

# ABC'S OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

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**1st Edition**

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# INTRODUCTION

God has just called you to a remote town to do children's ministry. There will not be another person there who can help you and there are no means of communicating with the outside world. You arrive all enthusiastic and start getting everything ready. You are about to introduce the town to the best children's ministry they have ever seen!

You make the mistake of praying and God tells you that the only resource you can use is your Bible.

Now – without reading anything further – shut this book and write down how you are going to succeed.

Welcome back. I wonder what you wrote?

**We should examine the resources that we use and ask what purpose they serve.** Do they draw the children closer to God? There are times when you need fun and food and other things and they have their place – but not at the expense of the spiritual. Very few crafts help a child grow stronger in their faith. There are not many games that make them want to rush out and serve God.

We need to make a difference in the lives of the children. We need to be involved in the great commission. I was talking to the Pastor of a church in QLD, Australia about a once a term children's outreach. It was fantastic. Great games and terrific entertainment, wonderful prizes and enthusiastic singing, delicious food, great stories and stacks of kids.

I asked about decisions and discipleship and found out that although there were some decisions there was so much planning involved in the program that no one had the energy to do anything between the events to disciple the children. I felt sorry for them. Perhaps they could have started a weekly program, with very little effort. It would have started smaller, but it would build over time. This pastor could not think of a single family that had joined their church from the outreach events.

It's easy to make the mistake of trying to wow children into the kingdom by trying to compete with the 'world'. You can't compete with the world and neither should you. Offer them Jesus and the life he brings to them. That is something deeper and richer than the world could ever offer.

Parents are not going to turn up to your church because Rebecca brings a pretty craft home, but if their child's behaviour changes for the better they might.

This book primarily deals with the 'Children's Church/Sunday School' concept. It could also be applied to Children's Outreach clubs because they become church for children who have nothing else.

It's also aimed for ministry with 6 to 14 year olds although most of the information applies to younger ages as well.

Each subject has been kept reasonably brief to avoid overloading people with information but most of the subjects could be expanded to the size of a book.

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# **FOUNDATIONAL SUBJECTS**

# CHILDREN NEED JESUS

This chapter examines both why children need Jesus and how to start basic discipleship with them.

I recently ministered in a large children's ministry where the children's leaders were enthusiastic about the ministry. I presented the gospel and almost half of the children responded! Great you say? I think it was sad. The Bible says in **1 Corinthians 2:14** "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Simply put – there is no spiritual growth possible until we are born again or become 'spiritually alive'. These children were sitting in church for years without being offered salvation!

Have you ever tried to water a dead plant hoping there was a tiny bit of life in it? If it is dead - it is dead, and no amount of watering is going to bring it back to life! "You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world (Ephesians 2:1,2)." Until we are "made alive in Christ (v5)" we cannot grow spiritually.

One of the biggest mistakes being made in Children's ministries is not offering children the opportunity to enter into a life altering relationship with their Heavenly Father. What made the difference in your life? It was when you were born again! Children need that same experience. There is little value in pumping children full of information without relationship because as we know the Christian life is ALL ABOUT relationship with God! The devil hates it when anyone leaves his kingdom and enters God's kingdom. He does everything he can to stop us from doing the simplest thing – offering salvation to children.

So the very first and most important thing is to see children giving their lives to God. This is **the** starting point.

They need the Saviour because “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).”

Jesus tells us that “No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6)”.

When Jesus died on the cross he died for the sins of the world but unless someone becomes a child of God they are not part of his amazing family. “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).”

So children need to have the Saviour because through him they:

- have forgiveness of sin
- have life and have it in abundance
- can enjoy living for God instead of themselves
- can look forward to an eternity in heaven with God
- can experience the love of God personally
- can have their needs supplied
- have power to live a righteous life
- can overcome the evil one

Sadly, too many children's workers are busily providing entertainment rather than spiritual life and growth.

Some people say children are too young but how can you be too young to experience the love of a heavenly Father?

Children need God for the same reasons adults need God. Look at the following questions:

- Do children sin? – then they need Jesus to forgive them.
- Do children cry? – then they need his comfort.
- Do they face temptation? – then they need his strength to help them do the right thing

- Would it be valuable for them to have a heavenly Father loving them? – absolutely!

*How old would you like your children to be before they start loving you?*

My parents asked my five year old sister if she would like to give her life to Jesus. At the same time, **God spoke to me inside my heart and invited me to do the same.** He asked me if I would like to give my life to him and I said, 'yes'. I spoke up and said that I would like to give my life to Jesus too. My parents were surprised because I was only three years old, but being born again is not determined by age and understanding because *it's a spiritual transaction*. Even people with a cognitive impairment can come to Christ. They can respond to a loving God who can put the question of eternal life to them in a way that they can understand. The gospel has great depth and is very complex but yet at the same time it's simple so that no one is left out.

When my children were babies and then toddlers I would tuck them into bed and tell them how much I loved them and then I would often remind them that God loved them even more than I did. They all gave their life to God at a young age and have never faltered in their love for God and are now great young adults.

We know that everything about God involves faith and we know that even the gospel has mysteries all through it. There will always be differing opinions about many things but the simple truth is that we all need to be saved and Jesus is indeed the one and only Saviour.

So the first thing children need is the Saviour!

## **ONCE CHILDREN ARE BORN AGAIN THEY NEED DISCIPLING**

Matthew 28:18-20 "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Verse 20 continues by saying: "And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age." This is a promise that God himself will be with us and help us with the great commission.

When I started in children's ministry a long time ago I had no idea what I was doing. I started teaching Scripture (SRE) in local primary schools where I presented the gospel followed by an altar call (it would be very difficult to get away with that nowadays of course). Over two hundred children responded in just a couple of weeks and we needed to decide what to do in order to meet their discipleship needs. We decided to start three after school clubs. I still had little idea what I was doing so I just kept asking God for help.

We provided afternoon tea, played a game or two and ran competitions. That was the easy part. My wife to be, Janet, brought along her guitar and we taught the kids a few songs and we shared Gods love and plan for their lives. These messages were a vital part of their discipleship as we purposely applied them to the children's lives. We would tackle subjects such as commitment, specific sins, personal devotions, courage, faith, victorious living etc. and used Bible stories to channel the messages. Children would respond and we would pray with them and help them understand how to follow Jesus.

I write this to illustrate the importance of knowing what you are trying to achieve. It is better to have in your heart to introduce children to the Saviour and disciple them, taking one step at a

time in that direction, learning as you go, than to grab the latest curriculum and hope you are doing something right. If you tell them about God but do not offer him to them it is like telling them about the greatest friend they could ever have but never giving them an opportunity to start a great friendship!

# WHAT THE AVERAGE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY LOOKS LIKE

A Children's Church can be any size from just a few children to hundreds usually depending on the size of the church. It typically goes for 30 to 60 minutes and the program often includes things such as singing, message, memory work, prayer, games, craft and worksheets.

The average Children's Church is not planned very well, wastes too much time on non-spiritual activities, does not present the gospel very often, is thrown together at the last minute most weeks, lacks enough leaders, does little actual discipleship and depends on bought curriculum to get through from week to week. 'Wow – that's a bit negative!' you say, but unfortunately that's the truth for the majority. It's not that people don't want to do better; it's just that somehow it does not happen.

We need to understand some important things here.

1. We need to know what it is we are trying to achieve.
2. We need to know how to go about achieving it.
3. We need to be inspired to put in the effort required to achieve it.
4. We need to understand that the enemy knows the importance of children getting strong foundations in life and he will do all he can to make sure their foundations are not Christian.
5. We need to minister unto God and not unto man so that if there is little support from church leadership it makes no difference to our passion and our great attitude!
6. Most importantly: we need to ask God what he wants us to do with the children and then do it!

Take a moment to check out the health of your children's ministry. Mark yourself on each item according to the maximum score indicated. I have restricted this to what I believe are the eight most important aspects.

1. I pray over the ministry and seek God's guidance about what programs to prepare. \_\_\_/30
2. I have a pretty fair understanding of which children are saved. \_\_\_/10
3. I have a discipleship process that is effectively training the children. \_\_\_/20
4. I have a team (one or more other leaders) who I am developing, empowering and releasing into the ministry. \_\_\_/10
5. I provide guidance and materials to assist parents in the spiritual upbringing of their children. \_\_\_/10
6. I am submitted to the church leadership. \_\_\_/10
7. I spend personal time with God in the Word and prayer regularly. \_\_\_/50
8. I actively try and improve my ministry expertise. \_\_\_/10

**Your score \_\_\_/150**

How did you go? If you scored 100 or more then you are flying ahead and I want to come and see what you are doing because you are going great!

If you are like most people and have scored poorly then how good is it going to be when you improve your score! The average score is around 35 so you can see why most children's ministries are in trouble.

The most important one is No.7 because if you don't spend time with God then you will achieve little, if anything, for the Kingdom of God.

You may run a program with lots of 'fun' activities, with lots of preparation and a great 'wow' factor, but if it's not discipling the children then it's shallow and of little value. As soon as the children are attracted by something in the world that is more fun they will disappear.

The spiritual wellbeing of the children is paramount. You can't match the world and its attractions so have 'wow' but keep it as a lower priority.

The world cannot offer what you have – spiritual life. As the Word says, **"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" John 10:10.** If you offer this to the children they will want to keep coming back. You won't have to compete with the world. The devil, (the one who comes **"to steal, kill and destroy"**), will try anything to stop us from 'making disciples.' By this I mean introducing them to the Saviour, helping them develop a strong relationship with him, teaching them the basics of faith, equipping them to live and serve him, and giving them regular opportunities to express their faith.

The devil loves to

- encourage you to procrastinate
- keep you from seeing how important the ministry is
- distract you from your relationship with God
- discourage you because of a lack of support and resources

BUT you can easily overcome these things in your ministry if you commit yourself to God so he can use you.

# THE SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL IN A CHILD

We know that Jesus said that “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. (John 5.44).”

So being drawn to God does not have to come with a theological understanding. It is when God speaks to a person inside their heart, offering them relationship with him.

So a small child can respond to the Father, and once they are in God's family you can teach them almost anything from the Scriptures. It's just a matter of breaking it down into bite size pieces that they can understand.

Teaching children spiritual truth involves faith and is quite exciting. The Bible also tells us that it is “the Spirit who leads us into all truth (John 16:13).”

When we teach children we should anticipate the Holy Spirit bringing the truths to life in their hearts above and beyond what the normal mind can understand. This can change our thinking as we realise how important it is to teach them what God wants us to teach them.

The Holy Spirit easily bypasses the intellect and goes straight to the heart. He alone knows exactly how to communicate truth and life to each child, even when we have no idea how to help them. We just need to take the time to ask God what he wants us to share and then prayerfully believe in faith that his Spirit is speaking through us and bringing more and more life to them.

Children can be saved, baptised in the Holy Spirit, preach and teach, minister in the power of God, pray with great faith, live righteous lives, witness effectively, worship from their hearts etc. etc.

So bring them the Word of God and release them to minister in their amazing, childlike faith, and see God do amazing things in them and through them – just believe!

# WHAT YOUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY COULD LOOK LIKE

Children's ministries come in all different shapes and sizes and there are many different priorities, approaches and circumstances. The following is an example, that if found in every church, with variations relative to each setting, would result in great health in churches all over the world.

I picture children coming into Children's Church (or whatever your setting is) with smiles on their faces because they are happy to be there.

They run up to their small group leader, who they have a strong relationship with, and start sharing the latest news about their life. They feel welcome and loved. They bring their unchurched friends and love Jesus with all their heart.

The worship time starts and they sing and dance and have a great time and when the more worshipful songs start they close their eyes, raise their hands and worship their loving God. They listen intently to the messages and learn and respond.

I see a culture so healthy that when children visit who would normally be disruptive, they instead settle easily because of the presence of God and the culture of good behaviour.

The children are everywhere. They are in the worship team, they pray, they talk to one another about living for God. They are honest, open and passionate. They listen, learn and put into practice. They welcome, take up the offering, share testimonies and weep openly when they need prayer and support.

They care for one another and encourage one another. They minister in the adult church, on ministry trips and overseas on the mission field! They are children – and they are great!

Can you picture that?

Are you shedding a few tears of hope?

Is this possible?

Yes! Absolutely!

I have seen it in my Children's Church.

Is it all plain sailing?

No way!

You have to plan for it to happen.

You have to fight for it (spiritual warfare)

You have to believe it can happen.

You have to lead by example.

You have to implement the plan!

**YOU CAN DO IT!**

**TAKE NO PRISONERS!**

# **A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY**

Let's pretend you are in a small church with half a dozen not-so-darling children. You have just been asked to run the Children's Church. You have no resources, no helpers, no curriculum and no idea but hey! You'll do it – won't you?

There are plenty of people who find themselves in a situation very similar to this. Helpful people offer you resources that are dusty and ancient and will say anything they can to encourage you so they don't have to do it themselves.

However, the reason you had a brain snap and said 'yes' is a positive sign that you would like to make something wonderful happen! And it can.

**The only success that really counts is introducing children to a life-long relationship with God and the only way you can do that is if you have one of those yourself!**

**So here's a recommended plan of action to get started:**

1. Pray and ask God what he wants you to do with the children – what the ministry is to look like. Try and do this by shutting out all of your preconceived ideas and understanding and just letting the Holy Spirit show you what is best for your children and circumstances.
2. Pray further and ask God what you should do to get started. Sometimes God wants to use a creative gift or talent that you have as part of the plan.
3. Believe for the resources that you need.
4. Use the first few weeks to be very relational with the children. Find out about them. Share who you are. Keep the program

full and enjoyable because children will 'fill in' any spaces you leave.

5. After a few weeks give your testimony and then present the gospel. Ask for children to give their lives to God. Pray them through to salvation.
6. Start the discipleship process. To be ready to start discipling the children you will need to have spent time in prayer asking God how to go about it. It is important to remember that God knows exactly what is going on in their hearts and lives. Sometimes there are things going on that are so big that they are not ready yet to do things such as forgive or read their Bible or whatever else you may want to teach. Ask God what he wants, write it down, and then find scriptures, stories, illustrations, personal examples, object lessons or whatever else works best to make the messages clear. Try and have at least a month planned out.
7. Ask God to send more leaders and helpers as needed.
8. When you are ready, set up a message plan. This should include approximately 20 core subjects you believe should be covered in a 2 – 3 year period (Check out the Program Planning chapter).
9. Once the program is working and children have started responding, introduce memory verses and worship songs.
10. Now make it a priority to get children involved in praying, testimonies, song leading, speaking, communion leading, ministry etc. Anything that will get them expressing their faith is invaluable for the walk with God.

# THE POWER OF PRAYER

Let me inspire you to pray.

Many years ago my wife and I started up three afterschool children's clubs. One of them was hard work and another was okay. The third one, however, was heavenly with lots of children. Many of them gave their life to God and every moment was a joy. We were running the same program and it was in a tougher area. By worldly standards it should have been more difficult than the other two. So what was the difference? The difference came in the form of one man, Mr Stephens, who had been praying over the area for years.

Around 2004 my ministry took off. I went from having a handful of leaders to having 50 and the spiritual blessing was amazing. God was moving powerfully amongst the children and we were starting to take ministry teams to other places. This coincided with me being broken before the Lord and some people in our church meeting every week to intercede for the children's ministry and for me.

Another time we were sharing the gospel with a 12 year old girl. We asked her if she would like to become a Christian but she was not interested. It was like she had not even heard us. We tried again another time and it was like she was in a fog that we could not get through. We spent some time away from her, praying and using spiritual warfare against her blindness towards the gospel. We spoke again to her and she readily accepted Christ as her Saviour.

Another time we were preparing for a camp and spent a weekend away listening to God and sensing what he wanted. The time of intense prayer increased our faith immensely and God

moved powerfully in the camp. In one of the meetings I was speaking about the Father and his love for us. As children were coming to the front to respond I spoke of how God was weeping for them. Drops of water started to fall from the ceiling of the marquee onto the children that responded even though it was in the middle of a fine day!

Here in beautiful Caves Beach/Swansea in NSW there is great unity amongst pastors and we pray regularly together. It is making a distinct difference to the spiritual atmosphere.

Prayer works! Pray for your leaders, your children and your program. Teach your leaders to pray. Teach the children to pray. Believe for greater things than we have seen so far and then believe for greater things than anyone has ever seen!

John 14:12 "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

## THE SETTING

The setting for your children's program is very important. I was recently looking at a Children's Church program as it was being run on a Sunday morning. The Primary aged children had a very large hall. There were some obvious difficulties for the leaders. The children were not connected with the people trying to lead the program. There was also no atmosphere as it was a dark room with very high ceilings.

One of the younger groups had a small room. They had set it up nicely and it had a cosy feel to it. The children were focused and enjoying being there.

The younger children's leaders had a big advantage and it was much easier for them to run a program successfully. The large hall was a major hindrance and it was obviously a weekly battle to win the children's attention for the duration of the program. No one wants it to be that tough but with a little bit of planning most situations can be improved.

Everyone's situation is different. It is worthwhile having a good look at your setting to make sure you are creating the best atmosphere you can for the children. It can even be worthwhile getting someone not connected to your ministry to come along one day to see what they think of your setting.

I suggested that they could move the children from the large hall to a smaller room. Alternatively, they could put up dividers or curtains to contain the children to a workable space.

When you are using an area that is not yours think about how to bring your setting alive with things like posters, props and banners.

Even a lovely, bright table cloth on your table out the front can help.

# LEADERSHIP

# IT STARTS WITH YOU – THE LEADER

This chapter tackles two subjects; the importance of your personal walk with God and having God on the throne in your life.

## **The importance of your personal walk with God.**

When I had 50 leaders, of which 37 were teenagers, the success of the ministry rested squarely on my shoulders. If I taught them to pray, they prayed. If I was compassionate, they were compassionate. If I was a strong Christian, they would grow strong as well. There are exceptions to this of course, but after a number of years I could look at the teenage leaders growing into adulthood and see reflections of my strengths and weaknesses in them which was both exciting and frightening.

There is no substitute for a personal walk with God. If you spend time with God, developing in your relationship with him and allowing him to change you for the better, then every area of your life is affected. Your leaders/volunteers are watching you. It's easy to fool them into believing you are spending time with God, but if your relationship with God is not strong the ministry will suffer anyway.

When I have a consistent devotional time:

- I feel great
- Challenges and difficulties are easier to deal with
- I constantly discover truths I want to share as I read the Word and as the Holy Spirit teaches me
- I am full of ideas for the ministry
- I am stronger against temptation
- I am more spiritually aware
- I find myself praying for people and situations through the day as naturally as breathing
- I am a better husband and father

- I am a better leader
- I am a better person!

I can say with absolute certainty that your ministry has no hope of succeeding in real spiritual terms unless you have that intimate relationship with God. The times in my life when I have been too busy serving him to talk to him have been deserts in my ministry.

He is the **only** source of life and that life **only** comes from closeness to him.

### **Having God on the throne in our life.**

Our free will gives us the right to choose whether to submit to God in anything and everything. People say they are totally committed to Christ but I have never met someone who fulfils that claim. If we were literally fully surrendered to him then we would give up all 'our rights' and just do his will 100% of the time. Like Jesus did. **"I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38)."**

Can you imagine the average Christian having their annual meeting with God? It could go something like this:

'Okay God. This year I am going to spend more time in prayer. And that sin you have been talking to me about may have to stay on the backburner for a while because I have other issues I am dealing with right now. I'm going to increase my giving but you need to sort out my neighbour because I am worried I might do something 'unchristian' if those parties keep going so late.

Don't forget the new car I am believing for, and oh, I nearly forgot, I still have that ulcer trouble - just reminding you.

I am going to try and be more patient with my wife Lord, but don't forget to open her eyes about her reactions as well. Anyway, as you know Lord, I am fully committed to you. Sorry I have to rush. The church prayer meeting awaits me.'

It was fun writing that but sadly, there is too much truth in it for most of us. Imagine having an annual review with your boss where you tell him what you have decided you will and won't do and then you walk out before he can say anything. No doubt you'd be looking for a new boss to 'serve'.

What it amounts to is telling him what you have decided to do rather than listening to, and obeying, everything he requires of you! We 'allow' God to deal with sin in our life when we are good and ready and not before. Imagine if we were submitted to his work in our lives completely. Our lives would be full of his joyful presence and I cannot begin to imagine the power we would have to enlarge his Kingdom on earth. We might even see people raised from the dead and people falling down in repentance in shopping centres!

The gap to total commitment is immense for most of us, including me, but there is no reason why we can't keep working on it.

**The more surrendered we are to God, the more fruit we are going to see, not only in ministry, but in all areas of our life.**

# DEVELOPING TEAM

## MY STORY

My wife Janet and I worked together in children's ministry for many years. She was brilliant and together we were able to do so much that I never really thought about needing a team. The people who helped us were never grown as leaders – just helpers. After Janet left children's ministry it became difficult to accomplish everything I wanted for the ministry. So God sent Colin, a wonderful man to help me develop a vision for team.

One thing he showed me was that young teenagers make great leaders. Adults can be great also but they often take longer to encompass your 'DNA' and they are more set in their ways. Teenagers are so open and enthusiastic. I have been amazed at the way they develop as leaders – particularly when released, empowered and equipped to do the things they are passionate about and gifted in.

Many churches use teenagers to 'help' but few churches train them to be leaders. After a few years of developing team, the young people could run the whole program without any adult input. They produced manuals, DVD's and other resources and have done things I could never do. I wondered how to train leaders but found that the best training by far was simply to give them responsibilities.

**Always choose your leaders prayerfully.** It can be tempting to fill a need with anyone, particularly if you are desperate for workers, which is often the case. It is so easy to choose someone, but so difficult to remove them – particularly if they have an agenda – so choose carefully!

It can take a while to develop a successful team. You have to be prepared to sow a lot of time and effort into your leaders. Be careful you don't neglect relationship with the children. The end result is that you will have lots of leaders relating to numerous children. Team is your only hope of building something big, lasting and productive.

## **RELEASING & EMPOWERING**

To release – is to give someone the opportunity to take on a task.

To empower – is to give them the authority to develop and build their own vision with accountability but without unnecessary interference.

Bill Hybels states *“Ask leadership development experts what is the best catalyst for a leader's growth and they will answer in unison: ‘Make them lead something.’ No one can grow as a leader without the real life challenges of actually leading” (Courageous Leadership, 2002, pg134).*

When you do this there will be benefits and challenges:

### **BENEFITS**

- They will do things that you would not and cannot do that will improve the ministry
- You are able to put your time into other things
- They are part of your ministry area and as such you will receive praise for your expanding ministry
- You will have the joy of watching the maturity of leaders and ministries
- As people fulfil more and more roles – you are able to move up and up toward the ultimate dreams God has placed in your heart
- Releasing and empowering people has the potential of seeing your ministry thrive even if you leave
- Opportunities to instil kingdom values into the next generation of adults

## CHALLENGES

- To find the balance of giving them guidelines without **controlling** them
- They will make mistakes as they learn
- To face the reality that when things go wrong, you will often get them blame whether it's your fault or not
- To choose the right people
- To deal with difficulties arising from leaders who 'promised much but are delivering little'
- To be a big enough leader to deal with temptations resulting from the success of an expanding ministry
- To deal with leaders who are struggling with character issues that are effecting their ministry

**The following is an example of a leadership culture that we found successful.**

Firstly, we chose leaders one at a time through prayer and by personally approaching them. Once we had a few, we started to develop them and release them into ministry areas such as small group leading, song leading, timbrels, ribbons and banners, dance, drama, prayer, speaking etc.

As the ministry grew we invited more leaders. Then we found that it was necessary to put some guidelines into place. Each leader was required to attend leadership training and retreats, arrive early for church, be involved around 45 weeks of the year, attend another service so they did not miss out and lead or be an assistant leader in something. For new teenage leaders who were keen to join we approached the parents so they understood what was required. Often they would have to be the taxi service! We always kept in mind however, that every leader was a volunteer. Not all of your leaders will live and breathe children's ministry like you do. It's important to respect their family commitments and personal needs and remember that yes, you chose them but they also chose you. Treat them well.

At the start of each year we had a retreat for all the leaders. It was a time of fellowship, prayer and ministry. The main aim was to hear from God for ourselves, each other and for the children and direction of the ministry. These were incredible times of blessing and unity and were something that the teenagers loved – even more so than the fun weekend we would have in October as a thank you to all the leaders.

Everyone was involved in ministering in some way. We worked together as a team with each person contributing as they felt led and as their confidence increased. We took teams into regional Australia and other countries. These were incredible times. Everyone involved grew close as a team and leapt forward in their personal spiritual journeys.

You may be wondering how all of this could possibly work when there was so much required of each leader. I wondered that too but they thrived on it and if they had something like exams coming up we were always flexible. In fact, we had people begging to join our team regularly! They saw the culture and wanted in! At the end of each year we would ask some of the year 6 children to join the team and it was great seeing the excitement on their faces when they were asked. Unfortunately, there were often tears from children who were not invited but we could only take so many leaders!

**You cannot grow your ministry without a healthy team.**

# VISION – WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE

Bill Newman writes: *“If you had anything you wanted – unlimited time, unlimited money, unlimited information, unlimited wisdom – all the resources you could ask for – what would you do? Your answer to that question is your dream” (The Ten Laws of Leadership, 1993, pg 17).*

Vision is all about life:

The reason we are here on earth.

Why we get up every morning.

Why we push ourselves to win.

Why we won't take no for an answer.

How we feel life surging through our bodies.

*Dr David Yonggi Cho says, “You have to have a burning desire in your heart. If you do not have a burning desire, then wait and ask God to impart His desire to your heart. God does not like the lukewarm, for he specialises only in the red hot; if you have that red hot burning desire, then you are going to have results” (The Fourth Dimension, Vol.1 1979, p. 83).*

There is a chance that you are reading this and thinking that children's ministry is not your ultimate, God given dream. God may have placed you in your role for a time and you can use this time to serve him faithfully and thus prepare yourself for when God releases you into your heart's desire.

We love superheroes because they reflect our inner desire to do something great. I believe that this inner desire relates to the plan God has for us, that when infused with his power, can be accomplished.



Now could be a good time to stop and think where you want to be in 10 years in the following areas of your life:

1. spiritually \_\_\_\_\_
  2. ministry \_\_\_\_\_
  3. career \_\_\_\_\_
  4. family \_\_\_\_\_
  5. friends \_\_\_\_\_
  6. health & fitness \_\_\_\_\_
  7. bucket list \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **SEEING IT HAPPEN**

*“Vision is the fuel that leaders run on. It’s the energy that creates action. It’s the clear call that sustains focused effort year after year, decade after decade, as people offer consistent and sacrificial service to God” (Bill Hybels, Courageous Leadership, 2002, pg 31).*

Don’t forget that good can be the enemy to being great so don’t settle for anything less than the dream God is placing in your heart.

For those of you who are young remember that some of Jesus disciples were 17 year olds.

Most of all, remember that **“you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13).”**

# WORKING WITH YOUR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Many children's ministry leaders feel that the church leadership does not take much notice of them. This may be a problem but it's also an opportunity.

In my experience, not all, but most senior ministers have little understanding of the workings of children's ministry. It can be a foreign and frightening planet. They are busy preparing sermons, looking after people, running meetings, making decisions, studying, praying, doing office work, playing golf etc. They want a capable children's leader doing such a good job that the children are happy. Happy children mean happy adults. Happy adults mean families stay in church. The last thing they need is a headache about the children's ministry on top of all the other pressures such as getting their golf handicap down (yes, I am just joking).

There are many children's leaders pulling their hair out in frustration because 'no one seems to care'. They are under resourced, underpaid (you mean some are paid!?) and forgotten. Church leaders, whose job it is to focus on adults, can be scared of children's church and often feel a bit guilty because they know they should be more involved. They just don't know how and have little time to think about it.

**You have the power to make all this so much better!**

The following is a step by step suggested guide:

1. Ask to see your oversight who will either be the senior minister or some other nominated person. Better still; invite them over for a meal, letting them know that you would like to discuss the church vision and what the leadership expects from the children's ministry. If your church is strong on vision and purpose then you should be ready to listen as well as ready

with ideas yourself in case the leader does not have anything concrete in mind for your ministry.

2. After you have met, go away and work on the vision, goals and program and submit it to the leader for scrutiny. As part of the submission request a 30 minute meeting every 6 months so you can give progress reports and get feedback.
3. Keep your 6 monthly reports brief and informative. Cover things such as children's spiritual milestones, discipleship, attendance, things taught, lessons about to be taught, events you are planning such as camps, outreaches, ministry trips, finance, workers, praise points and frustrations. Keep it brief enough so your oversight can read it in less than 5 minutes and then discuss it with you.

There are some great benefits from this approach. The leadership will know what is going on and that will ease their conscience. They will be able to converse with people about the ministry because of the information they have gleaned from one short meeting. They will see your passion, success and frustrations and be more likely to provide more financial and other resources. They will be thrilled that your department is implementing the vision, which after all, is their heart for the church.

There are other things that you can do to bring further connection if you are able:

1. Provide family devotions and spiritual guidance.
2. Prepare intergenerational activities to connect across the generations. I.e. family camps, family fun days, children or specific families leading communion, children sharing what they have learnt with the church, children involved in 'adult' ministry trips, having older people come and share their life experiences with the children, children praying for adults in church, children performing dramas, singing on stage etc. etc.

These and many other ideas increase the profile of the children while at the same time giving them opportunities to express their faith. When a church starts to see the children in action, the whole church will get excited about what's going on. Families will join your church so their children can be part of such a healthy ministry.

Very few church pastors/ministers can or will make an effort to produce a healthy children's ministry. If you have felt neglected – forgive – and repent for your attitude! Determine in your heart to change your attitude to a great one and take on the full responsibility for promoting children's ministry in your church.

Children's ministry is seriously important but remember- so are many other things in the church. Move forward humbly and passionately. **Bring your ministry to life!**

# PROGRAM

# PROGRAM PLANNING – THE HEART

**RULE NO.1**

Always rely on the Holy Spirit to guide your program.

**RULE NO.2**

If you are using a curriculum, it's your slave, not your master.

**RULE NO.3**

Always look for ways for the children to be actively involved.

Always pray and ask God to guide you when you are preparing a program. You need to do this because only God knows the needs of the children. Get away by yourself or with your leaders and pray and listen to the Holy Spirit. Write down what he gives you and use it to plan the term (or however long you do your planning for).

This can seem like an overwhelming task; particularly if you have never done anything like it before. Just remember, God wants to speak to you about his children. All you have to do is listen. Putting it into a functioning program is really quite simple. For example, imagine that this is what you sense as you pray:

Peace

Forgiveness

A longing to be loved

Anger

A picture in your mind of a meadow, with children having a picnic and lying down, looking up into a beautiful sky.

Now God will guide you to add 'flesh' to the bones.

You found yourself thinking about anger because you are aware that it's a problem in a few of the children. You also sense that there are other children with that problem that you are not aware of and that this is the right time to address it. Things that come to mind are the story of Cain and Abel, a couple of personal

examples, a drama about two boys fighting; the scripture about not letting the sun go down on your anger etc. Suddenly you have material to tackle anger from a few perspectives over a few weeks.

If you think about this for a moment you will realise something quite exciting. If God is telling you to tackle this subject, it means he is going to do something lasting in the lives of children as you pray with the ones who respond and through the teaching you bring to them. If I could say to you that there will be a few children in your care where anger will no longer be a problem for them and that they will carry that victory over anger for their whole life would you want to be the vessel that God uses to impact them? If you had not prayed – but were ruled by a curriculum then you would have missed that great opportunity.

Am I saying to throw away curriculums? Not at all! A lot of work goes into them and that can save you a lot of time and effort. The more resources you build up, the more you have to draw on.

Here is a list of some of the resources that can be of benefit:

- Examples from your life
- Scriptures from the Bible
- Stories from the Bible
- Object lessons
- Examples from other people's lives
- Concepts and instruction from Christian books
- Curriculums
- Dramas

Work with your strengths. Are you a natural story teller or do you prefer to teach with lots of Scripture? Just remember not to go very long if you are a teacher and make sure you break the message down into bite size pieces for the sake of the children.

How good are you at communicating from the front? Develop your strengths and know your limitations. It took me years before I was a decent communicator. Now I love to preach to anyone and anything. I even preach to imaginary people as I walk along the beach. I just love to minister! If you are keen, don't give up – keep taking steps to improve.

The key with curriculums is to be the master, not the slave. Only use them word for word if that suits your situation best. Otherwise, take the bits that you feel to use and leave the rest. You may find a lesson on anger that has some good stuff in it that could be added to what you already have.

There are times, however, when it could be best to follow a curriculum closely, particularly if you find one that is a 'good fit' and that deals with some of your 'core value' subjects. For example, you may want to go over some foundations such as repentance, salvation, praying, Bible reading, witnessing etc. once every two years as part of your teaching priorities. If you find an excellent curriculum – use it. You can always put it on hold for a week or two in the middle of it if you suddenly sense a need to tackle a different subject for some reason.

Another thing you sensed when you prayed was the picture of a meadow, with children having a picnic and lying down, looking up into a beautiful sky. You may sense that this is linked to peace which in turn is linked to the other subjects of forgiveness, anger and the longing to be loved. That will help you understand what order to put things in. It would also help you to focus on what you are trying to achieve. For the children to enjoy the 'picnic in the meadow' and peace, they would need to have experienced God working their lives in the other areas. You need God to help you know how to present them so the children respond and have God work in their hearts in those areas. It's no use saying we should have love without offering it!

When children respond, they are moving forward in their faith. Value those times and minister into their lives.

Children are like sponges. They will soak up what we give them but if the sponge isn't used it will eventually get full and then nothing can be added.

Children need to be more than sponges. If you want to take the analogy further you could say that the quality of the water is important. If you have things in the bucket that are not relevant they are just going to make the whole process more difficult. Look at your program and get rid of the things that are not taking the children forward in their walk with God. You only have them for a very short time each week, so don't waste time on crafts and games and such like unless it assists the process.

Children need to be active in your setting and out in the world. Use small groups to get them sharing with and praying for one another. Use them up front for testimonies. In fact, you should aim to have children doing nearly anything. Get them active!

Children are often far more hungry for the things of God than we realise. If we would just give them opportunities to minister, they will surprise us and will quickly grow stronger in their faith.

## **THE GOD FACTOR**

I have seen many ministries successfully attract lots of children – but I have rarely seen one that seriously attempts to see each child effectively disciplined. As a result, few are held for the long term. This can be quite serious. Children who walk away from the church when they are teenagers often do so because they have not found a personal relationship with God. They can become quite hard towards the gospel because they 'had' church when they were little and it didn't mean anything to them. They do not

realise that God is far more than words in a book and games and prizes!

God is the only one who really knows what's going on in the hearts and lives of the children we are reaching. He knows what they need so we need to ask Him what He wants us to communicate to them! You may have a great curriculum so full of fun that children are coming from everywhere to join in. But if you do not have the 'God connection' there is a limit to your success.

Let me illustrate. You could be talking about loving your parents and have many props and fun things, a memory verse, prizes and take home ideas. Does it sound good? Well yes – but was the approach and timing right for the children from broken homes? Or the naughty little boy who hides under his bed in fear when daddy comes home drunk late at night? Or the girl who you wish would at least make an effort to join in who hates 'Uncle Harold' who baby sits every so often?

Children have many issues. Sometimes it is things like a dog with a sore paw and it seems trivial to an adult but can be huge for a child. I remember when I was about 8 our family ran out of rubber bands and I was worried that we were so poor that we couldn't buy any more. This is where small groups are crucial. If the relationships in the group are working properly children will share what is worrying them.

It's not satisfactory just to teach them a lot of generalities. Children have very real needs and are as capable as adults of being passionate about their relationship with God. I remember as a ten year old praying with great concern for my unsaved friend and my relationship with God was very real.

God is the only one who really knows what is going on in the hearts and lives of the children we are reaching. We have a

responsibility to pray and ask God what He wants to communicate to the children through us. Then we are on our way to seeing little lives changed miraculously.

Most of us want an excellent program so planning ahead is crucial. Time is often needed to refine the program and to add things like dramas. The more prepared you are the more you are able to include other people in various roles.

# DEVELOPING WORSHIP

Music is a gift God has given to mankind to worship him with.

One of the most amazing things about all of God's commands and laws is that they always benefit **us**! When we spend time praying it strengthens **us**. When we praise and worship God **we** are filled with his presence. When we love him, he loves **us** more. When we serve him, **we** feel fulfilled and store up treasure in heaven for ourselves! When we go through tough times God uses them to refine **us** for our sake. When we are persecuted God promises **us** great reward. No matter what happens he promises to work all things for **us** (Romans 8:28).

Worshipping God through music is one of the most wonderful things. It's like God knew we needed help to lift our eyes and hands towards heaven and proclaim his goodness so he sent us an enjoyable way to do it.

Singing songs in children's church is good and lots of children's songs are jumpy, catchy songs with plenty of actions. But nothing can replace worship. I once asked about fifty children from age eight to twelve to choose from a list of praise and worship songs and they chose worship songs above the faster praise songs almost completely! There were some great praise songs around at the time so I was very surprised.

Do not underestimate a child's desire to worship God from their heart. **We all fall in love with God a little bit more as we worship and children need that opportunity as well.**

There are plenty of great songs around so it's just a matter of deciding what to use. Children will happily sing along to a CD or DVD or if you are blessed with your own band then all the better.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY VERSES

As a preacher both to children and adults I am ever grateful to my Sunday school teachers from my Methodist days as a young child. They drummed the scriptures into me and that has been a massive help through the years not only for ministering but also for living an effective Christian life.

There is definitely an advantage in learning scripture when you are young. The retention rates in young children are great and the Word of God stays in their heart forever.

We have a responsibility to encourage children to memorise scripture and there are plenty of ways to do it. The main way is through puzzles and competitions. Sometimes you may want to do a whole passage where you add verses to it each week until it's complete.

Here are a few ideas:

- Parts of a verse in a balloon – burst the balloons and put the verse together
- Auction pieces of a verse
- Jigsaw puzzle
- Half letters
- Hidden pieces and swap with other teams

The list is endless and it can be lots of fun.

Make sure you print off take home copies of the verses so they can go over them ready for the next time you meet.

Another idea is to not teach the verse during your meeting. Just give them a take home passage and leave it to them to learn it at home. Give them an incentive to know it such as a prize or privilege or 'tickets' in the draw for a major prize.

To help children remember verses better it's a good idea to have a special prize for every child who can repeat all the verses off by heart at the end of the term. Sometimes children will just learn the verse at the last minute and then quickly tell you before they forget. However, if they have to remember all the verses then they will be far more focused and that helps to really lock them in.

As a starting point I would suggest that four or five verses about repentance and salvation would be very beneficial. This will help them with assurance and witnessing.

# THE GREAT POTENTIAL OF SMALL GROUPS

The small group concept that I am writing about refers mainly to a short time in a program where children gather together with a leader.

Small groups have some great advantages:

- ✓ They are good for building relationships
- ✓ Children of similar age can interact together
- ✓ They are more likely to share about their own lives
- ✓ You can use people of all ages to run them without them having to do much preparation
- ✓ Children are more likely to pray out loud
- ✓ You can learn about individual children and their life and struggles
- ✓ You can monitor their spiritual progress more easily
- ✓ They can learn to pray for and care for one another

The main thing I would not do in small groups is expect the leaders to give the message. It's too much responsibility and a huge duplication of effort. Small groups are a good place to discuss the message to make sure everyone understood it and what it meant to them.

When I was one of the leaders in Dad's children's ministry I used to look forward to the small group times. I had a group of about 10 older girls. It allowed the girls to make friends, become better friends and learn to respect one another. It was a great time to consolidate learning and answer any questions they had about the message. They were open and ready to share about their lives and how the message effected them. It is sad to think they would have missed this special time if we hadn't of had small groups.

Lizzy

There are many things you can do in small groups:

- Discuss the message briefly
- Ask each child a life question such as 'What do you like to do in your spare time' or 'what makes you really upset'
- Talk about what your answer would have been when you were their age
- Ask if anyone has a prayer request and get the children to pray for one another
- Mark off successful memory verse attempts from last week's memory verse

These small group times can have lots of other things in them and as a guide they should go for about 10 minutes.

Small groups should be seen as a prime opportunity to further disciple the children. From time to time you should ask yourself questions such as: Are the small groups helping the children grow as young Christians? Are they relating well together? Are the children expressing their faith to one another and gaining in confidence in life and in witnessing?

# CHILDREN LEARNING TO MINISTER

Children are capable of far more than most people realise when it comes to the things of God. The Bible gives us a strong clue when it says, “Let the children come unto me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it (Luke 18:16,17).”

Also Matthew 18:10 “Their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.”

Children have a certain innocence and trust that has not (usually) been bombarded by a faithless world long enough to blunt it. Have you ever been in the situation where someone says, ‘let’s pray healing for so and so?’ and you have enthusiastically joined in while wondering where you can find the faith to REALLY believe? Children don’t have the same struggles we do.

When you take this innocence and spread it across all areas of the Christian life, children are more prepared than adults to take the sort of faith risks that get God’s attention. This actually gives them a chance to develop a firm foundation of faith in action that will only grow stronger as they grow up.

Sadly, very few children get the opportunity to live out their faith in Church settings so that foundation can be laid.

**Children can do most things and it’s quite easy to develop them.** It just takes some thought and prayerful planning. Make out a list of ministry opportunities. A list that could include things such as:

- Dance
- Singing
- Leading communion
- Praying for other children after messages
- Intercession

- Mini messages
- Serving
- Welcoming
- Missions
- Ministry trips
- Dramas
- Instruments, possibly in a band
- Finance
- Roll keeping
- Pastoral care including a buddy system
- Anything else!

It's good to look at the gifts your leaders and helpers have. They could train children to do what they do. Children often learn as well as adults but usually just need to be taught in a simpler and possibly shorter form to suit their age and development.

When children are involved in what appear to be non-spiritual tasks it's important to teach them that all the gifts fit together towards success and so every gift is important. One way to highlight this is to have a formal time of prayer and releasing for all the children in their various rolls so they see themselves as equal parts in the whole picture.

Another way is to talk about the men and women that fight in a war to defend a country. Ask them where the weapons come from? And the bullets? Who tells them what to do? Who feeds the soldiers out in the middle of nowhere? How does the food get to them? What about their clothes and boots and who brings them the mail? And how long would they last without water? And what if they are wounded or get sick? Clearly the soldier has no hope of success without a huge amount of support.

Another option is to talk about parts of the body trying to survive without the rest of the body from [1 Corinthians chapter 12](#).

## **SO HOW DO WE BRING CHILDREN TO THE POINT WHERE THEY CAN MINISTER?**

The simple answer to that is just to get them doing it. One of the hardest things is to get kids to speak - so if you can get them to speak you can get them doing nearly anything. Right? You could give a few children the opportunity to speak for five minutes each in a couple of week's time and then see what happens. In most cases they will speak for one to two minutes, speak too fast and communicate a lot less than you were hoping for.

I would suggest asking for volunteers; then give them some separate tuition. Give them topics to choose from or have one topic and break it up into parts for them. Help them know about finding scriptures, introduction, body and conclusion.

Let them know that personal examples, illustrations, stories or object lessons can help. Teaching children to preach is like teaching them to learn an instrument. It takes time and practice but the results can be music to the ear!

As well as speaking, here are a few ideas that you could put into practice:

- When children respond, get other children up to pray with and for them.
- Have a prayer team where the children pray for 10 minutes before the service – or better still have them meet sometime through the week.
- Start a singers/worship group
- If you have a band look to include children where ever you can.
- Create a 'welcoming team' who prepare gift packs for visitors, make them feel welcome and look after them.

There are children who are restless, but when they are given responsibility they often settle remarkably. Make sure you value the spiritual aspects. Don't give children who are not relating to God spiritual responsibilities in the hope that they will change. Children will not appreciate being prayed for by someone whose life does not measure up.

Children are capable of doing great things in ministry – just give them the opportunity!

## PUTTING FUN INTO THE PROGRAM

I believe that programs should have elements of fun from time to time. By that, I mean that everyone is enjoying themselves. So I am not just talking about games and competitions. There are other things such as surprises and humour and enjoying God's presence – after all God has a sense of humour! It could be well worth while getting your team together and brainstorming on 'fun' over pizza. This could help also if the ministry isn't as enjoyable as you would like.

This in no way is meant to take away from the spiritual component of the program. When we run camps our philosophy is 'fun, food and fellowship'. If children are enjoying themselves playing games and are getting good food, they are in the right frame of mind to respond enthusiastically to God.

There are times when I use humour. Sometimes I even use it when praying with children. There was a boy who went to sit back down after I had prayed for him but I kept calling him back and adding to what I was praying into his life. It was very funny and added to the atmosphere. It did not take away from the importance of what we were doing and it helped children enjoy the time of ministry.

Humour and fun must have come from God so we should use it and enjoy it – just never diminish anyone or compromise what God is doing and **NEVER** devalue someone's life through humour!

I was at a camp once and the guest speaker was a bit of a prankster and had water dumped on me in the middle of a program. Another time an eight year old girl came up to me while I was explaining something to a camp of one hundred and forty and said I was wanted urgently on the phone. I apologised to the camp and headed off only for her to say that she was just kidding!

Have you ever tried sticking magnets on the back of a board so that no one can see someone moving them from behind? The metal markers on the front keep moving out of place every time you look away from the board to the children. They go ballistic trying to tell you what is happening.

A surprise 'This is Your Life', moment, great prizes, fun games, mysteries, enjoyable memory verse puzzles, captivating stories! Be creative. HAVE FUN!

If you are a really big ministry you could nominate leaders to constantly work on things that are going to delight the children and make the program more enjoyable for everyone. Camps are a great opportunity to concentrate some fun activities and surprises.

I once half buried a metal box at a camp so that when we went for a walk the children discovered it. Inside the box were strange instructions and keys and things. We put the children into teams, gave each team items from inside the box and set them loose to follow the instructions and try and find whatever the mysterious 'treasure' was. They didn't notice that there just happened to be enough of everything in the box so every team got everything they needed. The game was extra successful because the children thought it was not related to the camp and was therefore mysterious. The treasure at the end was a stack of shiny \$1.00 coins hidden in the handle of an anchor out in the lake.

I specialise in huge games - particularly night games out in the bush with bandits and guardians and snotty nosed monsters and all the usual suspects you would expect in a children's game. People remember the games for the rest of their lives because of the effort that goes into them and the incredible (and possibly a little bit scary) time they had. For children with little contact with

church these are memories that make them feel good about the church and so they are more likely to return then or in the future.

What are you good at? What fun do you like to have? How can you bring more enjoyment into the lives of the children in your care?

# MINISTRY

# HOW TO CHANGE LIVES THROUGH MESSAGES

The message is the most important part of your program. Think of it like this: You have prayed and God has given you a message to pass on to the children. Your duty and desire needs to be to see that message not only clearly understood, but also come to life in the hearts of the recipients. When you teach about the importance of forgiveness it's great to know the children are listening and understanding all about it. But that is not enough. **You must give them an opportunity to action what they have learnt.** They need to have an opportunity to pray and forgive during or after the message.

The message is not always just the 'preaching' time; songs are often chosen to go with the theme and there are other ways to introduce and enhance the message; drama, dance, object lessons and testimonies to name a few.

The preaching time is very important. This is when you pass the message to the children that you received from God.

For a successful message you need to:

- have prayed until you are sure what you are going to speak about
- know exactly what you are wanting to achieve in the lives of the children
- clearly state the purpose or aim of the message in the introduction
- ask the Holy Spirit to help you find the best way to make the message clear
- use stories, scriptures, testimonies, object lessons etc.
- where needed, give the children the chance to respond for prayer or action

## **How long should you speak?**

I am amazed that the preaching in church always takes the same amount of time. In some churches it takes 90 minutes to get the message across, in others 60, in others 40 and yet others 20 minutes. Maybe the congregation is a bit thick in some churches so they have to go longer? Or maybe some preachers need longer to say something? I say that in jest but I think that you should take as long as needed (allowing for children's concentration spans of course) to get the message across. Your guide might be 15 minutes but some messages will take 10 and others 30 minutes depending on the concept.

Getting the message across clearly is important but so is the response time. I remember one preacher telling us that there was going to be an amazing time at the end of his message where God would turn up and do wonderful things in our lives. Unfortunately he spoke for an hour to the children and there was no time left for anything other than waking the children up so they could go home.

# ALTAR TIME

I accidentally spelt this title as 'alter time' and then thought how appropriate that is. The altar time is when we 'alter' or change our lives in some way to become more Christ like.

Let me state quite clearly that the devil hates altar time because it moves people away from his world and more into God's world. Preachers (like the one I spoke of in the previous chapter) want God to touch people's lives, but when it comes down to it they often lose confidence and the altar call is minimised or not actioned at all.

This is nothing more than the devil hindering the work of God through fear. The thing about altar calls is they often take us out of our comfort zone and into faith where we are not quite sure how many are going to respond and how things are going to turn out.

I live for these times. I love to see lives changing through the miraculous work of God. When people respond they are saying that they need something to change and that they need help to see that happen. Whether it be healing, salvation, forgiveness, overcoming or whatever the reason, in most cases it's an opportunity to see genuine change.

There was a man in our church who would respond nearly every time we had an altar call. His life was a mess but his heart was for change. I encouraged him one day by letting him know that it was okay to keep coming out as God was doing a continuous work in his heart. Some people need to go to the doctor regularly because they have serious health issues. Some people need regular ministry to help them overcome serious life issues.

I have seen some people respond to the call to salvation regularly. There is a reason for this. Often it's a sense of

unworthiness. They feel that they can never truly be accepted by God. They are right about the unworthiness in that none of us are worthy but they need to understand that if God accepts them, they must be of great value.

Sometimes repeat responses just show a lack of understanding about salvation and some good teaching – particularly one on one - can help them realise they are secure in God's family.

Whenever I pray with a child or adult, I always ask why they have come out the front. Children in particular will respond for random reasons. I remember being thrilled that a child came out the front to give their life to God only to find that they wanted me to pray for their sick dog. If I had not asked, I would have just asked them to pray the sinner's prayer after me and return to their seat – after all, that was what the altar call was about. They would have gone and sat down and wondered why I didn't pray for their dog! By praying for their dog I may also have made it easier for them to respond to the gospel next time.

Asking them what they would like prayer for also helps them focus on what it is they really want. As they say it, it helps them firm it up in their heart. Jesus often asked people what they wanted. When someone was blind or crippled it was blatantly obvious what they wanted but he wanted them to verbalise it. I guess it became a fresh confession of faith toward the need in their life. There is power in saying the things in your heart out loud.

Purposefully finish speaking so there is plenty of ministry time. Don't make the mistake of running out of time. Use a time keeper if need be.

**Make sure when you teach about something that you also give children the opportunity to action it in their lives.** You probably know the saying, 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't

make it drink'. What you don't want to do is lead the children to living water then take the water away just when they are ready to drink! Altar time, (ministry time), is where transactions are made between us and God. It is when they experience him personally. They are times that lock our faith in stronger and stronger as we invite him deeper and deeper into our personal world.

Learn to love these times and let your faith rise as God meets with the children personally as you minister to them.

# CONNECTING CHILDREN TO GOD

Think about what a Christian child would look like if you were completely successful at discipleship. They would be a joy to watch as they love and serve God. This is the great commission so we should pursue it with a passion!

Matthew 28:19,20 "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

## CHILDREN CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH SALVATION

The starting point is of course salvation. The most exciting thing we can ever see in ministry to children is when a child responds to the gospel. We know that filling children with all sorts of Bible stories and spiritual information is almost a complete waste of time unless they are born again.

When a child says 'yes' to God the greatest miracle of all occurs. Their spirit is brought back to life by the amazing power of the Spirit of God. Eternal death changes to eternal life! If we are serious about making disciples we must first, prayerfully, offer them salvation, believing that the Holy Spirit is at work in their hearts to draw them to God.

Luke 15:10: "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

## CHILDREN CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH PRAYER

Once a child is saved they have entered into a wonderful, loving relationship with God. People are often taught to pray primarily to ask God for things but the most important aspect of prayer is about relationship with God. Children need to learn how to relate to God as they pray.

Here are some points to help children come close to God through prayer:

**Making sure there is nothing between them and God.** The Bible says in *Isaiah 59:2* “Your sins have separated you from your God. They have caused him to turn his face away from you” And then *1 John 1:9* “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Also from the Lord's prayer: *Matthew 6:12* Forgive us our sins, just as we also have forgiven those who sin against us.

**Worship.** The Lord's prayer starts as “Our Father in heaven, may your name be honoured (*Matthew 6:9*).” Children should spend a few moments letting God know how much they love him.

**Talking to God about things that are going on in their life** such as relationships, struggles and needs. So we also see from the Lord's prayer: “Give us today our daily bread (*Matthew 6:11*)” and *verse 13*: “Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted. Save us from the evil one.”

## **CHILDREN CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH THE BIBLE**

It's possible to read the Bible and get very little out of it so our approach is important. Children need to learn that when they are about to read their Bible they should first pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to them through the scriptures. This takes it from being just words to being alive and personal. This doesn't mean that everything they read is going to jump out of the pages and send them spinning in wonder, but there will be plenty of times when God does speak to them. It's like eating good food. Some meals are memorable, but all meals are beneficial. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (*2 Timothy 3:16,17*).”

Help them understand about *rhema* words – scriptures the Holy Spirit quickens to them that speak wonderful life into their circumstances. Let them know that as they get more and more of God's word in their hearts, the Holy Spirit has more scriptures to remind them of when they need help. This is why it's important to teach scripture as memory verses so children are getting it locked into their memory forever.

If children do not have a guide to help them when they are reading their Bible they should set themselves to read a small passage of scripture each day, relying on the Holy Spirit to teach them things.

You can give them support by running a small group time each week where children have had the same passages to read through the week. They share what God spoke to them about and that helps keep them on track with their devotions and helps encourage them to persevere.

## **CHILDREN CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH FELLOWSHIP**

Acts 2:42 "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

When children get together in Children's Church or similar, they need to experience true fellowship. Fellowship is worshipping God together. It's important to get children interacting together to the point where they talk openly with one another about their love for God and living for him. You need to have children pray for one another whenever you can.

Line up children to talk about aspects of their faith such as when they were born again, struggles with temptation, how hard it is to witness, what they need from God. The list is endless.

It's crucial to get children interacting in life giving ways rather than just sitting and listening. They need and want life, and life means action!

Don't let a curriculum or tradition stop you! Many children's leaders are frustrated with their lack of results. To change this, you need to prayerfully plan things that will see children responding to God and then being active. Start one step at a time. You can give the children opportunities for personal response to messages, and then gradually introduce children to praying for others who respond. The next step is encouraging them to share their testimony and verbalising their spiritual experiences. Before long they will be comfortable talking 'God stuff' with one another.

## **CHILDREN CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH OBEDIENCE**

The Bible says in many places that if you love God you will show this by obeying him.

1 John 2:3-5 "We know that we have come to know God if we obey his commands. Suppose someone says, 'I know him', but suppose that person does not do what God commands. Then that person is a liar and is not telling the truth. But if anyone obeys God's word, then God's love is truly made complete in that person. Here is how we know we belong to him. Those who claim to belong to him must live just as Jesus did."

The two ingredients to help us obey God are staying connected to God, where his strength will help us, and making a daily decision to obey him in every way. We need to help children by teaching this very clearly and then giving them further practical guidelines.

One way you can do this is by having children make suggestions on struggles they have being good, then organise workshops on

those suggestions. For example, a child will probably want sibling problems talked about. Children would then make suggestions about how to work through those specific problems. On the way they will learn that some things can be solved by staying clear of problem areas while other things are unavoidable. You can then teach them how to overcome in situations. This may take some weeks to work through but the benefits will be enormous.

The big plus in this approach is that the children are asking the questions and inputting into the solutions. They will also discover that they can contact you or one another for support when they are struggling.

Connecting children to God is often easier than people realise. You just need to be purposeful about it and plan how you are going to implement it so it engages the children. There is nothing in this world more wonderful than making successful disciples. Have a go and make a difference!

# A STRONG GOSPEL

I believe that the presentation of the gospel needs to be strong and purposeful. I have seen too many altar calls that present what you get without proclaiming what you need to give. Jesus gave his life for us to redeem us – buy us back. He did not have to do that. He owes us nothing and we – the sinners – who have turned our back on God, owe him everything!

When we present the gospel we need to make it clear that:

- We are sinners and deserve to pay the price for our sin.
- God sent Jesus to be punished in our place.
- We need to give our whole life to God. Every part of our life – forever! To repent means turning from living our life our way to living our life God's way. **Acts 26:20** "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."
- By giving our life to God we become part of God's family and receive forgiveness for our sin.
- As a Christian, life will be hard but wonderful and one day we will enter heaven to live forever.

I then ask if anyone would like to give their life to God. I always state very clearly that **this is a decision to live totally for God for the rest of their lives.** I do this because I don't believe in undervaluing the gospel. The offer of salvation is something we should be prepared to literally walk throughout the entire world to find because Jesus is the **only way** to secure eternity and true happiness. Salvation is the greatest miracle someone could ever receive.

It is important to remember that **"no one comes to the Son unless the Father draws them (John 6:44)."** I cannot win anyone to Christ in my own strength. Only the Father can by speaking to them and

offering them life. We are just the vessel. The exciting thing about that is that I can simply believe he is speaking to their hearts and that they will be responding to him – not me.

I have never been able to understand the 'bow your heads and close your eyes – no one looking around' approach. Imagine this. 'Okay everyone. Bow your heads and close your eyes. You all know why we are here and this is your opportunity so while no one is looking around slip your hand up if you would like to be in the soccer team! This is the greatest, life changing, miraculous, forever decision you could ever make! This is not the time for timidity. How can we expect someone to share the gospel with their unsaved friends when they became a Christian in secret in a crowd of Christians!?

I am always prepared to make the call to repentance clearly and quietly wait for a response. It's God's work, not mine. If I have to go up a gear to try and convince people it could just be desperation related to my ego. There are exceptions to this of course so it's important to allow yourself to be guided by the Holy Spirit at all times.

One day you are going to stand before your King. We don't know exactly what is going to happen but it is quite possible that there will be multitudes of angels and saints applauding and cheering the line of people attributed to your faithfulness. It would be sad if in the midst of that celebration you noticed some people missing because you 'forgot' to make sure you offered them life. I know that's heavy but this is life and death and we are the only ones God has instructed to offer people life.

**Matthew 28:19 "Go and make disciples of all nations."**

**Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."**

Matthew 28:19 gives us our instructions and Revelation 22:12 speaks of our reward. I think it is safe to say that the great commission is the most important thing we are instructed to do. What we did in reaching others is most likely to be the main focus of our reward.

# THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a wonderful thing in the life of a Christian. My Dad was a Uniting Church minister. My parents had never heard of healing or the baptism in the Holy Spirit until I was about fourteen years old. I am so grateful that they were open to new things from God. I remember lying on my bed and wondering how King David as a boy growing up could have a heart so filled with worship for God. When I was baptised in the Holy Spirit at age seventeen worshipping God suddenly became a natural and exciting part of my relationship with my Creator.

These are some of the areas that are enhanced once we are filled with his power.

1. The boldness to witness
2. The ability to easily worship from our heart
3. An increased love for God
4. An extra strength within us to defeat temptation and overcome sin
5. A greater desire to live victoriously no matter what
6. An awakening to the authority we have against the evil one
7. A greater faith and power in our prayer life

The power of God helps us in so many ways and they all apply to the life of a child. We all remember what it was like growing up. There is no more important time for children to have the power of God assisting them than when they are forming their values and character at a young age. Children face temptations, need to win their friends to Jesus, are attacked by the enemy's plans and need something to love and worship. In fact, they need strength for everything and we should be passionate about them receiving God's power into their lives. The devil is no respecter of age. He does his best to harden young children to the things of God while their character and values are still being formed. This alone shows

how important it is that we equip children with the power of God while they are still young!

**It is important that children see the baptism in the Holy Spirit as something they genuinely need.** I believe that we should teach in such a way that the children see that they need to be filled. Often children (and adults) respond and then just hope something is going to happen without them engaging personally. I have noticed that when children get the 'revelation' that they need God's power and then get actively involved in seeking it, God gets involved! Those powerful times create lasting memories for everyone.

**When we are baptised in the Holy Spirit the power of God often is seen in our emotions.** I was praying for a group of eleven and twelve year old children and it was quite obvious they were being filled because of their emotions. There was some weeping and some joy and afterwards when I asked them to explain their experience this was confirmed. The next day I gave the same message to children around seven to ten years of age but when we prayed for them there was not much evidence via their emotions. However, when I asked for testimonies it was obvious that they had as deep an experience as the older children but that their outward emotions were not as developed due to their age. Being baptised in the Holy Spirit is not God touching our emotions. Rather, our emotions are moved by the power of God coming on our life.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a free gift but that does not mean children will fully appreciate it. **It is up to us to guide them and teach them about it.** I am hopeless with information technology. I was given a good quality camera by my family a while ago but I still treat it as an old fashioned one. I point it and take the photo. Anything else is beyond my comprehension! If I took the time to

study the instructions and listen to my daughter I would probably discover a whole world of amazing functions.

Children not only need to be filled, they also need to understand the wonders of what they have received. Explain the 'benefits' of the power and help them understand and receive the gifts of the Spirit. I can tell you from firsthand experience that when a child prophesies in church with the anointing of God it has a powerful impact!

**Speaking in tongues or our prayer language** is an important aspect of being baptised in the Holy Spirit. It's a fairly natural thing to worry that we are going to make a fool of ourselves and so some people don't take the step of faith and start speaking.

I find my prayer language to be of immense benefit. Just simply praying in tongues quite obviously strengthens my spirit. Sometimes I pray for things using my prayer language; especially when I don't know specifics about a situation. The Spirit, who knows all things, then intercedes through me. It is also often part of my worship as I sing. I believe people should continue to pursue God until they have received 'power from on high' and their prayer language.

I find that the infilling of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues are acts of faith. Faith that God is going to fill you and faith that when you open your mouth and start speaking, he will speak through you in a language you have never heard before. Sometimes when we are praying for people we need to be patient. When it takes a while it can be a sign that God is working in hearts to position them so they are ready to be filled.

It is also important to remember that children are more ready and willing to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit than adults.

**We need to encourage children to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.** We are told in Ephesians 5:18 to be filled with the Spirit. This instruction is not a once off experience but a command to be continually filled. Once children have experienced the filling of the Spirit they need to understand that the things of this world are a drain on the power of God in our lives. They need to have it reinforced time and time again that the power to live for God comes from a close relationship with him. This can only happen through prayer, Bible reading and fellowship as discussed in the chapter on 'Connecting Children to God'.

# **WIDER THINKING**

# OUTREACHES

I have seen many children's outreaches where a huge emphasis is placed on 'fun' and the spiritual aspect is but a few minutes.

To be blunt, this doesn't work.

At the beginning of the book I talked about how we can offer the children something that the world cannot offer – Jesus. We need to believe that he is going to impact their lives so they will come back for more. We need to make it 'church' for the local neighbourhood kids.

It's great to have big prizes, lots of fun and special events but NEVER shy away from presenting God to them, seeing them saved and then discipling them. I have talked about the discipling process in the Connecting Children to God chapter.

Outreaches are great places to have themes and these can be a lot of fun planning. Just make sure you don't let the theme water down the power of the message you are bringing them.

Some theme ideas include:

- A biblical theme such as love, fruit of the spirit, battles etc.
- General themes such as aliens, circus, pirates etc.
- Latest craze or movie themes

One of my favourite ways to do a theme is to pick something fun and popular and draw out spiritual themes from it. For example, we have a kid's camp coming up and the theme is 'the circus.' There are so many spiritual lessons that tie in with this theme! One example is to liken the tightrope walk to stepping out in faith.

If you are into competitions and points to enthuse children to 'get in the door', remember their memory verses, bring new friends and behave, then here are a few ideas:

- Sets of cards to be collected with a reward for collecting the whole set
- Simple points made from cardboard or raffle tickets
- Play money that can be spent at a shop you have set up where saving up for the better items is an incentive to come each week.

There is almost no end of ideas for the fun side of an outreach.

I once decided to reduce the time spent on the spiritual and increase the time spent on games so we could attract more children. The numbers dropped!!! As soon as I changed back the numbers increased again. That was an important lesson for me because it got me thinking... why? I realised that they were coming to 'drink from the Living Water' and that the fun and games were just a pleasant addition.

Jane Mackey, a children's pastor in Sydney, ran an afterschool prayer meeting for children where that's all they did – pray. It was extremely successful because it built relationship with God and one another. In fact, people from all over the world have run with the concept because they saw how successful it was in Jane's ministry. Thanks Jane for stepping out in faith and obedience.

The best way to start an outreach is to pray first. God knows the best format for reaching the local children and families. He may even tell you to do something you would never dream of doing. But remember; because he is in it, it will be successful.

**A children's outreach should be supported by the church.** If your church gets behind your ministry then it is far more likely to succeed. Although your immediate objective is to reach the local

children, the greater objective is to reach whole families. Have some people there whose role is to say hello to the parents as they drop off or pick up their children. That friendly connection is an important bridge. Have a BBQ or family fun day or similar at the end of each term where you invite the whole family.

Your church can plan to have bridging events to encourage families into the church atmosphere. Special events such as Easter, a concert, Christmas in July, a church picnic or something like Alpha. These things help the adults get a feel of your church without jumping full on into a church service.

Lastly, you may consider running an outreach as **a combined churches effort**. There is something special about this and people respect Christians when they work together across the denominations. It also helps when you do not have enough people to run one by yourself.

# MINISTRY TRIPS

You may be wondering why I would include ministry trips as a subject. There are a number of reasons, but first let me define what a ministry trip is to me. It is a journey to another church, region, state or country where the aim is to minister to other Christians and/or unbelievers and where every member of the team has a role.

The benefits for the people/children you are ministering to are:

- ✓ The impact of the messages that you bring
- ✓ The inspiration they get from your team
- ✓ The relationships that occur
- ✓ The support it gives to churches
- ✓ The fresh perspective you bring
- ✓ Outside people sometimes bring people to Christ that the local church has not been able to move

The benefits for the people/children in your team are:

- ✓ They grow spiritually through the whole experience
- ✓ They grow in their ability to minister in some way
- ✓ They are putting their faith into action
- ✓ They are working in a team
- ✓ They are building relationships
- ✓ They gain knowledge and perspective from the people on the team and the people they are ministering to

We all want the children, teenage leaders and adult leaders to grow in our ministry. There is no better way than through ministry trips. You don't need a crowd – a few will do - and you just need a place to minister.

When you have a destination and are planning what to do, the most successful approach I have seen is to gather your team together to seek God. Have them all, children included, ask God

to show them what the needs are and what he wants spoken or done. God will speak to them by giving them a word/s, a picture, a prophecy, a scripture, a vision or other.

When they have waited on God for a few minutes ask them what God gave them and write it up so everyone can see. You may need to repeat the process if it has started slowly. Once you have finished it's amazing how it all fits together.

Now you need to prayerfully decide what goes where as you match it up with the itinerary. Then, of course, you need to decide who is doing what task.

This is when the trip becomes very exciting. Everyone is involved from the prayer planning and because of this, each person has ownership of the trip. The children feel valued because of their prophetic contribution and when what they received from God is happening it's great for their faith.

There are numerous roles children can have. Things such as intercession, speaking, testimonies, setting up, games, craft, technical, drama, dance, singing, playing an instrument, object lessons and praying for people who respond. It's important to explain that things such as the sound and setting up are not just practical things but are part of the spiritual. Making sure the sound is good and the setting is right are important contributing factors to the spiritual atmosphere.

# HELPING PARENTS

We know that, unfortunately, very few parents do enough spiritual development in their children's lives. In a perfect situation, parents would be taking full responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of their children and children's church would be the 'fellowship' time with others their own age.

But we don't have a perfect situation so we do most of the spiritual development in most of the children. The important factor to remember here is that even after our best efforts, parents have a massively greater influence on the lives of their children. It is only when we have children coming from non-Christian homes or when God is doing miraculous stuff in a child's life that your children's ministry can have a greater impact than the parents.

With that in mind, we should do all we can to assist and equip parents. Many parents feel guilty about how little they are doing but don't know how to fix it. Consider having a parent time at the beginning of each term after the morning church service. A potential 60 minute program could run as follows:

## **Open in prayer**

**To help them relax ask them to form small groups of up to 8 people and get them to share something about their life with one another.**

This is meant to be the time that helps them relax so the question needs to be enjoyable. Something like, 'share about your favourite holiday spot when you were growing up' or 'what is the thing most likely to make you laugh hysterically'.

**Tackle a subject such as finding time in a busy schedule.**

Mix this up with testimonies, questions, discussion etc. The more people talk, the more they are connecting to the subject. If the subject is something like 'what is the biggest obstacle to you having family devotions regularly', you may find people open up or you may find people are reluctant to admit that they are not having devotions at all. Just be ready to speak for a few minutes on obstacles and how to overcome them if there is little response. Don't try and force answers or your next meeting will not be well attended!

**Get them to pray (and talk if they are keen) for one another for something to do with the spiritual development of their children.**

This is done in the small group. Once again, be aware of how open they are prepared to be. There are many things that could be discussed. You may even ask them for subject ideas for the future.

**Give them material that guides their family devotional time for the next term.**

Maybe give them enough for 3 or 4 days a week for the term. Leave them to be responsible for the rest of each week. A family devotional time is actually a wonderful opportunity for relationship building. I would suggest the following as a guide:

- Someone to open in prayer asking God to show everyone something from the Bible passage and to bless the time together.
- A life question of which there are thousands that can be thought up. The same type of questions that you would use to start the parent meetings. What's your favourite colour and why? What's your favourite sport and how did you come to like it? It's good to extend the question to 'why' so that you don't just get one word answers. These questions help families understand one another better. Throw in the

occasional deeper question such as 'what scares you?' or 'when do you feel sad?' Questions like these help the family talk about things and they can be one another's support. You may also want to leave the occasional spot for a family member to decide on the question for the day.

- A Bible passage to read that could be from just a few verses up to a whole chapter. The idea is for them to share what they got out of the passage. If there is a lot to digest in just a few verses, then only give them those few verses but if there is a good story or the need to read more for it to make sense then use a longer passage. Adding a question or two can help stimulate discussion. Don't forget that you are targeting around 10 to 12 minutes for the whole family time so keep things brief.
- Prayer requests both personal and other. It's good to suggest they pray for something specific as well as any personal needs each time. Things such as missions, unsaved friends and relatives, spiritual and political leaders, their church, people in need etc.

### **Field any questions.**

Give them the opportunity to ask questions and encourage other parents to offer answers as well as yourself. The more they help one another the better.

### **Have the children join you for the last 15 minutes**

#### **Guide everyone as they do the first devotional together.**

When the children join you get them to do the first devotional time together. Some parents tend to draw devotions out so they become boring for the children. Guide them through step by step, keeping it moving so the whole thing is finished in 10 -12 minutes. Ask if there are any questions or comments and then thank them for participating.

### **Pray over them to finish.**

**Ultimately it's up to you what format something like this would take.** The biggest hurdle could be getting the parents to come. They need to be able to relax and participate. You may want to entice them with a lovely morning tea or even lunch at just the cost of the food. Go for a warm and informal setting.

Don't single someone out and interrogate them about their efforts at home in front of everyone. On the other hand, you could get testimonies from people who are seeing some success. You can share about your own experiences in this area too. One of the best ways to help people relax is by telling them that it is hard to remember and find the time for family devotions. It's very normal and very common. Once they see that most are in the same boat they will be more willing to open up.

#### **OTHER WAYS TO INCOURAGE PARENTS**

Devotional books from Christian bookstores.

Maybe some input from the Pastor re subjects he/she would like discussed at home.

Running with the church or children's church theme.

# INTERGENERATIONAL CONCEPTS

It's exciting when all ages are doing 'God stuff' together and it's not as hard as most people think.

A simple example is communion. All age groups are capable of distributing it and most could lead it as well. Families can share the responsibility together. The main hurdle is making sure children are included in the process.

Prayer is another easy one. Churches often have prayer meetings but children rarely attend. Why not invite the children to join in! If your kids are in the church service for a while before going out, why not occasionally have a time of church prayer all together where there is a conscious effort to include the children? One of the easiest ways to do this is in small groups. You could ask them to pray for one another and extend it to asking the groups to pray for things like missions.

To be really serious about making worship intergenerational you need to stop and really think about how you would go about it in your setting. It's not just about everyone doing things together, it's making sure they are relating across the generations.

Having older people volunteer to come to Children's Church and spend a couple of minutes talking about some aspect of their life when they were a child is valuable. It helps the children appreciate the older ones and connects them a little more. The same could be done with the teenagers.

Tammy Tolman, [www.tammytolman.com](http://www.tammytolman.com) has an excellent book called 'Collide' on this invaluable subject which is well worth purchasing.

# CAMPS

*Camps often achieve more in a few days than is achieved in a whole year of programs.*

*Camps are particularly effective for seeing life changing decisions.*

There are a number of reasons why camps are excellent avenues for blessing.

- The atmosphere builds as a camp progresses.
- There is no coming and going – you have the same people all the time.
- There is a fresh spiritual atmosphere away from home and church.
- There has usually been strong prayer input.
- There is usually a team working together towards a common goal and **“where there is unity God commands the blessing (Psalm 133).”**

Decisions are often remembered for life because they occurred at a special location.

## **SECRETS TO SUCCESS**

There is nothing more important than prayer when planning your camp!

The team for camp needs to be chosen prayerfully. You may be tempted to choose the best games leader in the world even though they are unsaved or backslidden. Don't compromise with your leaders!

## **TEAM PLANNING**

The most successful team planning meetings we have ever had were when we went away together for a weekend to plan. Adults and teenage junior leaders were present.

We put aside all our wonderful ideas and worshipped and waited on the Lord for His direction. By the time we were finished EVERYBODY felt a part of God's plan!

- Everybody added pieces to the jigsaw puzzle as God revealed what He was going to do at camp through visions, prophecies, Scriptures, songs etc.
- God did things in our lives to prepare us.
- God showed us in small ways some of the big things to look forward to.

The benefits of this during camp were:

- Heightened vision, faith and expectancy.
- Enormous excitement as God did just as He promised.
- Growing faith for leaders and junior leaders as they saw their (part of the jigsaw), vision, prophecy, Scripture etc fulfilled.
- Unity.
- Purposeful direction.

At one of the most memorable camps I had the privilege to lead, the leaders sensed God's direction and we were able to prepare. God showed us that He was going to heal some hearts, bring His river and finally His fire. We prepared through ongoing prayer and by bringing a thirty metre long blue material river, and blue and red banners. God used these and other things.

Interestingly, the messages were almost non-existent, but God's presence was powerful in almost all of the eight meetings! The river came, the fire fell, God was glorified, lives were miraculously changed, and it WAS worth all the hard work.

You need to make sure that the spiritual is the most important part of the program. Everyone wants to see God move but it's easy to be sidetracked.

Here are some things to be wary about:

- One trap people fall into is to leave the spiritual side to an outside speaker to the extent that they have no idea what the speaker is going to talk about.
- Make sure your leaders don't work so hard before camp that they fall in a heap when they get to camp.
- Make sure God is always the primary focus.
- Make sure everyone has a servant heart. Leaders – particularly young ones – can sometimes forget the camp is about the children and start enjoying it just for themselves
- Imbalance in a program can also cause problems. I believe in the big three: FUN, FOOD & FELLOWSHIP. If the children have great food and great fun they will be receptive to being a part of great fellowship.

## **RELATIONSHIP**

If your pre-camp meetings go well, then unity amongst leaders is highly likely to continue. It is crucial that group leaders/junior leaders are committed to the children in their care. Their servant role does not end until camp ends. One of the areas they need to work at the most is friendship among everyone in their group. Any leader that is struggling should make the camp leader aware of this for their sake, the sake of the children, and to keep the enemy from gaining a foothold.

Psalm 133:1,3b “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore!”

Camps are great. Children love them and you should do everything you can to have one. If you cannot run a camp, maybe you can have a couple of days at your church including a sleepover.

# CONCLUSION

I hope this book has been an inspiration to you. No matter what your gifts, use them to glorify God and remember not to lean on your own abilities. Always depend on God.

Most of all, love the children. Give them opportunities to enter into a relationship with God that grows and grows and give them ample opportunities to express their faith through words and actions.

## THIS PAGE TO GO ON THE BACK COVER

### **Pastor Andrew shepherd**

Executive minister – Edge Church International  
Founder of Kids R Us Australia

"I have known David for over 20 years. David has inspired me with his long term passion to reach, equip and release a generation of children. Over the years David has produced some excellent resources on leadership for kids as well as practical activity based learning experiences.

In this book David has put together decades of experience to impart to you his wisdom in the various areas of ministry to children. David's book will be an invaluable resource to further equip you to reach and disciple children to become world changing leaders. I commend this book to you."

**David** pastors a church in Newcastle with his wife Janet and has four adult children who are all passionate about their faith. He was the leader of Hunter Valley Children's Ministry Network and was assistant director of NSW Kidsrus. David studied at Tabor Bible College and trained in children's ministry at Children's Bible Ministries in New Zealand. He attends conferences where he speaks and runs workshops around Australia and overseas. He travels all over Australia helping children's ministries and has a website, **davidsykes.com**, where you can view all of his resources. He is also contactable at [david@davidsykes.com.au](mailto:david@davidsykes.com.au) or by phoning him on 0405 105357

