



“A Great Door for Effective Work Has Opened...” The Evangelism of Children Around the World

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Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 16:9 remind me that there is an open door of evangelism and discipleship of children and youth.

This open door is **great** because of the abundance of children around the world.

- Children under the age of 18 make up 32% of the world's population.
- 43% of Africa's population is below the age of 15.
- 27% of all the world's children and youth live in Asia

This open door allows for **effective** ministry. Between the ages 5 and 12 lifelong habits, values, beliefs and attitudes are formed. Whatever beliefs a person embraces while young are *unlikely* to change as the individual ages (Barna). Therefore, if we *evangelize* children, they will be saved adults. If we *disciple* children, they will be spiritually mature adults. If we *equip* children, they will be commissioned adults.

This door is now wide **open** because of the receptivity of children to the message of the Gospel. Several mission organizations are adopting a 4-14 mission strategy that focuses on reaching children from 4 to 14 years of age. Why? The majority of people who will ever come to Christ do so between the ages of 4 and 14. With every year after age 14, people become less receptive to spiritual things and less receptive to the Gospel.

The door is also now wide open because of the ability to reach children in even the most remote regions due to the presence of media—radio, television, cell phones, and the world wide web.

But Paul continued with these words, “and there are many who oppose me.” This is definitely true of the open door of evangelism to children and youth. This opposition is seen throughout the world.

- Governments prohibit or oppose Christian evangelism of children. 1/3 of the world's countries have high or very high restrictions on religion. Many of these countries refuse to allow children and youth to be evangelized.
- Media worldwide promotes negative images of Christians and/ or Christianity.
- Many children are victimized in the Western world as well as in developing nations

- There are 42 million abortions throughout the world each year.
--Center for Bioethical Reform
- Worldwide, 40 million children are subjected to abuse each year.
--WHO, 2001
- 20 million children have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and human rights violence.
--UNICEF
- There are children living in abject poverty, orphaned children, child sold into slavery, children dying with treatable diseases, children infected with HIV.
- The Church in the Western world is often apathetic and the Church in developing nations lacks necessary resources.

While many individuals, governments, and organizations contribute to the victimization of children and opposition to child evangelism, we must fully grasp that this is a spiritual battle. The spiritual battle for godly seed (children) began in the Garden of Eden when God said, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers;” Genesis 3:15. This spiritual battle for the minds, emotions, and desires of children is increasing in intensity as we come nearer to the end of this present age.

What can we do as individuals and congregations to fully engage in this battle?

PRAYER

Jeremiah spoke so clearly of the plight of children when he said, “This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because *the enemy has prevailed*” (Lamentations 1:16).

How did Jeremiah confront the fact that “the enemy had prevailed?” He recognized that it was a spiritual battle and he demanded that the Israelites “Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children,” Lamentations 2:19. He called the people to prayer.

If we are to bring the good news of the Gospel to children—children in nations around the world and children right in our own homes—we must pray. We must cry out to God for their salvation.

UNDERSTANDING AND EMBRACING OF WHAT GOD’S WORD SAYS ABOUT CHILDREN

As parents, children’s ministers, pastors, and leaders in this body of believers we can develop a good understanding of what God says about the value of children in the heavenly kingdom and God’s heart toward oppressed children. We can seek to understand what the Bible says about child evangelism and discipleship. We can embrace the roles of the family and the local church in evangelism, discipleship, and “sending out” of children into the work of ministry. There are many questions that must be asked and answered so that we can align our ministry practices with what God’s Word says about children.

MINISTRY

Ministry is an action word. As we pray and develop a correct belief system based on God's Word, we will act. For *individuals* those actions may include interceding for a particular child, building relationship with a child, meeting a need that child may have. For *congregations* those actions will include evaluation and sometimes rebuilding our ministries to include prayer for children, relational ministry to children, and programs and events that effectively evangelize and prepare children for works of ministry. *Regional, national and continental leadership* will develop leaders who can effectively serve children, children's ministers, and families. They will include the evangelism and discipleship of children in vision, strategizing, and goal setting. They will continually speak of the value of children in the kingdom of God and the urgency of reaching them with the Gospel message.

Sometimes it seems that the opposition to worldwide child evangelism is too great and our resources are too small. But, God's Word clearly states that "our Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." When we align our actions (prayer, sound theology, and ministry) with God's Word and His will, we can be sure that He will work with us. We can be sure that He will provide all that is needed to reach and disciple this generation of children and youth.