



# **Bible & Life**

## **Bible Teaching Newsletter**

**BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE**

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### **Reaching Children For Christ**

*by David Dunlap*

*"...From a child you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith." —2 Timothy 3:15*

In the late 1850s the well-known evangelist D.L. Moody organized the largest Sunday School in Chicago. Upward of 1,000 children from all over the city would make great efforts to attend. One day a young boy making his way to Moody's Sunday School walked past several other Sunday Schools. A Methodist minister who was watching came out to him and sternly said, "Young man, why do you walk so far to get to Sunday School?" The young boy replied, "Sir, it's because they love a fellow over there."

Today in the year 2016, there is a great and urgent need to "love a fellow." There should be an urgency in winning children to Christ. Children are today's spiritual investment and tomorrow's eternal dividend. Yet children are increasingly found to be unwanted, mistreated, and abused at an alarming rate. A few years ago the Office of Child Health reported that 600,000 to 1,200,000 are sexually exploited and abused every year in America. Since 1970, the teenage suicide rate has increased 44%, and 76% of teenagers use alcohol on a weekly basis. Of these, 50% will be drunk in a two-week period.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Reaching Children For Christ**

What are we doing to reach out to children for the cause of Christ? Do you believe that elementary school-age children or even younger can be genuinely saved? Do you believe this generation of out-of-control high school students can turn to Christ? This has been a great stumbling block for many Christians and Christian workers. Yet if we are to be faithful to the Word of God, we are to make every effort to reach all ages for Christ, and especially young people. William Kelly wrote:

*"It matters not if it is a child of ours, or that of another. Do we claim this child for the Lord? What is His feeling for a child? He is great, He is mighty; but He despises not any. Our Lord looked upon children with what interest! They are objects of the Father's love, for whom He gave His Son, and whom the Son came to save. Each has a soul: and what is its value?"<sup>2</sup>*

What do Dr. James Dobson, Corrie Ten Boom, Ruth Graham (wife of Billy Graham), the hymn writer Isaac Watts, Matthew Henry, and scores of others all have in common? They all came to faith in Christ before they were ten years old. Is this not a wonderful testament of Christ's soul-interest in children?

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**William Kelly**  
(1820-1906)

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Today, Bible clubs are proving to be an effective ministry in reaching out to needy children. Bible clubs are being established at an unprecedented rate throughout America. According to the *National Network of Youth Ministries*, there are currently 10,000 Bible clubs meeting across the nation. Many of these clubs meet on public high school and middle school campuses. There are 50 high school Bible clubs that meet in Long Beach, CA, alone and thousands of others nationwide. Throughout the nation, school-based Bible clubs have been growing rapidly, mirroring what trend-trackers like Gallup have called “a nationwide spiritual revival.”

In 1984, the U.S. Congress passed the Equal Access Act, sweeping legislation which gave Bible clubs the same status as other non-curriculum clubs, such as “Students Against Drunk Drivers” and “Young Republicans”. According to this bill, students are allowed to invite guest speakers, use the public announcement system to alert students to meetings, and put on special events. These clubs must be student-led and initiated, must meet when other non-curriculum clubs meet (at lunch time or before and after school), and cannot discriminate against students based on political, philosophical, or religious distinction. Initially, many schools, especially those in the northeastern states, denied students these rights. However, in June 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Equal Access Act as constitutional.

Unfortunately, this has not brought an end to court challenges to this law. Doug Honig, the public education director for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has said that the ACLU is very wary of religious clubs at public schools. This attitude led the Renton, Washington, school district in 1993 to forbid Lindbergh High School students from praying and studying the Bible before school, citing the state constitution, which forbids religious activities on school property. However, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Equal Access Act took precedence over state law.<sup>3</sup>

### **Reaching Children for Christ in Reidsville, North Carolina**

A white school bus pulls up in front of any of fourteen elementary schools in Rockingham County, North Carolina. A few minutes later, with parental permission, about 20-30 youngsters leave the school and board the bus. The bus proceeds off school property, usually to a nearby church parking lot where the teacher begins a 30-minute Bible lesson with the students. During the last school year over 500 elementary students attended these bi-weekly classes on the Bible Bus. In addition, elective Bible classes are offered in every high school and middle school in the county. These classes are taught in the classroom for an entire semester by instructors licensed to teach Bible in NC. Last year, during two semesters, 860 middle school and high school students attended these classes on a daily basis. Demand for these classes is so great that often students must be placed on waiting lists.

How did this Bible program in the public schools come into being? A group of concerned citizens formed the Rockingham Council of Bible Education. All funds for the program, including the teachers’ salaries, are raised by the Council from individuals, churches, and businesses. It is impossible to say how many children have been impacted through this unique gospel ministry.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reaching Children for Christ Through the Local Church**

Battling on the frontlines for the cause of Christ, along with the thousands of public school-based Bible clubs, are many church Bible clubs and outreach ministries. These evangelistic clubs are winning thousands of children and are training a new generation of young people to be fearless witnesses for Christ.

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**Office of Child Health,  
Washington, DC, quoted by  
USA Today newspaper**

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Some of the better-known national ministries are AWANA, Word of Life Clubs, Pioneer Clubs, and BCM International. These clubs have proven to be effective in reaching children of all ages in inner-city regions, rural areas, and in suburban neighborhoods. However, many assemblies have found these larger national ministries to be cost prohibitive. There are fees which range from \$700 to \$1,000 per year. These fees permit an assembly to use copyrighted material, contribute to overhead costs, and support the ministry's missionaries or area representatives.

In addition to yearly fees, there are other expenses such as uniforms, handbooks, student workbooks, conferences, and leadership training. Some assemblies also find it difficult to gather together the large number of workers needed to effectively run these programs. It is often suggested that there be one trained worker to every three or four children enrolled in the program. Despite these costs and requirements, many assemblies have found these national ministries to be effective and worth the cost to the local assembly. These ministries make the centerpiece of their efforts memorization of Scripture and Bible teaching targeted to specific age groups. This primary goal is supported by kid-tested games, unique crafts, friendly competition, and the sensible use of incentives.

How can believers interested in reaching children for Christ go about this important task? What are some keys to an effective evangelistic children's ministry in the local assembly? Whether the ministry is a club in the public school setting, a national ministry program, or simply a sincere effort by the believers in the local assembly, there are important principles many have found helpful.

### **Keys To Impacting Children for Christ**

**1.** One of the most important principles in youth ministry is to build into your program a "high touch" element. That is, to get involved in the lives of the young people, talk to them, and schedule time in the program for them to talk to you. Allow them to see that you care about them in such a way that they can feel and hear the love of Christ for them. This is the "they love a fellow" principle of D.L. Moody that made his Sunday Schools so effective.

**2.** If possible, involve parents in helping children with Bible memorization, handbooks, and special work projects in the home. This serves a two-fold purpose: it exposes an unsaved parent to the Scriptures and it allows a parent to see the power of the Word of God in a child's life. In our weekly Bible club, we award bonus points to younger children if they can memorize the books of the New Testament. Recently one unsaved mother asked if we could record the A.P. Gibbs song of "The Books of the Bible" on a CD to help her four-year-old daughter memorize the books of the New Testament. She has been thrilled to see the spiritual progress in her children. This no doubt has served to further open this mother's heart to the gospel.

**3.** Use excellent Bible teaching materials. Well-prepared and doctrinally sound lesson materials are essential to a well-run children's ministry. Word of Life Bible Clubs and Awana have excellent material and are faithful to the Scriptures. Young people seem to thrive on them and evidence great spiritual benefit. However, this material cannot be used separately from membership in the national ministry. BCM International also has exceptional material and their material can be used as desired. Material can be ordered at BCM International, 237 Fairfield Ave., Upper Darby, PA. Gospel Folio Press also has excellent material very suited to Sunday School or church-based Bible clubs.

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***"Some people feel inadequate to work with young people because they aren't 'cool' ...or funny...or creative. Others think they are too old to impact a young person's life. But all these concerns miss the most fundamental skill of reaching young people—the ability to give them love. Real love is so hard to come by in a young person's world they almost cannot believe you care."***

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**Ron Hutchcraft**

*The Battle For A Generation*  
Moody Press

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FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

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### INFORMATION

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4. Use incentives to motivate young people to dig further into the Word of God. The proper use of incentives is a tremendous way to encourage children in the things of the Lord. One child in our afternoon Bible club has recited numerous Bible verses, including all of Psalm 23, the Ten Commandments, the books of the Old Testament, and the books of the New Testament. In our group, points are awarded which an individual can earn a prize of a Christian book, or a pizza party for the entire group. One of the most valuable incentives is a free week of Bible camp for memorizing Scripture passages. However, we have found in twenty-five years of working with children that the kind of incentive is not important. The awarding of expensive prizes is really not necessary; children find greater satisfaction in the sense of accomplishment and recognition among their peers and in the eyes of their parents than in expensive prizes.

### Conclusion

An evangelist was once asked how many were saved at a certain meeting. He replied with a gleam in his eye, hoping to press his point, "Two and a half souls were saved." The inquirer replied, "Do you mean to say two adults and one child?" "No," he said, "I mean two children and one adult. The two children have their whole lives before them to serve the Lord; an adult has only half a life left."

Truly, children are not the future of the church, but the present. Children properly trained and rightly encouraged can win others to the Lord and foster a winsome effect on others for the cause of Christ. Winning children to Christ must not be taken lightly, for this effort lies so near to the heart of God. Serious Christians should carefully and prayerfully consider how to best minister to the children of believers and children that do not know the Lord. In so doing, we will honor the admonition of our Lord, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them" (Mt. 19:14).

### Endnotes

1. Fred Green, Office of Child Health, Washington, DC, quoted in *USA Today*, April 5, 1992
2. William Kelly, *Lectures on Matthew*, (New York, NY: Loizeaux Brothers, 1926), p. 377
3. Joy Thompson, *Knight-Ridder Newspapers*, Sunday, June 11, 1995
4. Information furnished by Jan Johnson, Reidsville Bible Chapel, Reidsville, NC