

# STEWARDS OF GOD'S LITTLE CHILDREN

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## 0 INTRODUCTION

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Jn. 21:15b

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become Children of God." Jn. 1:12

"Truly unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 18:3

"Therefore, whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." Matt. 18:5

"We stand at the dawn of a new era. Before us is the most important decade in the history of civilization, a period of stunning technological innovation, unprecedented opportunity and great cultural rebirth. The issue is how do we prepare our children for it?" John Naisbitt.

It is generally known and accepted that children are the most vulnerable among all weak ones in the society. One generic reason is that they are weak and mostly depend on the adult to do anything. They are also seen as helpless and unintelligent in many aspects, yet the bible, our guide into the spiritual proves the contrary.

Experts in Children Ministry have in one way or the other, already heralded and highlighted the message of the relevance and importance of Children in the church. The gist of my presentation therefore will focus on the assimilation and imbibing of earlier lessons taken from our preceding speakers. Meanwhile, it goes without saying that the Church of Pentecost is seen as a unique church and as a result, its actions or inactions can develop into far-reaching impact on society.

## 1.0 WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT CHILDREN

Far against the general perception that children are not relevant in the bible there are numerous evidences that prove that children play an important role in biblical themes.

According to one Roy Zuck, children are not an afterthought in the bible because:

- The "child" is mentioned 121 times
- "Children" - 448 times
- "Son / sons" - 2,700 times
- "Boys / girls" - 196 times

Child and family related work - 8,000 times

## **2.0 GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ABOUT CHILDREN**

Some basic indications about children in terms of the bible are that:

- God regards children as precious.
- They are a sign of God's blessing. ( Psalm 127:3)
- Children are worshippers. They are designed to praise God. (Psalm 8:2)
  
- God loves children unconditionally.
- They are treated with dignity.

## **2.0 NEGATIVE HUMAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN**

As far back as biblical times, adults used to inflict pain and sorrow upon defenseless children due to man's attitude towards them.

- They were often neglected and exploited.
- They were used for debt mortgaging. Job 24:9, 2Kings 4: 1
- They became victims of hunger and nakedness. Job 24: 7, 10
- They suffered child exploitation – Joel 3: 8
- They were used for child sacrifice – Jeremiah 32: 35, Psalm 106:37, 38

## **4.0 WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE PRESENT?**

In contemporary times, similar treatments are being meted out to innocent children.

Notable ones are:

- Child abuse in many forms
- Child trafficking
- Child labour
- Child prostitution
- Ritual murders
- Ritual molestation
- Rape and sexual abuse
- War victims and agents
- Street children being underfed

In spite of these social vices, some positive and child friendly practices are in vogue.

These include:

- Children accompanying football players in international FIFA matches.
- Children being used for advertisements.
- Children presenting bouquet of flowers to dignitaries.

## **5.0 GOD'S STANDARD TOWARDS CHILDREN**

The bible has spelt out certain expectations according to God's standards:

- Parents must train and teach children by God's precepts. Proverbs 22: 6; 6: 20. Deuteronomy 6: 7
- They must be accorded love, respect, welcome. Matthew 19:13, 14
- Parents must present themselves as primary care-givers. Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20
- The community has its part to play. Malachi 4: 6
- They must be made to understand the things of God. Joshua 8:34, 35, 4:6; Nehemiah 12:43.

## **6.0 CHILDREN'S PLACE IN BIBLICAL MINISTRY**

It must be noted that God uses children for special tasks.

Wess Stafford says "When God had something really important to do – something that he couldn't entrust to adults, he used children instead"

### 6.1 Examples

- Miriam and Moses' rescue. Exodus 2
- Samuel carrying God's warning message to Elijah the priest. 1Sam.3
- The Jewish servant girl and Naaman's leprosy. 2 Kings 5
- The boy with 5 pieces of bread and 2 fishes and the feeding of 5,000. John 6:1-14

The boy Jesus neglected at the Passover feast in Jerusalem. Luke 2: 41-50

### 6.2 Biblical Examples of Children God Used

- David - (1 Sam. 17)
- Josiah - (2 Kings 22, 2 Chron. 34)
- Esther - (Esther 2)
- Jeremiah- (Jer. 1)

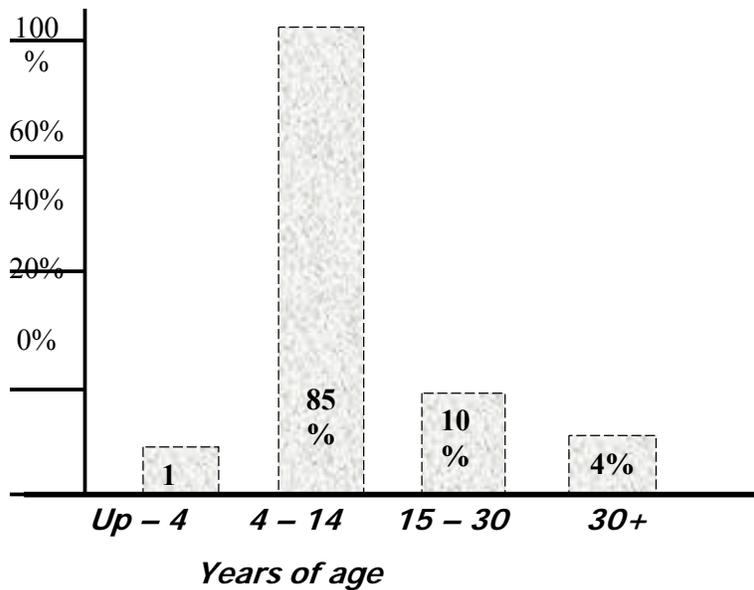
"It is not just that these people happened to be children, but that some of the most significant acts and revelations of God were through these children. Their faith and actions are critically important in the unfolding and outworking of God's purposes" – Dr. Keith White

"Throughout scripture, we see God entrusting special truths to children or using them as His special messengers or instruments" – Wess Stafford.

## 7.0 THE CONVERSION AGE BRACKET

Most people, by research, make a decision to follow Christ before age 14. About 85% of people who make a decision for Christ, do so between ages 4 and 14.

### Age at which people become Christians



Dr. Bryant Myers in 1995 made the above findings giving birth to the 4/14 Window Movement led by Dr. Dan Brewster

The staggering truth about the present day church is, it has failed to recognize that most people who make decisions to follow Christ do so between ages 4 and 14. Why this age group is that they are most **receptive** to the gospel and they are most **effective** agents for mission (Matt. 11:25-26). The challenge therefore is to raise up today's 4 to 14 year olds to experience God's abundant life (John 10:10b) – Mark 10:13-16.

They will ultimately be free from spiritual, mental, physical, relational, economic, social and ministerial poverty, to harness their immense potential and to deploy them to change the world.

## 7.0 SEEING CHILDREN THROUGH THE EYES OF JESUS

Jesus teaching about the place of children in the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:1-14) produced the following indicators:-

7.1 Children model the essence of gospel truth and faithful discipleship by showing how to humbly repent and trust in the God of Salvation.

7.2 To “Welcome a child” is to accept, love, value and respect a child which equates welcoming Jesus Himself.

7.3 Jesus emphasized that whoever neglects, abuses, hinders or turns away a child from faith in Christ will face severe judgment from God Himself.

At present, children and young people are vessels in God’s hands, pointing the way to faith while adults turn to be corrupt, distracted or deaf to His calling. Contrary to adults’ view, children everywhere can grasp spiritual truths easily. They can sense the guilt of sin, understand their need for a saviour and grasp the significance of faith. Note that children needs took precedence over that of the disciples and adults. Adapt your church culture so that the gospel is made attractive and accessible to children.

It is imperative that we open our hearts and minds to the need of reaching and raising up a new generation that can experience personal transformation and mobilized as agents for transformation throughout the world. Our vision and hope is to maximize their transformational impact while they are young and to mobilize them for a continuous impact for the rest of their lives. We must therefore act decisively and intentionally be inspired to raise up a new generation from the 4/14 window to transform the world. If we don’t, an entire generation of young people will be lost.

To serve as true stewards therefore, we basically need to nurture them. We must build them holistically in ways that address their needs and in line with the transforming power of God’s nature. The most appropriate transformational environment for the child are the family and the church. Parents have primary responsibility for building and nurturing their children. The church’s role is to nurture, encourage and resource their capacity to do so.

## **9.0 BASIC THINGS THAT CHILDREN SHOULD GET FROM THE CHURCH**

The following have been suggested by students in a class Dr. Dan Brewster had taught, and would seem to be important for all churches and for all children.

### 9.1 Teaching of the Word of God

Equipping in a church need not segregate the children from adults in terms of content, vision and direction. In fact, it takes only a little creativity to plan a curriculum that is for the whole family.

### 9.2 Making disciples of children

Commensurate with age, each child shall be encouraged and given an opportunity not just to believe, but also to learn to follow Jesus through the teaching from the Word of God. This should be one of the key objectives of any church.

### 9.3 Prayer

The whole church should regularly pray for all of the children both corporately and individually. Parents should also be taught to pray for their children and, of course, children themselves should pray regularly.

### 9.4 Love and care

Children should grow and thrive in the love and care that a church affords them. A church should provide a listening ear to the children, and they should be free to share their views, needs, hurts, hopes and dreams.

### 9.5 Opportunities to participate in ministry

Children should be viewed as resources for ministry, and prepared for God's work by the church. The church should provide opportunity for children to find and express their spiritual gifts.

### 9.6 A child-friendly church facility

The church facilities should be safe and attractive to children and childhood. There should be safe places for children to play and be childlike – if possible, even with playgrounds or play areas.

## 9.7 Appropriate classrooms

Each church should endeavor to provide attractive classrooms for children's bible studies and other activities with child-sized tables and chairs and colorful visuals on the walls at child-eye level.

## 9.8 Qualified children teachers

Children's Bible teachers should get regular and continuous training so that they become and remain qualified. Teachers should be monitored to ensure that their teaching is sound and age-appropriate.

## 9.9 Age-graded classes and curricula

The church should ensure that children receive regular, sound and biblical education based on children's age and capabilities.

## 9.10 Family equipping and preparation

The church should educate and encourage parents to enable them raise their children in accordance with the Word of God and in a way that protects children from harmful culture and other things that defile their consciences and their faith.

## **10.0 WHAT DO WE DO WITH CHILDREN?**

Communication is not about making children do what you tell them but more about building a trusting relationship with them.

Communication is achieved through us creating a good atmosphere, the good use of words and the use of effective illustrations.

- Becoming friends with them
- Playing with them
- Listening to them
- Telling them true stories from the Bible.
- Giving them quality time
- Introducing them to Jesus

The gospel must never change but the wrapping around it can and should be changed to attract children.

- Jesus broke protocol (tradition), took children in his arms and blessed them.
- Rather than restrict children they should instead become like Him.
- Jesus' mode of correction was by a harsh means

## **11.0 TRANSFORMING OUR CHURCH TO BE CHILD-FRIENDLY**

Since the whole society is structured for adults, and children are often spectators, they are often seen but not heard and having them suffer the consequences of adult's behavior. This unfair and unfortunate phenomenon in our society has found its way into the church. Church buildings are structured with adult members as the primary focus. Missionary works as well as disciple-making efforts are targeted mainly towards adults. On the other hand, it is very challenging for churches to reach out to children in a manner that is accepting and welcoming to children as proposed by Jesus in Matt. 18:5.

We are to invite the children to come to Jesus, to learn, to grow, to serve, then to go make disciples. As adults become disciples, God then sends us out into the world to serve others and make new disciples, bringing them back into the Church. They, in turn, can become disciples and go out themselves. Thus the process is repeated and the church grows. This process is not only for adults, but applies to children and youth as well. Children need a safe place for that process—a place that meets them at their point of development with what they need to take a step forward with Jesus. Jesus Himself said, "Let the children come to me—do not hinder them, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14). The children should be well-nurtured and cared for. There should be nothing about church programs and facilities that hinder the child's safety and well-being or their journey in faith.

"And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach and publish openly the goodnews (the Gospel) to every creature (of the whole human race)." Mark 16:15AMP

## 12.0 GOALS OF A CHURCH THAT WELCOMES CHILDREN—SOME EXPERT OPINIONS

The ultimate goal of a child friendly church is to create a child-friendly 'world' where a child can love and be loved. According to Dr. Keith White, a child is to be loved by, and to love, one or more significant adults.' He lists five basic needs of a child, that the sensitive church, seeking to improve its ministry and child-friendliness, strives to meet.

### 12.1 Security

The primary need of a child is **security** through a place for relationship, exploration, play, and development. No intervention will have any effect unless children know they are safe.

### 12.2 Significance

Children also need to be assured of their **significance** that they are someone precious because of who they are. Every child needs to know that there is at least one adult who is committed to them unconditionally. Any program for child development/care is nothing if this is absent in the treatment of children and their relationships.

### 12.3 Boundaries

Children need **boundaries** to feel safe, to develop, and to relate with others appropriately.

Boundaries are *rules and discipline* - the values and principles that characterise and govern a person's life.

### 12.4 Community

Biblically, children (like the rest of us) are created for **community** and relationships. Are our churches providing that community?

## 12.5 Creativity

Children need to exercise their **creativity**. They are essentially creative and creators. They create toys from scraps of wood, plastic, rubber, and paper. As created in the image of God, children must be given opportunities to create, to make, and to shape. A church can provide safe and age-appropriate materials, from crayons to modeling clay to paper-mache, to encourage children to express their creativity. Children can also be effective actors and dramatists, too.

**13.0 DR. DAN BREWSTER, IN HIS BOOK - 'CHILD, CHURCH, MISSION'** proposed some measures church can undertake to become Child friendly:

13.1 The worship services should be meaningful to children and not just adult experiences in which children must conform to adult standards. Many churches, especially in the majority world, do not have the luxury of space and facilities to accommodate children in the main service. Many, however, make a genuine effort to place the children in the midst. For example, some have designated a family worship service on a communion Sunday. The important point is that the children know they are welcome.

13.2 Children should be talked to and listened to - before, during, or after church—about their worship experience. The children should be asked what they want to be done for them in the church, and they should participate in the decision-making.

13.3 The agenda items of the church elders' (presbytery) meetings and annual church programs should include matters relating to children and how to improve the church's ministry to children. E.g. Christmas parties.

13.4 The Bible classes and teaching materials should be age-graded and suitable for the age and maturity of the children. In today's electronic-oriented world Sunday school materials, where possible, should be interactive and employ a variety of multi-media resources.

13.5 The budget of the church should provide funds for significant child ministries, including materials, teacher training, activities, and rituals.

13.6 The church should emphasize **rituals**—Christmas, Easter, other special church days, birthdays, Sunday school graduations, anniversaries and

remembrances—and make them a big deal for the children. Also, the church should have **designated days and times to bless children** in its annual program.

13.7 The pastor should be a regular visitor to the children’s ministry and should know many of the children by name.

14.0 Rev. Ben Freudenburg, a minister from Kirkwood, Missouri USA, also presented the following:

14.1 Children are members of the body of Christ.

14.2 How true is it that the client in a Children’s Ministry is really the parent?

14.3 Are our buildings designed with Children in mind?

14.4 Congregational communication demonstrates our love for children.

14.5 How can major programs deliberately include children?

14.6 Worship should deliberately be designed to be perceived through Children’s eyes.

(Culled from Children’s Ministry Magazine)

15.0 Global Ministries, A United Methodist Church in Brazil developed the following as their five-point plan for a child-friendly church.

15.1 Welcome and include children.

15.2 Listen to children (to their wisdom and spirituality).

15.3 Bring healing to children and family.

15.4 Bless Children (faith nurturing and providing age-level program participation).

15.5 Includes Children in the mission of the Church.

It is important to note that these simple measures, when implemented, can launch any church into a more effective ministry to children and youth.

It would also be noted from the foregoing that these experts and authorities on children’s ministry are echoing similar messages which need to be adapted by any church that professes to be child-friendly.

Pat Watkins, Global Ministries’ missionary for the Care of God’s Creation, pointed how children who are naturally related to nature can “lead us adults back into a relationship with God’s creation.”

## 16.0 SOME RELEVANT SAYINGS

“A child of five, if properly instructed, can truly believe and be regenerated as much as any adult”.

“Church is the one place we’re all equal. We’re equal in God’s eyes as his children. Worship is one place where age holds no power. I’m as big as the biggest, yet as small as the smallest, as valuable as the most valuable and as unworthy as the least worthy. I’m as capable as the most capable and as sinful. Age makes no difference to our Father in heaven. In his house, in his eyes, we are who we are, his children, and he expects us to come and worship him. It matters not what our age is.” – An anonymous Pastor.

A child-friendly church helps children sense that they’re a part of the church – not apart from the church.

“If we effectively teach God’s principles and expectations to our youngsters and instill within them a thirst for righteousness and passion for God, the need to wage a culture war will be eliminated by reshaping the culture from within. The cumulative effect of their character and beliefs will redefine the contours of our culture.” – George Bama

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children” – Nelson Mandela

“Our children will define the future which makes them our most significant and enduring legacy.” – George Bama

“We, as staff, are a reflection of an adult-centered theology.” commented Domingues.

Child theology can help you and I appreciate deeply how precious children are, and how they usher us adults into the Reign of God.

- Want to enter God's kingdom?  
Become like little children
- Want to be great in God's eyes?  
Then become like little children
- Want to let Jesus know you welcome and receive them?  
Then welcome little children
- Want to avoid judgment at God's hand?  
Then don't be little or despise little children
- Want to follow Jesus example?

Then love, pray for, accept, be with and bless little children. - Wess Stafford

## **18.0 OUR WAY FORWARD**

As a leading Pentecostal Church and an icon among Christian circles in the nation, our actions, traditions and practices, by and large become a modelling facet.

It therefore behoves on us to 'let our light shine' both within and without. In as much as we can comfortably pat our backs as having chalked some successes, non-complacency should compel us to be more determined to strive for excellence. The following noticed or unnoticed factors could serve as our or standard in our quest for becoming a leading child-friendly church and becoming good stewards for his glory:

18.1 Incorporating as a normal practice, the issue of conducting an occasional joint adult/children service at the local level. In the course of the service, the children can be made to participate in the church service by way of singing, leading worship, or choruses, performing a rehearsal activity, allowing them to dance and any other activity that could affirm their sense of belonging. This is the practical way of promoting intergenerational growth—where the church flourishes through and with both the current and future generations. Let us remember this is enshrined in the vision 2018 document.

18.2 The District Minister and the local presbytery must supervise or be involved in planning children's activities for the church.

18.3 The local register must be thoroughly and religiously used where the Presiding Elder sources the base statistics from. This will ensure an accurate update of our children membership.

18.4 The Minister and local presbytery must show keen interest in the Children's affairs. Teachers' appointment must be done by the Presbytery. Christmas parties must be sponsored by the local church.

18.5 The District Minister will be required to visit the Children's services on a regular basis.

18.6 Teachers should occasionally be invited by the District Minister for interaction and orientation.

18.7 The Minister must make efforts of establishing extra-activities for children. Eg. Compassion International Camps, School Bible Clubs, Vacation Bible Schools, Camp Meetings, etc.

18.8 Interesting and news-worthy activities should be sent to the Publication Unit for publishing on the church's website and/or Pentecost Fire.

18.9 We passionately appeal to our counterpart, the Youth Ministry to gear up its efforts of integrating a soft landing and sustainable system for our graduated teenagers who are more or less 'stranded' as they transit to the adult church. This trend sometimes lure the groomed and grown child to join a nearby charismatic church or sometimes go wayward, thus losing the primary nurturing efforts made by the Children's Ministry.

## **19 CONCLUSION**

God gave a stern warning in Mal. 4:6 thus, "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse". Until we succeed in turning the hearts of 'rebellious' fathers to the children and the 'neglected' children to the fathers, the church will have no bright future, but rather suffer a curse on the land.

This discourse has made the attempt to express the plight and condition of children, their potential benefit to the New Testament Church, how Jesus regards, treats and

recommends the ideal situation and the applicable responsibility to adopt vis-à-vis practical views expressed by seasoned practitioners.

Are we prepared to take this charge of becoming their faithful stewards? If we need an impacted generation to be, then we equally need an impactful generation that is. For a good and faithful steward will always work for fruitful results.

May the Lord Almighty be our helper as we chart this compelling and strategic course.

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