

A Challenge to Work with Children

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The battle for the heart of the child

Lesson 1

A. The battlefield is intensified

1. Never before in the history of mankind has there been such an attack on our children; through electronic means, through films, games and the general downfall of moral standards.
2. Post-modern / new-age values are generally being accepted by secular society and enforced in the education systems all over the world.
3. These values are often in clear contrast to Biblical / Christian values.

Some of the post-modern understanding:

- a) Accept that every person's beliefs, values, lifestyle and truth claims are equal.
 - b) Wholeheartedly approve the other's beliefs and lifestyle and praise them for their choices.
 - c) Preference of sexual behaviour, value systems and beliefs are personally determined, and should not be interfered with.
 - d) Freedom is being able to do anything you want to do.
 - e) Truth is not an absolute but, rather, what feels right and works for you.
 - f) God is "cosmos" and takes whatever form you want him to be, etc.
4. It is in this kind of post-modern secular value system that our children are growing up, and that of course imposes a lot of dangers for them as well as the very real risk of going to a lost eternity.
 5. **The fallen nature.** The enemy even has an ally inside each child (person) which naturally pulls away from God into sinful habits.
 6. **The pillar and foundation of truths: 1 Timothy 3:15.**
This is one of the important names given to the church. In the midst of a decaying society, the church is called upon to uphold Godly standards of truth, and enter this modern battlefield to rescue people out of darkness into His marvellous light. The earlier we begin the better, before the sinful nature breaks through into sinful habits and even bondage.

B. The dangers facing today's children

1. **Modern toys.**

Many are clearly created to condition our children to the occult and the demonic. Even babies are given a cute little monster instead of a teddy bear! The video games have children controlling demon-like figures to fight and kill each other. Many children's books contain the occult and magic. Instead of healthy sport, children are lead into the marshal arts that are occultic in origin.

We must create an exciting but positive alternative environment for the children in our care and this applies to both parents and the church.

2. **The danger of occultic practises.**

It is a dangerous road when children, from babyhood, are fed with these types of demonic toys and games as in the end it can lead to occultic and brutal practises.

3. **The danger of drug abuse.**

The peer pressure on children in schools and other institutions to experiment with alcohol, drugs, tobacco and sex is very strong, and is now affecting much younger age groups.

4. **The danger of a destroyed family.**

The sad and tragic implications of a divorcing society will probably never be fully measured, but the impact it makes on children is catastrophic.

Today AIDS is destroying one home after the other, and in many cases children are left to fend for themselves, especially in the third world.

The church has a God-given responsibility to raise the standard of marriage and family life, and also to care for the widows and orphans. Hebrews 13:4; James 1:27.

5. **The danger of physical and sexual abuse.**

The S.A. Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect made a startling revelation on the condition in South Africa. It showed that one in three girls and one in six boys are abused during their childhood, and that these statistics seem to be on the increase. In today's society even small babies are abused and raped.

6. **The danger of committing suicide.**

The number of children becoming depressed and suicidal is growing at an alarming rate.

The following is a poem written by a child in one of the schools in America, which strongly illustrates the different environment the children are growing up in today.

*Now I sit down in the school
where prayer is against the rule
for this great nation under God
find mention of Him very odd.*

*If Scripture now the class recites
it violates the bill of rights,
and anytime my head I bow
becomes a Federal matter now.*

*For prayer in a public hall
might offend someone with no faith at all
in silence alone we must meditate
God's name is prohibited by the state.*

*We'er allowed to cuss and dress like freaks
and pierce our noses, tongues and cheeks
they have outlawed guns, but FIRST the Bible
to quote the good Book makes me liable.*

*We can elect a pregnant senior "Queen"
and the "unwed daddy" our senior "King"
it's inappropriate to teach right from wrong
we'er taught that such judgement do not belong.*

*We get our condoms and birth control
study witchcraft, vampires and totem poles
but the Ten Commandments are not allowed,
-- it's scary here I must confess
when chaos reigns, the school's a mess.*

*So Lord, this silent plead I make,
should I be shot, my soul please take. Amen!*

C. The answer to all the terrible dangers the children are facing

The church is the only group of people who have the answer and solution to the growing problem of the dangers facing our children.

2 Corinthians 5:17. Only Christ can change the heart of man and give him a brand new life under His care, guidance and protection. That also applies to children who are led to Him, the Good Shepherd.

The church has been given a special mandate to look after the children.

To a future Apostle and leader of the early church, this command was given

"Feed My lambs"
John 21:15

But is the Church living up to this God-given responsibility today?

The responsibility of the church towards the children

Lesson 2

A. Introduction

From what we have seen in the previous lesson it becomes even clearer that the church has a great responsibility towards the children, to protect and guide them in a world of danger and falsehood.

B. A great mission field

Mark 16:15-18

The great commission Jesus gave to His church clearly includes the children. He said: “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*”, so that surely includes the children.

1. A compelling statistic.

There are about 2,5 billion children and teenagers in the world today, and 80% of them are raised in non-Christian homes.

In AD 2000, four hundred million out of the total population of seven hundred and fifty million in Africa were children under the age of 16 years. That is more than half the population.

2. Another fact is that most people receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour in the early years of their lives. Data from a major research study in America showed that if a person did not accept Jesus Christ as Saviour before the age of fourteen the likelihood of ever doing so fell drastically.

C. Childhood is God’s appointed time to receive eternal life

Proverbs 22:6 “*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*”.

1. God has made little children humble, teachable and trusting for a purpose, so that responsible adults are able to lead them to Him. It is 10 times easier to bring a child to the Lord than an adult.
2. This is the time when the foundation for life is laid, not only practically but also spiritually. Towards the early teens everything will be tested and personally accepted or disregarded. That is why it is so important to introduce them to living, vibrant Christianity during their childhood.

D. An invitation from Jesus – even a command

Mark 10:13-14, “Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them; let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for such is the kingdom of God”.

1. Since little children cannot find the way themselves, adults are commanded to bring them to Jesus, and that starts from the time when they have to be “carried to Him”. Therefore, bring the babies to Jesus and let the leadership of the church, together with the parents, dedicate the baby to the Lord, and from then on they should, together, bring the child up in the knowledge of the Lord.
2. **Luke 18:15-17** tells us that these children were *infants* and Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these, but the Word also shows us that when their spiritual consciousness awakens they need to receive Christ for themselves.
Mark 9:42 “*These little ones who believe in Me....*”.
3. Jesus said “*do not forbid or hinder them*”. Through negligence or by withholding the truth from them, we hinder them – whereas, instead, we should train them in the knowledge of the Lord.
4. If we don’t bring the children to Him, Jesus would be “greatly displeased” with us, because that is the same as hindering them.
5. The promise given in Proverbs 22 is that if we train them and show them the way to Jesus, “*They will never depart from that way*”.
 - a) “Train” does not mean to force them to sit and be bored in the church every Sunday because they do not understand what is going on.
 - b) Training must be well planned and exciting for the children, where we use all means: hearing – seeing – participating – experiencing.
 - c) In training you make sure that the child can understand and follow what is presented.

E. Research concerning the importance of training a child

Josh McDowell writes in his book “The disconnected generation” about research done on the development of the brain using modern technology and it showed that a child between three and eight has twice as many neurons, brain connections, (Synapses) and brain energy as an adult.

This lavish overproduction of raw material is designed so that the child’s brain can adapt to any set of conditions.

The research also showed that when children enter adolescence they undergo a process called pruning, the unused connections are ruthlessly pruned by thousands per second.

Only those, which are reinforced by personal experience, will survive. That proves the importance of training the child in all that is positive and right.

F. A serious responsibility

Matthew 18:6

“But who ever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”.

1. From the context of verse 8 we can see that Jesus speaks about causing a child to go to hell.
2. Today, as we have seen in lesson one, there is a satanic onslaught on children. As we look at the toys, the videos, the books and magazines offered to children today, we understand that so much of it is conditioning them for the occult.

Satan knows that it is very important to start when the children are still small, that is why they try to replace the teddy bear with “a cute little monster”, etc.

3. Jesus warns that it is adults who cause children to be lost. That could be by deliberately leading them astray but it could also be by neglecting to show them the right way, and that is where the church sometimes also falls short.

Jesus also warns of severe punishment for those who cause the children to be lost. Verse 6: *“it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”.*

4. The Pastor and the leadership team are responsible for the whole flock and must give an account to God for each of them. Hebrews 13:17. In the natural, the shepherd will not only care for the adult animals but will, in fact, take even more care of the little lambs because they cannot fend for themselves – should it not be the same in the Church of God?
5. The text in Matthew 18:10 continues ...*“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones...”*. Then comes the story of the lost sheep, where everything is done to find it, and Jesus ends by saying: *“even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish”.*

The Church's attitude towards the children

Lesson 3

A. Introduction

A church without children is a poor church. It is like a childless village. There is a much quoted phrase; *"today's children is tomorrow's church"*. Well yes and no! It is true that children under proper guidance will develop into mature strong Christians and leaders of tomorrow, but it is also true that, *"today's children are today's church!"* – unless we wish to disagree with Jesus' declaration that *"the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these"*. We need to give the children the very same status and prominence as we give to the adults in our churches. Mark.10:14.

If we take Jesus' warning seriously, *"whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it"* – then we have some important learning to do from the children. That cannot happen unless adults and children meet, mix and worship together. Mark.10:15.

It is therefore very important that each church takes a serious look at its attitude towards the children, and integrates them as a very important part of the church.

B. What is the general attitude in the church towards children?

(Of course it is different from church to church, but the following attitudes are common and should be corrected.)

1. The attitude: "To work with children is a secondary ministry in the church".

- a) If a church has 40 families as members it will actually mean at least 120 children "members" but, usually, that major part of the church gets the smallest funding, the least attention from the church leadership, and it is often left to a group of untrained people to care for them.
- b) A suggestion was made that the following questions should be looked at by church leaders:
 - i) How much has been spent on children's ministry as a percentage of the church budget?
 - ii) Does the children's work have adequate leadership and equipment?
 - iii) What effort is being put into training and equipping people for children's ministry?
 - iv) How much involvement does the church leadership have with this ministry?

- c) If a negative result is shown after answering these four questions, it is time for change in a positive direction.

2. The Attitude: “Children are too immature for normal church activities”.

1 Corinthians 13:11 (this scripture is used to back this attitude).

- a) The “real” church is where the adults gather. The activities they are involved in is real church business and often adults can hardly wait until Sunday School starts so that they can get rid of the children as they see them as such a disturbing factor. In some places children do not even enter the church building but are led off to another place to be entertained while the adults worship God.
- b) In other places the children are forced to sit still and endure the whole adult service, without understanding much of what is going on, with the rule: “children should be seen and not heard!”
- c) This is a completely wrong attitude. Children should be integrated as much as possible and church gatherings should be lively, welcoming and Spirit filled, so that everyone will feel “It is good to be here”.
The preaching of the Word could be the part of the service where the children need to have it presented in a different way.
- d) Jesus certainly seemed to be able to catch the attention of them all ... a little boy even asked his mother for a lunch box so that he could spend the whole day with Jesus! So it could be that our Pastors should learn some homiletics from Jesus!

3. The attitude: “Children can get nothing out of being in the ‘adult’ service”.

- a) The argument is that if they are bored they will grow up with an anti feeling towards church.
- b) That is true – if our church gatherings are boring – but if they are lively, warm, welcoming and Spirit filled, it will make a strong impression on even a small child.

4. The attitude: “Let the children be trained in their own environment”.

- a) Of course it is good and right to train children in groups according to their age and development, but children should only go into their own groups when it is needed for understanding.
- b) A certain church, which was very proud of their “excellent” system, had signs put up in the entrance hall which divided people into different venues according to ages. Only the adults were allowed into the “real church” and the family only met again when the whole service was over.
- c) The danger of that kind of system is that the children grow up with a feeling of not belonging to the “real church” and soon they will feel too old for the children’s church, but too young for the “adult church”.

- d) The world divides the family up throughout the week, as so often even small children spend most of the day in institutions, and families have very little quality time together.
- e) The church should never follow this trend. The family should be able to look forward to a wonderful and exciting time together in the house of God.
- f) In Ephesians 2:19 the church is called “*the household of God*”, or “*the family of God*”. That certainly indicates a feeling of fellowship and coming to church should mean experiencing a warm loving relationship for the whole family.

5. Please evaluate your church’s attitude towards the children and, if needed, change – so that it becomes children and family friendly – and a wonderful mission field will soon be ripe for harvest.

J. Malherbe tells about his friend’s children:

“Recently my friend Sandy told me how her grandchildren react when they are arriving at church. “*Yeah! We are going to praise Jesus!*” These are kids who enjoy Jesus and love church because it is a joyful family event – not a “*sit still, be quiet and bored kind of service*”. They love the banners they get to wave during worship, participating helps them to feel involved. Then after praise and worship they go to their own age-based classes to learn from God’s Word”.

The Church models, by Petra College for Children's Ministry

Lesson 4

Introduction: Four basic models

Model 1: Adult church

Ignore them!

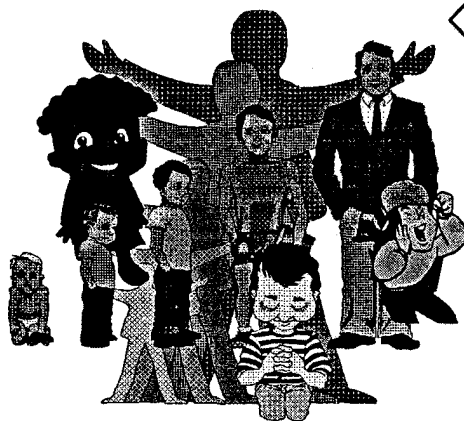
Worship service *despite* children



Model 2: Children's church

Separate them

Worship service *for* children



Model 4: Church for all

Integrate them

Worship service *for all*

Model 3: Family church

Relate with them

Worship Service *with* children

Model 1: Adult church (Ignore the children!)

Description:

This is a worship service that focuses only on the adults. Although children may attend, the service does not give any attention to their needs, nor does it involve them in any way.



A. Arguments used to defend this position

1. "The church is not a circus!" (argument for order).
2. "When we were children ... " (argument for tradition).
3. "They will have their turn" ("church of tomorrow argument).
4. "They learn even though they do not understand" (passive learning argument).
5. "When they grow up to understand" (spiritual evolution argument).
6. "The Bible and faith are complicated issues" (deeper knowledge argument).
7. "They have nothing to offer" (benefits argument).
8. "Children are not my department" (shifting responsibility).
9. "Nobody taught me " (insufficient training argument).
10. "I want to, but I do not know how " (ignorance argument).

B. Reasons for rejecting this position

1. It is unbiblical.

Exodus 12:3	Passover – children participate in a family service.
Deuteronomy 12:7	Families go to Jerusalem for the important feasts.
Nehemiah 8:3 (10:28)	Children participate in a service of repentance and rededication.
2 Chronicles 20:13	Children participate in a service in a time of despair and rejoicing.
Psalms 8:3	The power of infant worship.
Joel 2:28	Sons and daughters will prophesy.
Matthew 18:1-14	Become like children, welcome them, do not cause them to stumble.
Matthew 19:14	Leaders commanded to let the children come to Jesus.
Children in ministry:	1 Samuel 3; 2 Kings 5:2-3; 2 Chronicles 31:16; Isaiah 8:18; Daniel 1; Acts 12:13

2. Children need the church.

There are so many things about God and Christian living that they can only understand when they experience it in the church. See John 17:23.

3. The church needs children.

Unique contribution of children: humility, trust, joy, energy, simplicity (see Matthew 18:1-14).

For its future – "The church is always one generation short of extinction" (see Psalm 78:1-8).

4. We run the risk of losing the next generation.

All over the world children are beginning to dance to the beat of a different drum. They are very directly influenced by mass media, especially through television, music, videos, movies and toys. This new culture gives them what they want and often lures them away from the Lord Jesus Christ and the life He opened for us. The church cannot afford to lose this generation!

Model 2: Children's church (Separate the children!)

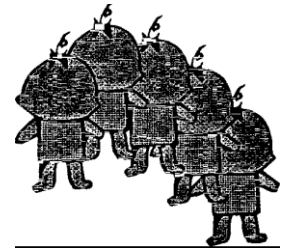
Description:

These are worship services for children. It takes into account the needs and understanding of children. Sometimes all children are put together in one children's church. In other cases children are divided into specific age groups, with separate services for each group.



A. Goals

1. To reach children within their own idiom and according to their needs.
2. To give children a pleasant experience of church.
3. To accompany children towards the realisation of their full potential in Christ.
4. To employ educational principles and methods.



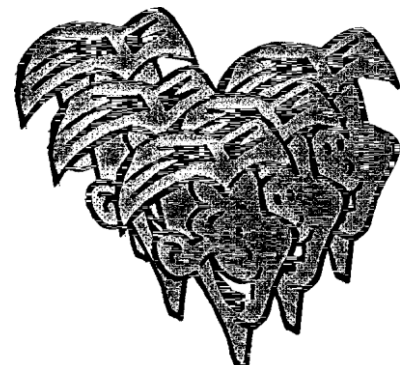
B. Biblical foundation

1. *"Each in his own language"* (Acts 2:8).
2. *"A Jew for the Jews"* (1 Corinthians 9:20).
3. Jesus became a human being (Philippians 2:6-8).



C. Advantages

1. Children experience and understand more.
2. Uses peer group dynamics.
3. Lively, joyful atmosphere.
4. More freedom in style and structure.
5. Greater participation of children.



D. Disadvantages, potential dangers

1. Splits up the family.
2. No experience of unity in the congregation.
3. Distance from main/adult church.
4. Difficult task that requires hard work.
5. Need for strict discipline.

6. Can be influenced too much by popular beliefs about what is "in" and what is "out"
7. The depth of Bible teaching can be watered down.

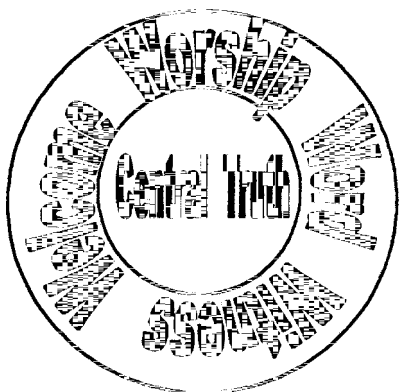
When is a children's meeting also a worship service?

A worship service should be characterized by 4 basic aspects:

- Fellowship of believers
- Worship of God
- Hearing the Word of God
- Practical response through service and witness

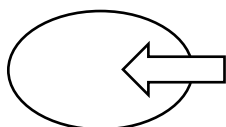
These basic aspects can be represented in a simple formula of 4 W's:

- Welcome (fellowship)
- Worship (praise, prayers, worship)
- Word (Bible – preaching, admonition, encouragement, teaching)
- Witness (Service and witness)



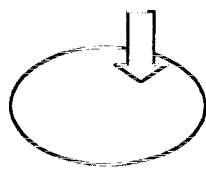
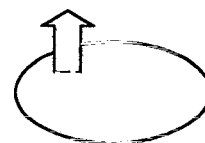
The ideal is to let all four aspects focus on the same basic theme or central truth, as is shown in the diagram. This structure is very suitable for children, but it can also be used in other forms of ministry and worship, including the traditional worship service.

Here we will illustrate its use with a whole programme of music. Music is an integral part of childhood. Children have lots of energy, they like movement and playing, they are very eager to learn, they have little inhibitions and they normally have a good memory. These factors almost guarantee that they will enjoy music – of course if they are led in the right way. It would be foolish not to use this wonderful opportunity.



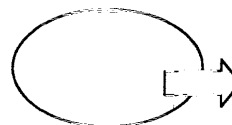
Music can easily be used to **welcome** children. When the right tunes or songs are played in the background, they normally respond spontaneously. Action songs and silly songs can also be used as icebreakers or just for fun. In this way music helps to put the children at ease and to build the unity in the group.

Worship is the one element in this programme, which can hardly be done without music. From biblical times to the present music, in a wide variety, has accompanied the praises of God's people. It should be the same with children's ministry.



Music is also very useful in the ministry of the **Word**. Through the ages there has grown a very rich store of songs that reflect in some way or another some passage or truth from the Bible. These songs have helped God's people understand and remember His Word

The same music that helped bring God's Word into the hearts of His people, has normally also been the way in which God's truth has been passed on as a **witness** to others. Thousands of hearts – many of them totally hardened towards other forms of testimony – have been drawn to God through music. Through music children can help carry God's truth to people who might otherwise not have heard.



Model 3: Family church (Relate with the children!)

Description:

The name family church refers to worship services that seek to accommodate and build families, and also to create a family atmosphere in the services, where even people who are not family can feel at home.

A. Goals

1. To worship God in a more modern and informal idiom.
2. To build families – the basis of church life.
3. Participation of all participants, which helps growth.
4. Build relationships among church members.
5. Accommodate people from broken families.
6. Attract people from outside the church.
7. Challenge families for practical ministry and witness.



B. Biblical basis

1. Equipping in the family (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).
"Me and my household" (Joshua 24:15).
2. Church in the home (Romans 16:5, 23; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

C. Advantages

1. Reach people in their primary relationships.
2. Build families.
3. Exposure to other role models (usually more leadership involvement).
4. Develop the congregation as a family.
5. Informal atmosphere may attract outsiders.

D. Disadvantages, potential dangers

1. Emphasis on family can exclude some.
2. Too much emphasis on informal atmosphere; pleasant experience.
3. The Bible not always central.
4. Can lack spiritual depth, discipline.
5. Church can be inward-looking, not focused on outside needs.
6. Where this type of church is not supported and attended by the whole congregation it can polarize and divide the church.

Model 4: Church for all (Integrate the children!)

Description:

This is a worship service where people of all ages worship God together and are equipped to take His Word into the world. This service differs from Children's Church and Family church in one important respect, namely that children are not the focus. They take their rightful place with all other members, participating together in all aspects of church life.

A. Goals

1. To focus on worshipping God.
2. To be equipped for service and witness.
3. To get involved in practical service and ministry aimed at those outside the church.
4. To be an illustration to the world of unity and love.

B. Biblical basis

1. Children fully participated in the festivals and worship services of Old Testament times (e.g. Exodus 12:3; Deuteronomy 12:7; Nehemiah 8:3; 2 Chronicles 20:13; Psalms 8:2).
2. God's special care for the weak or destitute (Deuteronomy 24:17-21; 26:12-13; Matthew 18:5, 6, 10, 14).
3. Sons and daughters will prophesy (Joel 2:28).
4. Children in ministry (1 Samuel 3; 2 Kings 5:2, 3; 2 Chronicles 31:16; Isaiah 8:18; Daniel 1; Acts 12:13).
5. The unity of the church (Ephesians 2).
6. The church as one body with many members (1 Corinthians 12).
7. No longer slave or freed, man or woman ... (Galatians 3:28, see Colossians 3:11).

C. Advantages

1. From a young age children can be part of the church.
2. The congregation focuses on worshipping God and reaching the world.
3. The diversity within the congregation can be used better.

D. Disadvantages, potential dangers

1. Children can again be ignored.
2. The congregation can become too big and impersonal – children feel lost.
3. Members can disappear within the crowd.
4. Too much emphasis on key leadership.
5. The church can become too open – lose its clear focus and depth if everyone has to be included.

Summary:

1. **Model 1 (Ignore the children!) should be avoided.** Matthew 19:13-15.

When we look at the biblical evidence, as well as the needs of children in our time, it is very clear that we should not follow Model 1, where the children are ignored. Most adults are at times tempted to ignore children or to treat them as junior members in God's kingdom and we see this in the example of Jesus' disciples (Matthew 19). In the previous chapter Jesus' clear teaching on the importance and the place of children is recorded and yet here they try to keep the children away from Jesus. He strongly rebuked them and clearly stated that they should let the little ones come to Him

2. **Each of the other three models can be good and effective.**

It has been shown that there are good biblical foundations for each of the other three models (children's church, family church and church for all). Each has good goals, and may have good advantages. Of course there are also potential dangers in each. These three models should not be evaluated in terms of good or bad. They should rather be seen as responses to the specific needs and contexts.

3. Most congregations vary the models for accommodating children.

This can be done by using different models in different worship services. A specific service can be arranged as a children's church. Even though adults will also attend, the whole style and structure will be tuned to the needs and abilities of children. The next service can be a general one, or focus on adults, or married couples, or unemployed people. Even in congregations where children normally have separate worship services there will inevitably also be joint services (e.g. on Sunday evenings or during holidays when less people attend, or during special services e.g. church feasts, sacraments or weddings and funerals). Sometimes pastors who normally prefer integrated services are invited to address children's groups (e.g. at school, camp or crusade). Here they need the skills to minister effectively to children.

4. Some congregations combine different models in the same worship service.

In some cases all share in the welcome and worship aspects, but then divide for the Word and Witness parts. There are pastors who include a slot for children in the course of the normal worship service. They might even call the children to the front and then minister God's Word specifically to them. Thereafter they can return to their parents, or just listen to the rest of the service, which is for adults as well.

5. It is especially in ministering the Word of God that pastors find it more difficult to include children.

The elements of Welcome, Worship and Witness are generally much more attractive to children. With some extra arrangements children can easily be included in these. With preaching, pastors often change to a style of communication that excludes children (at times also most of the adults!). Training and experience are needed to grow in a style that includes children as well. The use of stories, illustrations, visuals, dramas and direct involvement of the congregation can all help to involve children.

6. What is required is a willingness to change and become like children.

Matthew 18:2-5.

Jesus wants us to become smaller in our own eyes and submit ourselves before God. This will bring us on the same level as children. The kingdom of God is meant for children!

7. Effective children's ministry depends on good relationships with children.

Jesus shared God's Word with the people around Him – His close circle of disciples and others who followed Him for some time. It is impossible to bring God's Word effectively to children if we never get close to them, get to know their world, their needs and their concerns.

God's attitude and plan for each child

Lesson 5

A. Introduction

Right throughout the Bible we see God's heart and attitude towards the children. Through Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus and the Apostles we have been instructed how to raise the children in the knowledge of the Lord.

B. Children are a gift from God

1. Genesis 4:1, Eve said: *"I have received a child from the Lord"*.
1 Samuel 1:27, Hannah said: *"for this child I prayed, and the Lord answered my prayer"*.
Psalm 127:3, *"Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb are a reward from Him"*.

2. Throughout the Bible it is clear that a child is a great gift from God – one of the greatest and most precious we can receive and, if treated right, will have the potential of being one of the greatest blessings.

3. David sings further: *"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children in one's youth, happy the man who has his quiver full of them"*. Psalm 127:4-5.

An arrow is made to hit the target, but will only do so if it is shaped straight. Sometimes they are shaped so crooked that they turn around and hit the heart of the person who shaped it. What a challenge to the parents and the ones who work with children.

C. In the Old Testament Children were regarded as belonging to God

(That should surely be the same today?)

1. They are given to us for proper stewardship so that we can lead them into deep fellowship with the Lord.
2. According to God's law given through Moses, a child should be presented to God when it was eight days old and then given back in trust to the parents. Luke 2:22.
3. God even assigns a protecting angel to each child. Matthew 18:10.

D. Children are supposed to be part of the worship and service to God

1. Right throughout the Old Testament, in God's dealing with His people, the children play an important role:
 - a) Deuteronomy 6:6-7: *"And these words which I command you this day, shall be in your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children....."*

God even explains how they should teach them to the children – do it diligently, let them see it in your lifestyle, let it be shown in all we do – “*bind them to your hands*” – “*what we keep before our eyes*” – “*write them on the doorpost of your house*”. In other words, use all means to teach them, let them hear it, see it, feel it, experience it.
It cannot be said much stronger than that!

- b) 2 Chronicles 20:13: “*And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children*”.

Here the children, even the little ones, were deeply involved and experienced God’s miracle working power, which must have made a lasting impression on their lives.

- c) Psalm 34:11: “*Come, you children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord*”.

It is David, the greatest king in Israel’s history, who wants to share with the children his own wonderful experiences of fearing the Lord. For him it was not just about teaching doctrine. No! ... he lived it and, therefore, his words became much more powerful. The same must go for us when dealing with the children.

Psalm 78:1-4: “*Incline your ears to the word of my mouth, we will not hide them from our children*”.

The psalmist tells us not to hide the Word and the wonderful works of God from our children.

- d) Isaiah 28:9: “*Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breast*”.

Here God encourages us to teach knowledge and doctrine to even small children – of course it must be done in a way that they can perceive and understand, as God also told them to do in Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

- e) Joel 2:15-17. God called the whole congregation before Him, for a sacred assembly, and God wanted to make sure that they did not leave the children behind: “*...gather the children and nursing babes*”. It is here that God gives the promise that He is going to pour out His Spirit over the young ones also, and give them gifts for ministry. Joel 2:28.

- f) Nehemiah 12:43: “*That day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy, their wives also and their children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem could be heard afar off*”.

What a day of rejoicing! Can you imagine what that did for these children – to rejoice like that before the Lord! Their coming together before the Lord was not a boring affair for the children.

- g) Deuteronomy 16:13-14. God instructed that the children were to take part in all the feasts of the people of Israel ... these feasts were exciting dramas, which illustrated God's wonderful works among them.
The children built huts together with their parents --- They gathered in the first-fruits --- They walked together up to the temple to bring their sacrifice, etc.
 - h) The children were a part of many other great events in Israel's history:
They witnessed the wonderful miracles in King Jehoshaphat's days – how God sent an ambush and defeated the mighty enemy. They were part of the great repentance in the days of the prophet Joel, where God promised to pour out His Spirit even over the children, "I will pour out My Spirit over all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy". They fell on their face with their parents as the glory of the Lord came down at the dedication of the temple in Solomon's days, etc.
 - i) All that must have made a great impression on, and strongly appealed to, the children. God wants His people today to involve the children in a similar exciting and appealing way, so that they learn to trust and obey Him from early childhood
2. We can see from all these scriptures that God desires that the children be drawn in as an integrated part of our worship and service to Him. God even commands, again and again, that the children must be present, down to the infants and nursing babies.

Jesus' attitude towards the children

Lesson 6

A. Introduction

In His extremely busy ministry, Jesus frequently interacted with children. He ministered to them and even used them in His ministry. When He spoke and taught it was mainly in parables and illustrations, so that even the children could get the message.

B. Jesus has a big heart for the children

1. Matthew 18:1-14. Jesus praises the faith and simplicity of the children.

Children are so wonderfully uncomplicated in their faith and trust. There is no shadow of doubt in their mind that if their father promises something then, surely, it will be so. Jesus uses this as an example for His adult listeners; that kind of attitude is what God wants everyone to have towards Him.

2. It is profound when Jesus says in verse 5:

“whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me”.

How do we receive or welcome the children in our churches?

- a) By creating an environment where they feel welcome and important.
- b) By looking after their special needs.
- c) When Jesus commissioned Peter, He did not just say, *Feed My sheep*". No, the first commission was, *“feed My lambs”* John 21:15-17.

If we do this right, Jesus says that we receive and welcome Him in our midst.

3. The Lord encourages children's ministry.

Matthew 18:10 – *“See that you don't look down on these little ones...”*, *“Feed My lambs”*.

Many churches consider ministry to children as of secondary importance – it is the adults that count and are important ... here is a warning from Jesus never to do that ... we should rather welcome them and care for them in the best possible way.

- a) God does! He has even assigned special angels to look after each one of them; angels who are sent from the presence of God.
- b) In the same way God expects us, the church, to assign the very best and most gifted people we have to this most important task of raising the children in the knowledge of God. We should not have the attitude: *“if you cannot do anything else in the church, you can be involved in the children's ministry!”*

C. Children in the ministry of Jesus

1. **John 6:1-5.** In the great miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000 a little boy played a central role; he willingly gave his lunch box to Jesus – *what an impact that must have had on that boy, standing there next to Jesus and seeing Him multiply his little lunch box to feed the multitude!*

Even today the children could be part of the ministry to feed the hungry multitude, and that can be both literally and spiritually.

2. **Matthew 21:14-16.** Here Jesus accepts the praise and worship of the children. The adults try to trap Him and find fault with Him but the children spontaneously break forth into praise when they see His wonderful miracles.

- a) Jesus even refers to the prophecy of David in Psalm 8:2 where he tells us “*God has ordained the children to praise Him*”.
- b) So perhaps it would be right for the church today to find ways of involving the children in the praise and worship of the Lord.

3. **Matthew 18:2-5.** Jesus uses a child as an important illustration in His message.

- a) “Then Jesus called a little child to Himself, set him in the midst and said”
And Jesus started to teach about the different value system in the Kingdom of God.
 - i) Adult-ness implies independence, ambitions, drive, individualism and strength, amongst other qualities. These adult qualities are the values of the world and not of the Kingdom.
 - ii) Child-ness implies total dependence, trust, vulnerability, weakness, humility and belonging, amongst other qualities. These child qualities are the values of the Kingdom and not of the world.
- b) That is why it is much easier to lead a child into the Kingdom of God, so let us take advantage of that before the world puts its stamp on them.

4. **Luke 10:1-3.** When Jesus sent out the 70, two by two, there were probably young ones among them since He said: “*I send you as lambs among wolves*” – not sheep. They went out in a wonderful powerful ministry for Jesus.

- a) Could you imagine if ministry teams today also included the very young people and even children?
- b) Neither John, Mark nor Timothy were very old when they joined the Apostle Paul’s team on his mission journeys.

5. **Jesus ministered powerfully to Children.**

- a) Jesus called three dead people back to life; an adult, a child and a youth:

Luke 8:41-56. A wonderful example of how Jesus even goes out of His way to follow the father home to raise his daughter from the dead. The way in which the gospel writers portray this happening allows you to feel the love and concern Jesus had for the child: *He took her by the hand and called, saying "little girl arise"*.

Luke 7:11-15. This is the account of the son of the widow of Nain. Here we see the wonderful compassion Jesus had for the mother and her son.

b) Jesus healed several children:

Matthew 17:14-18. Here a father came and knelt before Jesus and said: *"Have mercy on my son he is an epileptic and suffers severely"* and Jesus reacted immediately.

Matthew 15:21-28. Probably the only heathen person that Jesus healed was this little girl – verse 24 – Jesus said: *"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*.

John 4:49-54. Jesus healed the son of a government official by His Word, from Cana to Capernaum, a distance of about 25 kilometres.

Church based children's ministry

Lesson 7

A. Introduction

From the Bible it is clear that children should be an integrated part of normal church life. Let us see where the children fit into the four foundational aspects of the church: Namely – **worship**, **fellowship**, the proclamation of **God's Word** and **service / ministry**.

B. Worship

Psalm 2:8: *“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of Your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger”.*

1. It is worthwhile noticing that it is God who planned and ordained that children should be part of praise and worship.
2. It is difficult to understand how the praise of children and infants can have such an impact on God's enemies, but obviously something happens in the spiritual realm when the pure praise of children rises up to God.
3. How can children be a part of the praise and worship in the church? Well – if we return to the Biblical way of praise and worship then many possibilities are open to the children.
 - a) King David is the great teacher of praise and worship. He encouraged song Psalm 149:1; shouting Psalm 95:1-2; clapping Psalm 47:1-2; lifting of our hands Psalm 63:4; dancing Psalm 149:3; kneeling and bowing down Psalm 95:6-7; the use of instruments Psalm 150:1-6 and also simple instruments the children can manage, like cymbals and drums, etc.
 - b) David even said: *“make a joyful noise before the Lord”*. The waving of banners and all the celebration God encourages through David is something children can take part in with great excitement and pure hearts, without the shy, self-consciousness which prevents most adults from praising like that!
 - c) Even when it comes to deep spiritual worship of the Lord, children can learn and grow into it when the right environment is created by the church.

C. The Fellowship of the believers

Matthew 18:5. We have already seen that Jesus wants us to welcome the children into our midst as a very important part of church fellowship.

1. Children should be fully included in the fellowship of the believers even if it requires major changes in the way the church functions.
2. Like a natural home is formed and shaped around the whole family, from the youngest to the oldest, so should it be in the church.

3. In a natural home, as the children grow and mature, they are given more and more responsibilities and opportunities to take part in the running of the home. It should not be different in the spiritual home; the church.

D. The Word of God

The Word holds the central place when the church gathers, but what about the children in this connection?

1. This is probably the time when the children have to be taught in separate groups, and in such a way that they can receive and understand the message.
2. It would surely be right if the church regularly had services which could be enjoyed and understood by everyone, so that the families do not need to be split up.
 - a) Now and then have a family service and when the time comes to share the Word use other means like: drama, puppets or electronic means like videos, films, etc.
 - b) Have a special children's service, where they are involved in planning and running the meeting.
 - c) A special Missions service, with focus on a particular nation, could also be set up so that it appeals to the whole family.
 - d) During a mighty move of the Spirit, where many wonderful things are happening, like healings and other miracles, do not send the children out to their different groups as they will get much more by remaining in the presence of God.

E. Service / Ministry

1. This is another important function of the church where we should not neglect the children, but use them according to their age and maturity.
2. Psalm 139:13-16. The Bible shows us how God is involved and concerned about each person, even in the very early stage when we are being formed in our mother's womb. Verse 16 tells us that God planned all our days before even one of them came.
3. Ephesians 2:1-10. As unbelievers we are called: ("*Children of disobedience*" verse 2). Only in salvation do we step into the wonderful plan God has for our lives, verse 10.
4. That is why it is so important that we get children started on that exciting plan as soon as possible, before they waste their time in the world.
 - a) 1 Samuel 3:10-11. Samuel was just a little child when God called him to speak for Him. From there he developed into one of the greatest prophets in history.

- b) Jeremiah 1:5-9. God planned Jeremiah's ministry before he was born and, when God called him, Jeremiah said: "*I can't speak, I am still a child*". But God touched his mouth and said: "*I have put My words in your mouth*".

Surely God can also use children in remarkable ways today, if we would just create a safe, loving atmosphere for them to develop in.

- c) 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-15. Timothy was groomed from early childhood for the ministry God had for him.

5. How can children serve / minister in the Church?

- a) Let it start in small ways: by greeting other children at the door; by helping an adult in different practical matters; by singing in the worship choir; by waving banners during worship, etc.
- b) When they become more mature: by reading scriptures; praying; even sharing a testimony and words from God, etc.
- c) Let children be a part of mission outreaches; giving out tracts to their friends; hospital visits and praying, together with adults, for sick people; visiting the old people and perhaps taking flowers and tapes to them from the Sunday service. From the age of 12 and up they could even be a part of outreaches into other towns and nations, etc.

Evangelism among children

Lesson 8

A. Introduction

It is not enough to give the children a good feeling and experience of church life and to teach from the Bible – the ultimate goal is to lead each one of them to a personal experience of being born again. John 3:3.

B. What is evangelisation?

Matthew 28:19-20

1. The goal for evangelism.

Is to spread the good news concerning Jesus Christ, to make people realise their sinful lost state, to lead them to repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

To make sure that they get truly born again, and to disciple them and bring them into the fellowship of the believers in a local church.

2. The methods used in evangelism.

By persuasive words and confrontational methods to persuade, sometimes even pressurise people to repent and to take a stand for Jesus, either by raising their hands, coming forward for prayer or signing a decision card.

After that they are embraced and welcomed into the Kingdom of God and advised what to do next.

C. Child evangelism is a complex issue.

1. Children are not “little adults”.

In some places the methods just described under point A are used to bring even little children to salvation.

The problem here is that many adults fail to see children in a process of gradual development. They treat them as “little adults” and expect them to respond to the gospel as an adult would do.

2. Children are on a journey.

Children are not small adults. They are on a journey to becoming mature adults but, wherever they are on the road of development, they are uniquely children and require to be treated as such.

In this process of development the consciousness and understanding of spiritual things gradually develop, and that can differ from child to child, according to their nature and upbringing.

We can say with Jesus that the very small child belongs to the Kingdom – it must be because of his innocence that the blood of Jesus covers him – but somewhere on the road of development, probably with gradual revelation, he needs to personally commit his life to the Lord.

D. In child evangelism there is the danger of being pressurised too early.

1. Children respond easily.

- a) Children will easily respond to an emotional appeal from an adult they love and respect.
- b) When children are emotionally persuaded to make some sort of physical response to Christ, (*lifting of hands, coming forward for prayer, etc.*) they can easily confuse the outward response with the real thing, which can only be brought about by the Holy Spirit.
- c) Sometimes, out of genuine concern for their spiritual welfare, people put children under strong emotional pressure to receive Christ. They do not realise that, in many cases, they drive them away from Christ in the long run because the child is not ready to receive and will, therefore, only make an outward response and think that this is all they need in order to receive what is promised.

2. The result of such a superficial commitment can be very damaging.

- a) No Spiritual power becomes available to the child in the battle of life because he has never really come into vital contact with Christ, the only source of power. The probability is that disillusionment will set in and that he will give up the unequal struggle for all time.
- b) It could develop into an antagonism towards Christianity because the whole experience is seen to be a hoax, which they were led into unfairly. It would be very difficult to get such a person to listen to the gospel later in life.
- c) When nothing in particular happens, the danger is that the whole of Christianity is seen as not working, and the result will be that they discard the whole thing when they reach their teens.

3. Let it be a true work of the Spirit of God.

In John 6:44, Jesus says: “*No-one can come to Me unless the Father draws him*”.

- a) The children need to hear the gospel in all its fullness and when they are ripe the Holy Spirit will draw them to Jesus.
- b) The people who work with children need to be open and sensitive so that they co-operate with the Spirit of God.

E. “Let the children come to Me”

The goal for child evangelism:

1. To bring each child in our care into a true experience of salvation should be the greatest concern for parents and church leaders but, as we have seen in this lesson, it takes great wisdom and skill so that the whole church experience does not become a vaccination against Christianity.
2. The Scripture Union International in a conference came up with the following conclusion after dealing with the challenges around child evangelisation.
 - a) Also in the spiritual realm a child goes through a process of development. He becomes increasingly capable of understanding right and wrong as God's Word is presented to him, and this may lead to an increasing awareness of the work of sin in his own life.
 - b) Parallel to this is an increasing ability to grasp the saving Word of God, and particularly the meaning of God's gift of Jesus Christ. At the same time the child's capability for response to God's Word is developing, and his acceptance or rejection of what he knows of Christ becomes steadily more meaningful.
 - c) In the light of this, we doubt whether there is any point at which a child suddenly becomes responsible for his actions or for his attitude towards the Lord. He is becoming more and more responsible for his life and choices as the years pass, until he attains the fuller responsibility that goes with adulthood.
 - d) We therefore reject the errors to be found in two extremes:
 - i) *That of expecting or requiring of children a level of understanding and response which is proper for an adult – the error of demanding too much.*
 - ii) *That of putting off any challenge to respond to Christ until the child has attained years of full responsibility, whenever that might be – the error of expecting too little.*
 - e) We believe that a child should be presented with the Christian message at any age in a way which is in keeping with his current development, that he may be expected to respond, and that God will then act with His saving grace in his life while he is still a child.

----- oOOo -----

My personal testimony: At the age of 6 I gave my life to Jesus with my limited understanding and I am sure that Jesus accepted me but still, every year in the same children's camp, I felt the need to do it over and over again until I reached 14, when the Holy Spirit did a wonderful transforming work in my life. This was not under pressure but a natural development until the full light broke through.

How do we as a local church meet this challenge?

Lesson 9

A. Introduction

To work and evangelise amongst children is not a choice but a tremendous challenge for any local church, and should have a very high priority amongst the leadership. The present situation should be assessed, plans and visions for the future should be created and finance and quality people provided for this important ministry.

B. Assess your present situation

1. In order to assess the situation it would be right to ask the following questions:

- a) How many children up to the age of 13 are related to the church through their family ... and how many are actually attending church regularly?
- b) What are we, as a church, doing to evangelise the many children in the neighbourhood around the church?
- c) Do we also consider children's needs and interests when we plan our services and other activities?
- d) Does the church leadership regularly visit the children's groups? Children will be far more inclined to listen to the pastor, elders, music leaders and other leaders if they have interacted with them.
- e) Are the children also greeted by name and welcomed when they arrive at church?
- f) Are at least some parts of our service child friendly?
- g) Can children be part of the praise and worship team, or any other ministry in the church, according to their development?
- h) Do you have proper facilities, equipment and personnel in the church for the children's ministry?
- i) How much is allocated on the church budget for the children's ministry?

2. Discuss and answer these questions honestly, and you will have an understanding where you are at, and where you need to improve.

C. How can we get started (in some cases improve on) in this important ministry?

1. Get a clear vision and plan: Habakkuk 2:2.

- a) Have a leadership conference in the church around this matter and seek God's face for direction.
- b) Let there be input from parents, and other members who work with children (like teachers, psychologists, etc.) from mature children, and children's workers from other churches where the children's ministry works well.

Let different gifted people give short challenging talks around this matter and after each discussion divide into workshop groups so that everyone can participate, even the children who are part of the conference.

After each workshop let an appointed person from each group bring the conclusion to the whole conference group before listening to the next speaker, and so on.

- c) After consideration and prayer, the leadership should then write the vision down and present it to the whole church.

2. **Implement the vision: "run with it!"**

- a) Invite the right people to be part of the children's ministry, inspire them with the words of Jesus for this important ministry.
Arrange training for them in: *Puppet ministry, creativity, song and music, telling a story, etc.*
- b) Arrange facilities so that the children can meet in age groups and acquire the necessary equipment needed for the training of the children.
- c) Have printed material ready to give to the parents about the new Children's ministry, and a more colourful invitation to the children.
- d) Start the new ministry with a "BANG"– *balloons, posters, all the children on the platform, etc.*, so that everyone understands that it is something new and important which is starting up.
- e) Also plan that in the future the services will be more child friendly, so that the time that they are together with the adults will be a joyful time.
- f) Let some children be a part of the welcoming team at the door, to especially welcome the children.

3. **Teaching material for children.**

A lot of good material has been developed for the purpose of teaching children and here let me mention an excellent one which was created by a teacher at All Africa Bible College, Barbara Ronaldson, called "Circuit Teaching for Children".

This material takes the children right through the Bible in three years but on three different levels, in that way covering nine years of teaching, that is, the full period a child will attend children's church.

To obtain this material please contact:
Circuit Teaching International, P.O. Box 774, Hillcrest 3650, South Africa.

D. Be aware of the gap

A natural transition.

1. It is important that there is a natural and exciting transition between the children's ministry and the youth work and then into full church activities so that no child drops through the gap and disappears into the world for years to come.
2. Right through the development let the children, the youth and the rest of the church fellowship mix as much as possible, in services, ministries, family days, family camps, etc.
3. In that way they will grow close, come to know and appreciate each other, and the generation gaps will be eliminated and the children will naturally flow from the one group to the other.

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