity revolutionised the treatment of women and children; a fact I knew but often forgot; exposure meant many female children were left to die and the end result was a skewed male: female gender ratio.

Although not a quick read (as I found I wanted to chew and think about passages and look them up as I went through) this book is not difficult to read.

If you like learning about the historical context of the Bible coupled with a desire to know more about family then this is a most definite “dip in and keep on your shelf” book. I refer to it often!

Seeing Children as Signs of the Kingdom of Heaven

(Reference: Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.)

Just as the child is both fully human, and yet still becoming an adult, so the Kingdom of Heaven is both "Now" and "Not Yet". We are still alongside the River Jordan, and the final destination of Jesus, and the critical event in the unfolding revelation of His Kingdom in Jerusalem, is near. Let me briefly mention just two points.

First, if children are signs of the Kingdom of Heaven, then we must get rid of all notions of power, territory, possession and hierarchies to enter it. This Kingdom is a whole new way of living. It's an upside-down, inside-out and back-to-front world. Put simply it works on almost exactly the opposite principles of the political kingdoms we know from personal experience and history worldwide. God's ways are not our ways.

Where He has His way, the whole feel of the place, and the nature of our common life together, change. Second, just as the child is both fully human, and yet still becoming an adult, so the Kingdom of Heaven is both "Now" and "Not Yet". You have daily reminders of God's way of doing things whenever you see children at work and play. Is there a better sign of the Kingdom? Is this what the "Resurrection Mind" is all about, as it refuses to become fixed and finalised, as it remains open to further journeying, revelation and change?

This surely is a characteristic of Mission-shaped Church. It is such a complete contrast with what the disciples and the mother of James

and John still had in mind somewhere between the Jordan and Jericho (Matthew 20:20-28).

Understanding Children's Expressions in the Context of God's Way of Doing Things

(Reference: Matthew 21:12-16.)

And now, at last Jesus enters the Temple itself. He has come to His Father's House. He has come home. He has come to His own. The vast roar of the crowds has ebbed, like the withdrawing tide, and there are now just a group of young people calling out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" as they see the signs of genuine mission in action. The authorities are as indignant as the disciples were when people brought children to Jesus! And Jesus draws their attention to Psalm 8 verse 2.

If we had time to meditate on Psalm 8 we would begin to see how the cries of newborn babies can be understood in a whole new light when we trust God's way of doing things; His purposes and intentions. In the Temple the authorities saw the behaviour of the young people who were singing and shouting as wholly inappropriate. Jesus saw them in a completely different way: they were doing exactly what God had intended.

Closing Reflection

At this point we must leave our walk with Jesus. This period in the life of Jesus is of considerable importance in understanding Christian community with children in the midst. There may be no great surprises, but perhaps we are struck by the way Jesus seems to have anticipated modern theories, policies, conventions and legislation. If we are to inspire and

equip other Christians to join us in ministering to children, then it makes such a difference if we root and ground our teaching in the life and teaching of Jesus. It is as Rowan Williams said "always worth taking Jesus seriously!"

This walk, a journey, a pilgrimage from Mount Hermon to Mount Moriah is one that Jesus calls us to join. It was an epic one for Jesus, and to all those whose eyes and ears are open, the heart of the Kingdom and Mission have been revealed, it is also momentous.

Where is the place where you now need to pause and be with the Master, so that He can show you more of His will and purposes? He is in no hurry to move on. He will wait for you and with you until you are ready to move on.

And the whole journey is framed by the cries of an epileptic boy (at the outset) and then the cries of a group of rowdy young people (at the close). Jesus heard in these shouts an echo of the cries of suckling babes. In God's view such raw sounds are one of the most beautiful, insightful and powerful expressions in creation.

Strange that all this has been so hidden from the wise and learned commentators! But then Jesus had already anticipated this: "I thank you, Father, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes...Yes, Father, for such was thy will" (Matthew 11; 25-26).

Respond to and reflect on this article at:

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CONTRIBUTOR GUIDELINES



Editorial Focus

The Journal seeks to be a thoughtful stimulus to thinking about children's ministry. It is seeking to engage the growing number of people employed by churches and Christian agencies to work with children, in a rich conversation about biblical foundations, mission and discipleship.

Key Subjects

This is not an exhaustive list but might stimulate your thinking as you consider what you might submit.

- 1 Biblical Insights
- 2 Mission Thinking
- 3 Spirituality of the Child
- 4 The Child and Culture
- 5 Learning Styles
- 6 Children in Need
- 7 Working in Schools
- 8 Resource Overviews

Editorial Requirements

We will be looking for articles of between 600 - 2400 words that are thoughtful but also have a point of view. Dispassionate overviews with 50 footnotes are not what we're after although we are happy to receive academically stringent work that has the sources noted at the end.

We are also looking for reviews of books and all types of resources that are between 200 and 1000 words long. These could be about a single item or cluster of resources.

Article Submission

The ideal is for the editor to receive a 1 page A4 summary of the article via email. This helps the editorial planning but also ensures that a conversation can take place about the ground that the article covers. The editor has the discretion to say no to an article on grounds of

length or editorial duplication.

We will not focus on ready to use resources or general vision and management issues as these are often covered in other publications. We are happy to review resource and leadership material but the focus of the journal is on mission, spirituality, discipleship and biblical insight.

Payment

The Journal is run on a 'covering costs' basis. We cannot pay for articles but will fully acknowledge their source, the work of the writer and the website or postal addresses where people can find out more about them or the focus of the article.

Contact

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