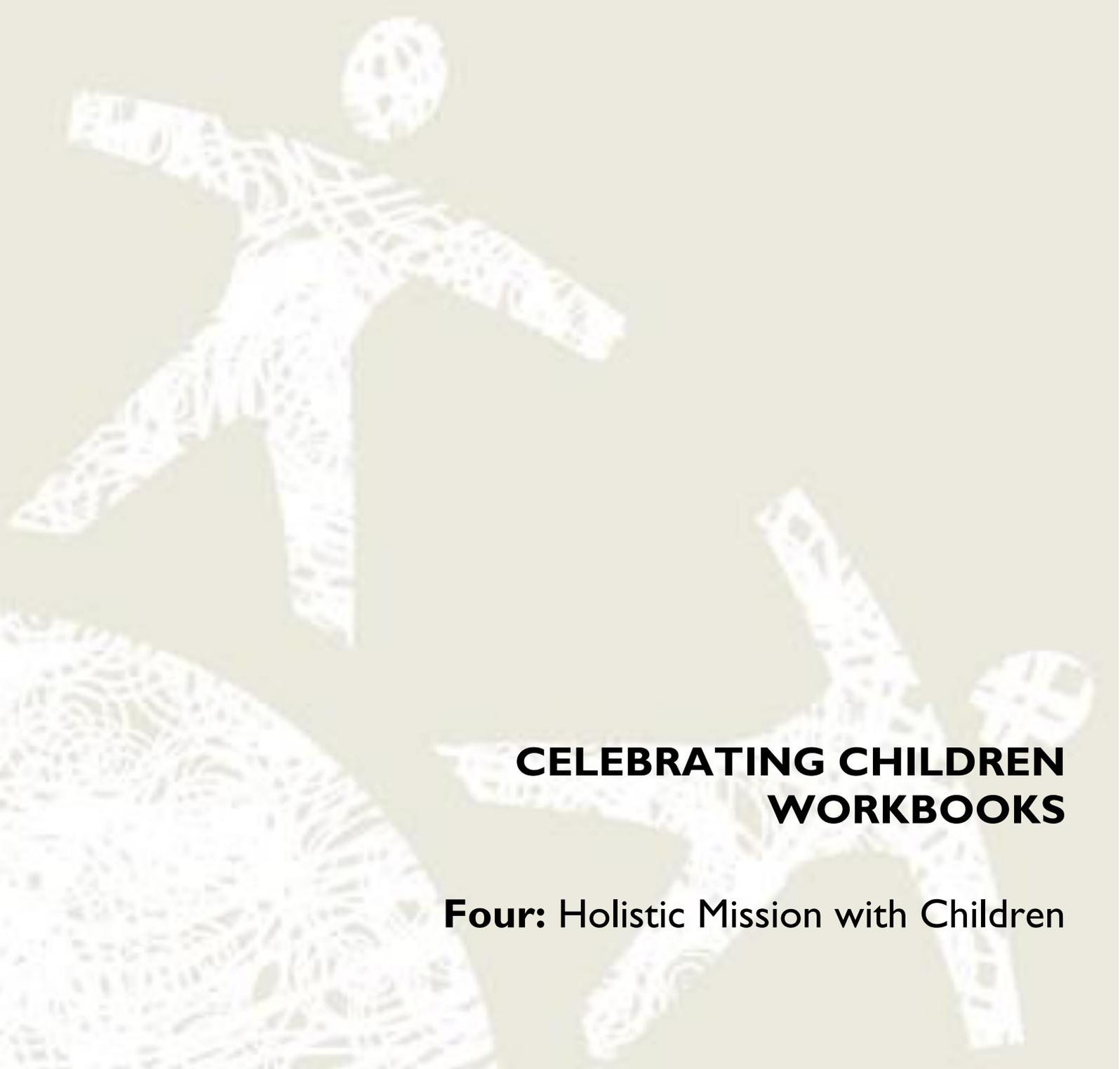


Viva Equip
PEOPLE



**CELEBRATING CHILDREN
WORKBOOKS**

Four: Holistic Mission with Children

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These workbooks have been written by a number of authors who have generously donated their time and expertise. Viva is pleased for you to use these workbooks to equip people caring for children at risk. Please do acknowledge authors and Viva if using these workbooks for training. Knowing how Viva's publications are used helps us to improve the quality of future publications. Please do give feedback on this through the registration and evaluation forms.

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Introduction¹

Listen closely and you will hear a life-changing story. This is no ordinary story. It is the most important story humans will ever hear! It is God's story, the way He has chosen to be in relationship with the world from the beginning of Creation. Inside this story, you will find your own story and the story of each child to whom you minister. You will find the story of your organizations and ministries. You will find the story of your cultural tradition. You will find God's Church community acting as His hands and feet in this world. This story, as described in the Bible, tells us God's mission, His heart for the world.

We need to understand the story of God's mission in order to know who He created children to be, how much He loves children, why He wants us to minister with children and how we can minister in the best way possible. In this workbook, you will first explore what the Bible says about God's heart and mission for children. You will discover that this mission is holistic, which means it is for the "whole" world, designed to touch every aspect of "whole" children and can be found in the "whole" Biblical story. You will also understand the central role that both the Church and children themselves play in God's mission.

Have you ever felt tired and discouraged or wondered if your ministry with children was really making a difference? Then this workbook offers especially good news for you! You are not alone. Instead, you, your ministry, and each precious child are all a part of the much larger story of God's mission in the world in which He is in charge and you are simply a vessel. There is even better news! The Bible tells us specifics about God's mission, so we can evaluate our own ministries and determine whether or not they are in line with His heart. In the end, it is not through our own power that we are able to partner with God in His mission with children, but through His power.

Workbook Overview

Part One: What does the Bible say about mission with children?

Part Two: What is "holistic mission" with children?

Part Three: What are the roles and responsibilities of the Church and children in God's mission?

After completing this workbook, you will not only understand what holistic mission with children is and how vital children are to the heart of God, but will also have a deeper Biblical understanding of what ministry with children should include. You will understand the role of the church and children in God's mission.

Part One: What Does the Bible Say about Mission with Children?

What a precious gift God has given to us in the Bible! Within its pages we find His story of mission for the world, His heart for the children we serve, and who He created children to be. We also find answers to help us understand why some children do not experience the fullness that God intends for them and why they suffer. Most importantly, the Bible sheds light on how we may respond. Let's begin our study with a look at what God has shared with us in the Bible regarding holistic mission with children.

¹ The authors of this workbook have chosen to refer to "Holistic Mission with Children" instead of "to Children" (as does the book *Celebrating Children*) to reflect our belief that children are not simply passive recipients of God's mission, but are instead active participants in it.

Lesson One: What is God's story of mission?

Summary

- God's good creation and the Fall
- God's mission of restoration
- What this means for our ministry with children

Have you ever watched a storyteller capture the attention of a group of children? They wait, with wonder and anticipation, as the story unfolds. There is something about a story that all humans respond to, no matter their age or culture. Master storytellers know that every great story has three parts: beginning, middle, and end. Within the narrative, characters encounter a problem. A good story doesn't leave characters in the middle of the problem, however; it must present a solution. God is the ultimate storyteller! In the Bible, He shares with us our story, the story of His relationship with the whole world.

The Beginning...Creation

In the beginning, God presents Creation, where everything is perfect, especially humans! He makes them special and unique, in His own image, to live in perfect relationship with Him, each other, and the rest of creation. We catch a glimpse of this in the children to whom we minister, in their laughter, joy, and creativity. In the beginning, God also creates societies and structures to work for the good of humans. Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1-2) paints this flawless picture.

Gen 1:31 a "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good"

It won't last for long, however because in the middle of the story the Bible describes the problem: the Fall.

The Middle...The Fall

As sin enters the world in the Fall, the perfect creation that God has created is broken and cursed. His relationship with humans breaks. Humans' relationships with each other break. Humans' relationship to the rest of creation breaks. Societies and structures break. The world is not as it should be. We feel this brokenness in the world around us and in our ministry with children. We see children who do not have a relationship with their Maker, families torn apart, societies broken down, and political, cultural, and economic structures that oppress children instead of supporting them. Evil is a very real presence in our world.

The End...Restoration

God, as any good storyteller, does not leave the world with only a problem and no solution, however. He tells us the end of the story and it is indeed good news! He steps into the story by sending His Son, Jesus, to come and reunite humans to Him. Jesus describes a new way of living, the Kingdom of God, in which the world's brokenness is restored. Humans may again have an intimate, direct relationship with God. They can live in harmony with each other and all of creation.

Today, we live in the middle *and* the end of the story at the same time! We know that the world is not as it should be, yet we have the hope that comes from knowing the "end" of the story and the good news of God's redemptive power.

“We live in the Biblical story as part of the community whose story it is, find in the story the clues to knowing God [...], and from within that [...] try to understand and cope with the events of our time and the world about us and so carry the story forward” Leslie Newbigin²

God’s mission is our mission

God has called each of us to participate in His story, not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of each of His precious children. He knows that many of them still live in the middle of the story with no knowledge that there is a solution. They are at the very heart of His mission! God’s desire to restore the life of each child is what motivates us in our work. We offer ourselves as His vessels. He in turn gives us the strength, knowledge, resources, and abilities for the task.

What is the goal of ministry with children?

Understanding God’s mission brings into focus the goal in ministry with children: that they would be transformed wholly into who God created them to be, embracing their unique identity and purpose.³ Children must be nurtured in their growth and maturing to be able to give and receive fully in relationships with God and others.⁴ As you minister with children don’t get so focused on their immediate needs and challenges that you forget the larger story of each child.⁵ It can be tempting to become overwhelmed with what is *wrong* with a child and his or her negative situation. We must not, however, lose sight of what is *right* with him or her and the potential for transformation that exists.



*In creation we see a beautiful model of **transformation**. The small caterpillar carefully builds its chrysalis and slowly emerges after time as a triumphant butterfly, truly a new creature. We, as God’s children can undergo the same **transformation** as He slowly changes us from our former selves into magnificent new creatures.*



The hope that God offers can illuminate even the darkest of situations.

² Newbigin (1989), 99

³ Myers (1999)

⁴ Balswick et al (2005)

⁵ Workbook 7 will look at how to design projects that take account of the big picture of children’s lives

Case Study

Human Trafficking: Children and the Sex Trade⁶

God's story is for everyone, including 17 year old Malee. It is a story of redemption, a story that shows exactly how much God loves us and Malee. He created us in His image and after sin entered, it was a world of darkness. The work of Jesus Christ on the cross provided for the entire world a way of escape out of darkness.

Malee was trapped in darkness for most of her young life. Her mother sold her at three months of age. She was sold again at two and stolen at age six. At 13, her "mother" tried to force her into prostitution. One year later, Malee was taken across the border, beaten, gagged and prostituted. She was kept as a slave in a brothel. Weeks later, Malee was rescued by Christians who knew they were to bring light into Malee's life.

Much of the world is still in darkness. The trap of sin includes human trafficking and the child sex trade. "International law defines trafficking in persons as recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring, or receiving people through force, threats, abduction, deception or fraud, abuse of power or vulnerability, or payments to others for the purpose of exploitation."

Children all over the world are caught in the web of "pornography, prostitution, sex trafficking, sex tourism, and child and forced marriages."

Many daughters in Southeast Asia have been expected to provide incomes for their parents. This accounts for the increased numbers of child prostitution. How can children know God's love unless we minister to them?

'The Garden of Hope' ministry is fulfilling their mission of bringing God' redemptive story to the girls of Thailand. It was there that Malee found her rescue from darkness. She received counseling, training, and the kind of love that only God can provide.

⁶ Based on Crawford and Crawford (2007), 171-76

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

In the _____, God shares with us the story of His _____ with the whole world. In the beginning, everything is _____, especially humans. As _____ enters the world, the perfect creation that God has created is _____ and _____. God does not leave the world with only a problem and no _____. He tells us the end of the story and it is indeed _____! He steps into the story by sending Jesus, to come and reunite humans to Him. Today, we live in the _____ and the _____ of the story at the same time! We know that the world is not as it should be, yet we have the _____ that comes from knowing the “end” of the story and the good news of God’s _____. God has called each of us to _____ in His story, not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of each of His precious _____. Understanding God’s mission brings into focus the _____ in ministry with children: that they would be _____ wholly into who God created them to be, embracing their unique _____ and _____.

Discussion questions

Think of a child with whom you are ministering right now.

1. What strengths can be found in his or her life? Where can you find hope in his or her life?
2. What aspects of his or her life are in need of transformation? What are his or her greatest needs?

Now think of your project or organization.

3. How might it build on this child’s strengths?
4. How might it seek to bring about transformation in this child’s life?
5. Take a moment to pray for this child. Ask God to bring about transformation through His power. Thank God for the hope that exists in this child’s life. Pray about how you as a carer or the project as a whole might be both an agent of transformation and a beacon of hope in his or her life.

Lesson Two: How can we understand God's heart for children?

Summary

- A biblical view of children
- Introduction to the Understanding God's Heart for Children framework

Children are valuable

Children are at the very heart of God's holistic mission for this world! The importance placed on children is very clear in the Bible, with child and family-related words occurring over 8,000 times.⁷ In the cultural time period of Jesus' ministry, children were often only valued for their economic worth and were seen as foolishly ignorant. In fact, they were in the lowest social position possible.⁸ This may seem familiar in your culture. Yet Jesus showed children's value in several important ways.

Children are models in the Kingdom of God

First, He held them up as models for adults to follow. You can imagine how strange this sounded to his listeners' ears, since children were usually viewed as unimportant! Jesus' disciples only thought of a Kingdom in terms of authority and power. They accepted that Jesus was the king, but in their understanding, kings have chief ministers and advisors and they were very curious to know which of them was to occupy these positions. When the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest, Jesus placed a child in the midst of them saying, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 18:3). In God's 'Upside-Down Kingdom', the last come first, the weak are strong, and low is high.

Those who serve children are great in the Kingdom of God

He also said that those who serve children are truly great in God's Kingdom. By welcoming children, adults welcome Jesus Himself. On the other hand, he claimed that if any one "causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck."

The Kingdom of God belongs to children

Finally, He claimed that the Kingdom belongs to children and they have unique knowledge about and ability to believe in Jesus. He often took advantage of their special faith to teach adults. Jesus used childbirth to teach Nicodemus a basic truth about the only way to enter the Kingdom of God – "You must be born again!" In the Gospels (e.g. Luke 1:26-32 referring to Isaiah 7:14, 9:6), the child is a sign, pointing humankind to salvation. Keith White puts it plainly: "God has chosen to enter the world, to reveal Himself as a baby and as a child." Adults are privileged to learn from children in carrying out God's mission on earth because He has "hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:25).

"Jesus did not just teach how to make an adult world kinder and more just for children; he taught the arrival of a social world in part defined by and organized around children."⁹

⁷ Zuck (1996), 13

⁸ Bunge (2001)

⁹ Bunge (2001)

We can also be sure that God is outraged about what is happening to many children! Scripture clearly shows that God is outraged about what is happening to children. Our own anger is but a pale reflection of God's own fury and indignation. . . .Over and over again God's warning throughout the Bible is "Don't touch my precious children!"¹⁰

God's heart for children

The Bible offers insight into how God created and views children so that we may better understand our responsibility toward them.¹¹

In the book, *Understanding God's Heart for Children: Toward a Biblical Framework*, a group of theologians and practitioners have studied the Bible and created the following seven statements as a way to organize and clearly communicate what God says about and intends for children. None of these statements can stand alone, however, but must be viewed as integrated to paint a whole picture of God's heart for children.

Understanding God's Heart (UGH) for Children Biblical Framework

1. God creates every unique person as a child with dignity.
2. Children need parental love in a broken world.
3. God gives children as a gift to welcome and nurture.
4. Society has a God-given responsibility for the well-being of children and families.
5. Children are a promise of hope for every generation.
6. God welcomes children fully into the family of faith.
7. Children are essential to the mission of God.

In the following lessons in this workbook, we will explore these statements and their implications for our ministry. As you read and understand each one, ask yourself, "What would this statement look like in my culture? ...my ministry? ...for the children with whom I minister?"

¹⁰ The Oxford Statement on Children at Risk was formulated in 1997 by a group of Christians involved in caring for needy children. It provides an initial biblical and philosophical rationale for Christians to care for children. The full text of the original document is shown in www.viva.org.

¹¹ McConnell et al (2007), 1

Case Study¹²

Joni Middleton wanted to know if the girls of Project Rescue knew how God thought of them. Little four-year-old Neelam quickly answered, “Children are gifts of God because he loves us.” She understood how God valued her so much that He regarded her as a gift. Since a gift is special, she was special.

Jesus was speaking to a crowd of listeners when He singled out a child near them. He said they would never enter Heaven unless they would change and become like the children. That idea was something new for these people whose culture regarded children as not at all important.

In fact, the girls of Project Rescue in Calcutta, India had been considered unimportant in their culture. The mission of the project is to rescue, restore, and prevent. The girls were rescued from lives of “pain, neglect, and insecurity in the city’s red light district.” The Project homes offer shelter in safe places and they offer emotional and physical healing. As the girls begin to trust the love being offered to them, they begin to see how valuable they are to God.

Not only do these girls learn to feel valued, they learn that because children are loved, they receive correction instead of punishment. One Project Rescue child said that “people who love children help them to understand right and wrong.” Middleton views their program as a form of correction, recognizing the problem of children at risk and then planning ways to correct the situation. Project Rescue, a part of Deepika Social Welfare Society, is working to prevent the forced prostitution facing so many Indian girls. The Project also wants to end tolerance the community has for the conditions these girls face.

We are able to recognize how special children are. The question remains: Do they see their own special worth? Do they recognize that they are gifts from God? Project Rescue is working to give positive answers.

¹² Adapted from Middleton (2007) and <http://www.projectrescue.com/rescue-restore-prevent.html>

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

_____ are at the very heart of God's holistic mission for this world. _____ showed children's value in several important ways. First, He held them up as _____ for _____ to follow. He also said that those who _____ children are truly great in God's Kingdom. Finally, He claimed that the _____ belongs to children and they have unique _____ about and ability to _____ in Jesus. We can also be sure that God is _____ about what is happening to many children. The Bible offers insight into how God created and views children so that we may better understand our _____ toward them. U_____ G_____ H_____ f_____ C_____ is a biblical framework that helps us understand what God _____ and _____ for children.

Discussion questions

Read through the 7 affirmations of the biblical framework, for each one think:

1. How do I understand this affirmation in my own context? What issues does it raise, and what challenges does it highlight?
2. How are the values and principles expressed by this affirmation being put into practice in my work? In my family, community, church, organization?
3. What am I doing to exemplify or embody God's intent and to further God's desire for children in this particular aspect?
4. What are some of the obstacles we are facing as a family, community, church, organization in this aspect?
5. How can we overcome the obstacles?
6. Who else can help us in working together to achieve this?

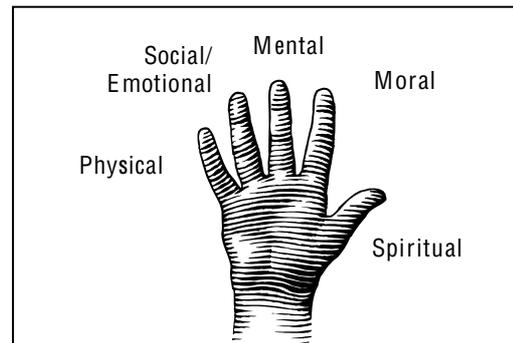
Lesson Three: What is a biblical understanding of children and childhood?

Summary

- How has God made children?
- How does the Bible see children?
- What are the implications for us?

Children and childhood are viewed in various ways around the world.¹³ Sometimes, children are seen as less valuable than adults, as ignorant, needing adults to pour knowledge into them. They may be viewed as either completely innocent or horribly sinful. God’s story presents a different view of children, however. It is a balanced, holistic perspective of children as both valuable contributors and sinfully in need of transformation.

As we saw, in the beginning God created children perfectly, in His image, as intricate beings with deep capacity to love, feel, act, and connect with others. Each child grows and develops holistically, including physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and social growth, as Jesus himself did.¹⁴ Jesus matured in his mind and emotions (wisdom), his body (stature), His spiritual relationship with God and his social relationships with other humans, including his family.



Children are not simply souls nor bodies, but souls deeply connected to bodies, minds, and emotions. As children mature, each part of them must develop in healthy ways, affecting the others. For example, when a child experiences a trauma, it may not only affect her emotionally, but spiritually, physically, and socially. She may experience difficulty accepting God’s love or love from others or may even feel physical pain or illness because of the emotional trauma. Experiencing God’s healing emotionally can bring healing in other areas. Our ministries, then, must reflect the importance of ministering to every aspect of children. We will discuss practical implications for ministry in **“Part Two: What is holistic mission?”**.

Holistic Practitioners

Don’t forget that God made us, as adults who work with children, holistic as well!

We must care for and develop our “whole” selves- our bodies, spirits, emotions, and relationships so that we will be fully equipped for the ministry God has designed for us, just as Jesus did. We must continuously practice humility, allowing God to transform every area of our lives, just as He uses us to impact the same areas in the lives of the children with whom we minister. Neglecting one or more areas of ourselves can disrupt our ability to be “wholly” who God intends us to be.¹⁵

Take a moment to bring this before God.

¹³ See Workbook 1 for more on this topic

¹⁴ For more information on Child Development, see Workbook 1, Part 3

¹⁵ Please see Workbook 8 for more information on Caring for Self and Others

What are the implications for how we see children?

“Children are created in God’s image with dignity” (UGH #1)

“We all begin life as children, created in the image of God. Children are born fully human, with identity and purpose. The journey of childhood is part of God’s plan. All people reflect God’s image through living in loving community with Him and one another. Children most fully express their God-given dignity in glorifying Him. God intends that no one prevent a child’s life from fulfilling His purpose. Respecting the image of God in every child demands a Christ-like response to nurture them throughout childhood”.¹⁶

“Children are a promise of hope” (UGH #5)

“Each generation has a unique contribution in God’s purposes for human history. Children have been shaped by the history of their community, are living fully in the present moment, and will reshape their community for the future. God intends that each generation will extend faith and fullness of life to the next. God intends that this generation grasp the centrality of children to his purposes for our time”¹⁷

“Children are essential to the mission of God” (UGH #7)

“God desires every child in every generation across the world to know Him and make Him known. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus calls the whole Church to reconcile relationships: with God, with family, with community and with society. God intends that His church be a witness in every community of His transforming power, so that his purpose for every child can be accomplished.”¹⁸

Children must be cherished

Because children are created in the very image of God and are so valuable to Him, both in the present and for the future, we must respond by respecting and valuing them also. Therefore, policies and practices in our ministries must be kind and nurturing, while not denying the role of sin in children’s lives and their need to be restored into right relationship with God. Even though children need guidance to mature, they are still fully human just as adults and are not inferior. What might this Biblical view of children look like practically in our ministries? We might:

- Implement child protection policies¹⁹
- Participate in advocacy for, with, and by children²⁰
- Foster child participation and actively listen to children²¹
- Allow children to make as many choices as possible, especially regarding decisions that will directly affect them
- Demonstrate patience, gentleness, and compassion at all times

¹⁶ McConnell et al (2007), 13

¹⁷ McConnell et al (2007), 183

¹⁸ McConnell et al (2007), 261

¹⁹ See Workbook 6 on Child Protection

²⁰ See Workbook 1, lesson 15 and Workbook 2, lesson 15

²¹ See Workbook 2 on Child Participation and listening to children

Case Study²²

Children are created in God's image and He has a plan and purpose for each child. Jesus told his disciples to bring the children to Him. He did not say to bring only the healthy children. He did not say to bring only the children from loving families. His love extends to all children including those 18 million who live on the crowded streets of India.

There are over 100,000 boys and girls living in Calcutta's streets and many have found their way to the railroad stations' platforms. They are "at high risk for exploitation, crime, addiction, physical and sexual abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases."

Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta has recognized the needs of the platform kids. In 2001, a safe house center was established. It was named "Anandaloy" or "Home of Joy". Every boy who enters the center has time in a detoxification program to help overcome any drug addiction. Anandaloy then provides for each boy his schooling, a recovery program and a warm home environment. Every boy is recognized as a child created in God's image. This means he is "worthy of love, trust, attention and compassion."

The Anandaloy program includes personal health and hygiene training, sports, healthy meals, times of daily devotions, counseling and occasional special outings. The boys are accepted for who they are. They are given a sense of belonging.

The family of Raja Das abandoned him as a child. He found his way to life on the railway station platform. He was involved in a gang, used drugs and was sexually exploited. Raja eventually ended up in prison for nine months. In the midst of all the turmoil in his life, Raja met someone who found help for him at Anandaloy. That was years ago and today he is an example of the promise of hope for his generation. Today Raja Das is helping to change the lives of more railway station boys in Calcutta.

²² Anandaloy, Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta from Pavamani (2007)

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Different cultures may view children as _____ than adults, as _____, as either completely _____ or horribly _____. The Bible presents a _____, holistic perspective of children as both valuable _____ and sinfully in need of _____. God created children as intricate beings with deep capacity to _____, feel, act, and _____ with others. Children are not simply souls nor bodies, but souls deeply _____ to bodies, minds, and emotions. As children mature, _____ of them must develop in healthy ways, affecting the others. Our _____ must reflect the importance of ministering to every aspect of children. The Bible shows us that children are created with _____, that children are a promise of _____ and that children are _____ to the mission of God. Therefore we need to take practical steps to _____ and _____ children.

Discussion questions

Each cultural context has a certain view of children and childhood. Take a moment to ask yourself the following questions.

1. What value does your culture place on children? What are its attitudes toward and beliefs about children?
2. Your ministry also has a certain underlying view of children. What value does your ministry place on children? What are its attitudes and beliefs about children?
3. Are there areas in which your culture and/or your ministry follow a biblical view of children as unique, valuable, full of dignity, and created in God's image?
4. Are there areas in which your culture and/or ministry do not exemplify this biblical view?
5. How might you demonstrate and bring about a biblical view of children in your culture and your ministry? What policies and practices might your ministry adopt in order to better follow a biblical view of children?

Lesson Four: What role do relationships play in God’s mission?

Summary

- Humans are created for relationships
- God models relationship for us
- We need to help children experience nurturing relationships

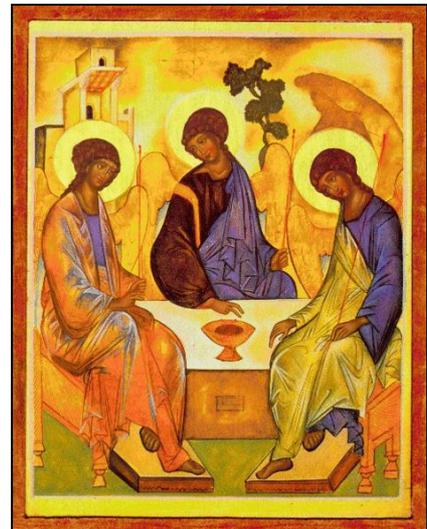
Humans are created for relationships! In fact, relationships are a vital aspect of God’s design of all of creation and His mission for the world. As we learned in Lesson One, God planned all creation to live in harmony. He created both male and female humans to be interdependent. Throughout the Bible, God shows the importance of serving others, and specifically our “neighbor”. Jesus commands his followers to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). Indeed He demonstrated a great relational love full of compassion and care: for His family, His disciples, those that followed Him, and even His oppressors. Ultimately, in giving His life for the sin of the world, He facilitated the most important relationship of all – between God and all of humanity.

A divine model of relationship

God is the perfect model for the central importance of relationship. In the trinity, God demonstrates perfect relationship between God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Each is different and has a unique role and identity; yet each is also fully giving to the other members, honoring, loving, and supporting them.²³

The biblical portrayal of God’s relationship to human beings shows how He desires them to exist in relationship with each other too.²⁴ Jesus prays for believers, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21).

We can learn much from God’s relational model about how to guide children in healthy development. We must guide children to find and grow in their special unique identity, while building strong relationships of unity and fellowship with others at the same time. Children must both affect and be affected by the communities in which they live. In fact, it is in relationships that we find our true identity. The apostle Paul uses the body as an analogy in which each body part is unique, but is only effective when connected to the rest of the parts (Romans 12:4-5). We find wholeness in the variety of different relationships in our communities, which characterizes truly holistic mission.



A picture of the relationship within the Trinity by Andrei Rublev (c.1400)

²³ Balswick et al (2005), 21

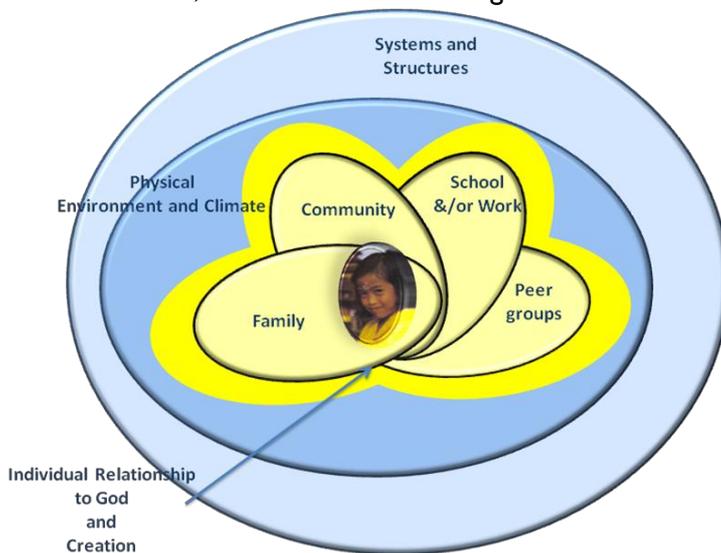
²⁴ Balswick et al (2005)

Biblical relationships²⁵

*Unconditional love not conditional love
God-centered not self-centered
Grace not shame
Acceptance and forgiveness not blame and perfectionism
Empowering not controlling
Building others up not keeping others dependent
Intimate not distancing
Experiencing and communicating feelings not failing to express feelings*

Children are relational

God intends that all children live in healthy relationships with God, their family, the community (including those in the neighborhood, at school, at work, and at church), systems and structures within the society, and the rest of creation, as we can see in the diagram below.



Welcoming and nurturing children in relationships

“God gives children as a gift to welcome and nurture.” (UGH # 3)

As we continue to try to understand God’s heart for children with the biblical framework, we see that “children must be welcomed and nurtured in these relationships. From the moment they are born as completely dependent babies, they must form strong, healthy attachments. It is a privilege to join with children in celebrating their uniqueness, embracing childhood as formative for the whole person. Family, friends, church and the local community are responsible for creating an environment that promotes children’s well-being”²⁶

Practitioners are relational too!

We can’t forget that we are relational beings also! Just as we must strive to strengthen the relationships in a child’s life, so we must make sure to strengthen the relationships in our own personal lives and in the organization of our ministries.

²⁵ Balswick et al (2005)

²⁶ McConnell et al (2007), 95. See Workbook I for the importance of relationships for child development

Case Study

A story from Kenya²⁷

Jonathon's parents, David and Sarah, are dying of AIDS. A local church has been visiting them for months, providing antiretroviral drugs (ARV's), other medications and meals, as well as school fees and tutoring sessions for eight-year-old Jonathon. Various church volunteer helps to bathe, feed and pray for the ailing family with regular visits each week. David and Sarah look forward to the company, as the members of the church are the only people who come to visit. Others in the community have long since stayed away, scared by the evil 'stigma and spirits' of HIV/AIDS.

David and Sarah's fragile bodies were too damaged during a prolonged period without any access to ARV's and proper care and nutrition. Their deaths are imminent.

The church is working to preserve family stories and memories for Jonathon. A book has been compiled with narratives on how David and Sarah met, fell in love and got married. Other pages chronicle the family and clan history and give an account of their move from the village 10 years ago. Additional entries tell of how Jonathon was given his name and of a younger sister who dies when he was four years old. Jonathon's young life is described in detail, and his parents include letters to him, imparting blessings and giving him instructions of a life worthy of the family name and heritage. Interspersed between the pages are the few fading photos that the family possesses. The book is placed into a keepsake box, along with what meager items the family treasures.

As a result of all their home visits, and through the process of establishing a memory book for Jonathon, the church has an intimate knowledge of his past and potential. They know his parents well. They know their hopes and dreams for him.

Jonathon has no extended family in the slum. Relatives in their village of origin either scattered long ago or have no desire to welcome the son of AIDS victims into their families. For Jonathon, the church's family-style home is his only hope. He knows these people, has played with them, prayed with them. They are his friends. The family that is taking him in has visited his parents on many occasions and helped him with his homework. He is comfortable with them. He watched them nurture his parents. He will watch them give his parents a decent and dignified burial.

He pain will still be unbearable initially. But most of the deep and long psychological scars will be avoided.

Jonathon will never have to wonder about who his parents were and struggle with being a person without a history, dropped off on the doorstep of an institutional orphanage. He will be more whole.

²⁷ See 'Continuum of Care', World Orphans <http://www.worldorphans.org/media/cc2.pdf>

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Humans are created for _____. In fact, God gives us the perfect model for the central importance of relationships in the _____. We can learn much from God’s relational model about how to guide _____ in healthy development. We must guide children to grow in their special unique _____, while building _____ with others at the same time. God intends that all children live in healthy relationships with ____, their _____, the _____, systems and structures within _____, and the rest of _____. As practitioners, we are also _____ and must make sure that we _____ relationships in our _____ _____ and the organization of our ministries.

Discussion questions

1. What evidence do you see in your work with children of children’s God-given need for nurturing relationships? What consequences do you see when these relationships are missing?
2. In what ways do you model relationships that are based on the relationship of the Trinity at home, at church, in your organization? What steps could you take to do this more?
3. Take a moment to evaluate your own life and ministry.

Relationship	Stronger or Weaker?	How could I strengthen it more?
God		
My family		
Friends		
Co-workers		
Church members		
Community members		

4. Does your ministry strive to foster relationships with others in the community such as churches, neighbors, other ministries, or the government?
5. How could you help to develop these relationships more?

Part Two: What is ‘holistic mission’ with children?

Now that we have explored the way God created “whole” children to flourish in healthy relationships, we will examine how children experience brokenness, both within themselves and within these relationships. God’s mission seeks to restore and strengthen these relationships so that children will become fully who God created them to be.

First, we will explore what prevents children from being all that God intends and why God allows them to suffer. Then we will take a practical look at how our own ministries may practice Biblically “holistic” mission.

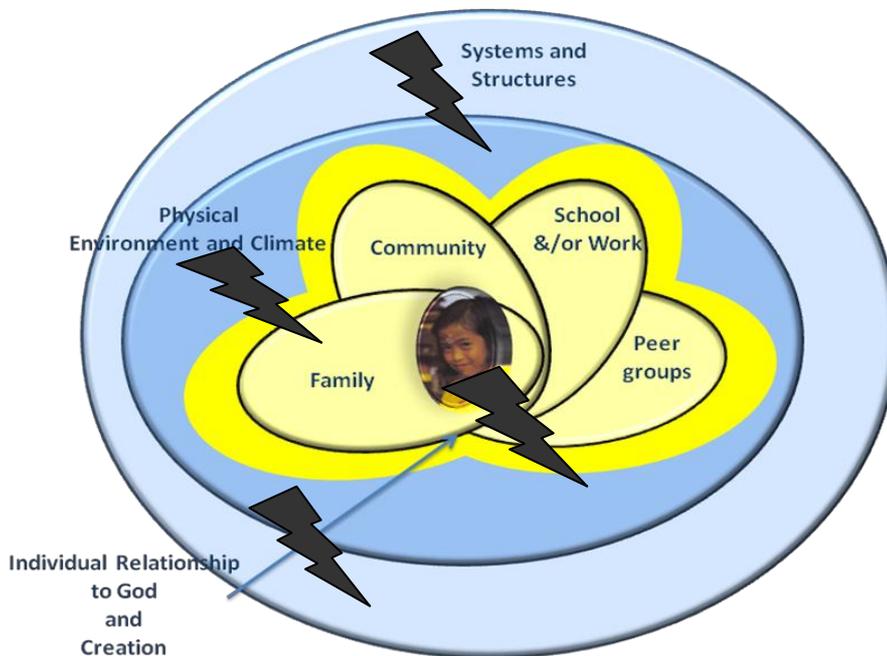
Lesson Five: What prevents children from being all God intends?

Summary

- Sin results in brokenness
- Hope from God's healing

As we saw in Lesson 1, whole children are created perfectly in God's image. Then we saw in Lesson 4 the importance of relationships in God's design. Because of the Fall, however, children are prevented from being wholly who God intends them to be. They experience obstacles to living in His desired fullness. These obstacles are a reality because of the presence of sin in the world and how this sin breaks relationships with God and others as well as within systems and structures.

Children may experience brokenness on several different relational levels as the following diagram demonstrates:



- **Relationship with God**

Children must enter into a personal relationship with God in order to experience fullness of life. This is the most important broken relationship that must be repaired. We will explore the spiritual development of children in Lesson 13.

- **Relationship with creation**

Children also may experience brokenness with creation, whether in their physical body in the form of disease or sickness or in the larger environment in the form of natural disasters or difficult ecological conditions. For example a child may suffer from a famine resulting from an extended drought or HIV/AIDS contracted from his or her mother.

- **Relationship with family**

When a child's relationship with one or more members of his or her family is broken, the result is often devastating, resulting in a deep brokenness. This may take the form of the loss of one or both parents or abuse at the hand of a family member(s). The centrality of the family will be discussed further in Lesson 8 of this workbook.²⁸

- **Relationship with others in the larger community**

A child's community plays a vital role in his or her well-being. When any of these relationships are broken, a child may suffer. They may include peers, school, work, and others in the neighborhood. Abuse may also happen in any of these relationships, deeply hindering a child's ability to experience wholeness. The importance of community support will be explored further in Lesson 9 and a child's relationship with the church will be explored in Part 3 of this workbook.

- **Relationships with systems and structures within society**

Broken systems and structures can oppress children with a seemingly unmovable strength. Political and economic systems exert widespread power over children. A lack of access to quality education may lock children in a cycle of poverty just as a lack of access to health care may ensure that they will experience sickness or even early death. Religious and cultural values may also support oppressive views about and attitudes toward children.

The Wounded Healer

Just as children experience brokenness in these relationships, so do we as practitioners.

We have hope to offer children that comes from having experienced the restoration of our own relationships, including our own personal, transformative relationship with God. "It is through our own understanding of suffering that we are able to help others".²⁹

"For just as the sufferings of Christ flow into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." (2 Corinthians 1:5)

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

However, we must be continuously in a posture of learning. As Jesus said, we must "become as a little child" to understand the Kingdom of God. We must always approach our ministry and our interactions with children from this humble posture, as God continuously transforms our lives daily and brings further restoration and strength to every aspect of our lives.³⁰

Jesus was the ultimate "Wounded Healer" as Hebrews 2:18 explains. Because he was tempted, "he is able to help those who are being tempted".

Just as we can minister out of our brokenness, so can children, as they become "Wounded Healers" also.

²⁸ See also Workbook 1, lesson 7

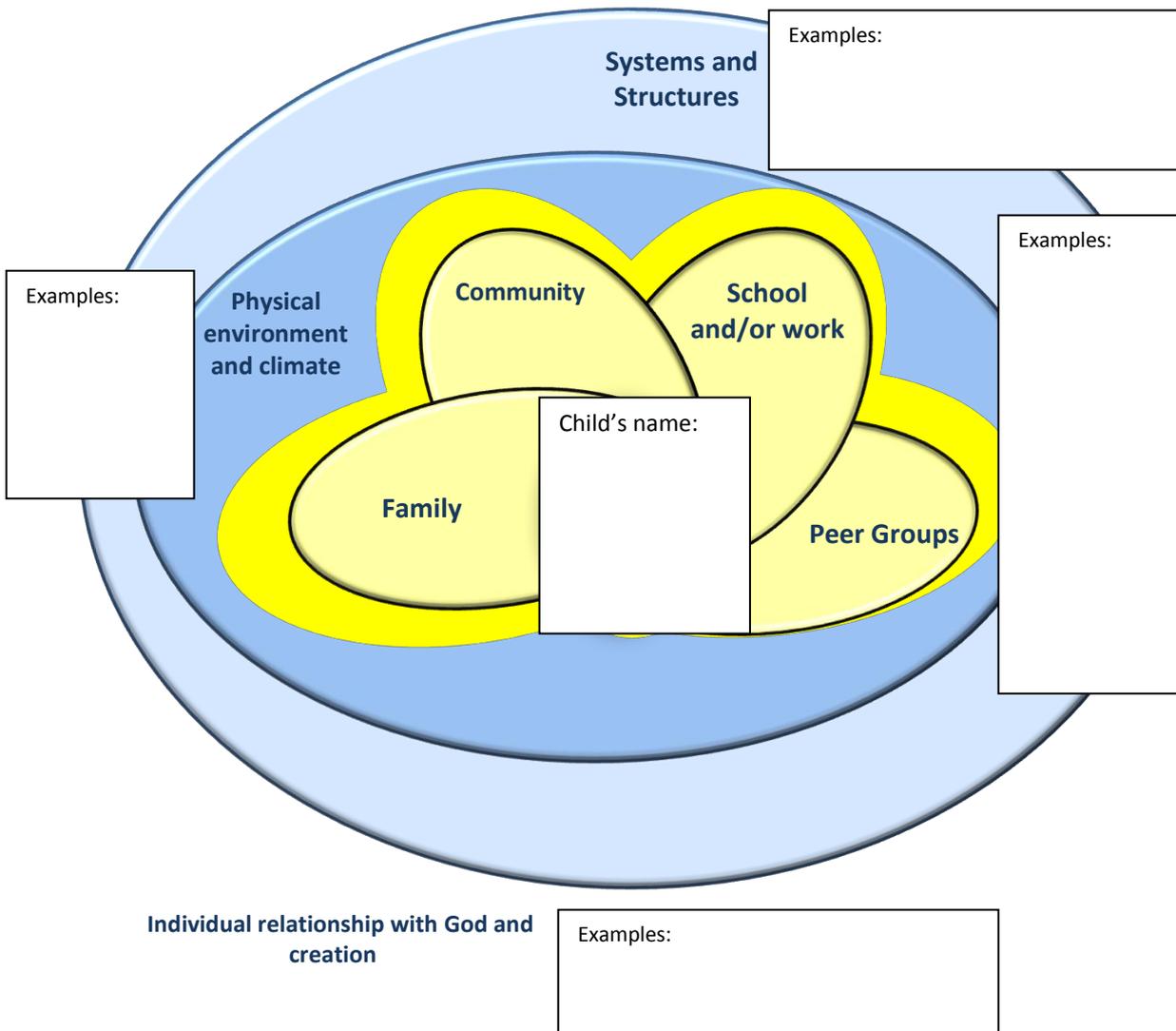
²⁹ Miles (2003), 203

³⁰ Workbook 8 will look in detail at self-care and some of the ways in which workers need to experience God's restoration and healing

Case Study

Choose a child with whom you minister. Write his or her name in the center of the diagram. Take a moment to think about the relationships in his or her life. Which relationships are strong and have a positive impact? Which relationships are weak or broken and have a negative impact? Write concrete examples onto the diagram for each.

Next, draw strong, thick arrows between the child's name in the center and the areas with which the child has strong relationships. Label the diagram with thin or broken lines between the child's name in the center and the areas with which the child's relationships are weak or broken.



Finally, take a moment to reflect on the child and his or her relationships. How might your ministry seek to strengthen those relationships that are weak or broken in the child's life?

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-
-

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children are _____ from being wholly who God intends them to be because of the presence of ____ in the world and how this breaks _____ with God and others as well as within systems and structures. Children experience brokenness is their relationship with ____; with _____ (whether in their physical ____ in the form of disease or sickness or in the larger environment in the form of _____ or difficult _____); with _____; with the larger _____; and with _____ and _____ within society. As practitioners, we also experience brokenness. The ____ that we offer children in based on our own experience of _____ in broken relationships.

Discussion questions

1. Think about the children in your ministry. What prevents them from being all that God intends? Use the following table to identify types of broken relationships in their lives, give concrete evidence of the consequences of this brokenness for the children and then think how these relationships could be restored.

Relationship	Experience of brokenness	How could this be restored?
With God		
With family		
With creation		
With community		

2. Which of these areas of brokenness does your church or organization focus on?
3. How could you help children experience restoration in the areas of brokenness? What sorts of activities would be effective?
4. Who else could you link with to help the children in your ministry experience restoration of their broken relationships?

Lesson Six: Why does God allow children to suffer?

Summary

- Why does God allow suffering?
- How does God respond to suffering?
- How can we respond to children's suffering?

*I get shivers when I sit alone,
 Don't wanna go back don't wanna go home.³¹
 Ice cold hearts in a cardboard street,
 All day staring, people passing feet.
 Insomnia, joint pain and a headache,
 All thrown in together with a stomach ache.
 Just lying here listless on a cardboard street,
 All day staring at people's passing feet.
 My life is a balancing act, real life truth or dare,
 My cardboard cupboard is empty now discarded and left bare.
 All this happens under your feet,
 Unnoticed in your concrete street.
 Just lying here listless on a cardboard street,
 All day staring at people's passing feet.*

- Coleen Houlihan, 16 years old³²

The suffering in Coleen's voice breaks our hearts. Many children face suffering of all types and most likely, in your own ministry, you serve children who suffer deeply. When faced with pain and injustice, it's difficult to understand how God could allow such suffering to happen – especially to children – and even more difficult to know how to respond appropriately. If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He intervene? The answers to our many questions about suffering come neither easily nor simply and the reality of suffering, pain, and evil in our world cannot be minimized. Let this lesson be a starting point for your own deeper ongoing reflection and application to your own context.

The biblical story: a fallen world

The biblical story tells us of the fallen state in which the world exists today. The perfect creation that God so lovingly fashioned is not as it should be because of the curse of sin. As we explored in the previous lesson, this results in broken relationships on many levels, which in turn results in suffering. Although God is all-powerful, He allows humans to make choices.

God's response to suffering

How does God respond to suffering, then? First of all, He knows what it is to suffer. Jesus himself suffered, experiencing every type of pain that we can or will ever experience. It is from this perspective, as a "Wounded Healer", that He ministers to suffering humans.

Second, His ultimate power, authority, and love remain unwavering in the face of suffering. He is able to transform even the most terrible evil into good. In fact, His glory can be manifested in the midst of

³¹ 'Wanna' means want to in colloquial English

³² Miles (2003), 203

suffering with absolute clarity. Next, God acts and is engaged with us in our suffering and He restricts evil. He is angered by the injustice that causes suffering.

“Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused ...” (Exodus 22:22-24)

Our Response to Suffering³³

As Christians, we are especially prepared to help children who are suffering. As we discussed in the previous lesson, acknowledging and healing from our own suffering allows us to minister to others. We must always strive for a balanced approach:

- **Responding with action**

It is our responsibility to be Jesus’ hands and feet in acting compassionately, working to limit or end suffering whenever possible. With faith, we can offer hope in hopeless situations, believing that change is always possible. This is “especially important among many cultures in which there is a strong element of fatalism”.³⁴ The Bible assures us that “if you have faith...nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

We can rage with God about injustice. For example, David’s words can guide us, “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” (Psalm 13:2) or “O Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue [this child] from their ravages, [this] precious life from these lions” (Psalm 35:17).

- **Alternative responses**

Action is not the only appropriate response, however. In fact, if we are too quick to act sometimes we may not hear God’s voice. Prayer must be central in our response to suffering. There are times to watch for signs of God’s movement and wait for his guidance. There are times to speak and there are times to be silent. When children experience pain, we may enter into their pain with them. Certainly the Psalmist knew what it was to experience deep grief and sorrow. We can mourn with children, in the words of the psalmist:

*Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.
My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak...
But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.”
Psalm 31:9-14*

Finally, we must respond with forgiveness to those who cause others to suffer. We must model this forgiveness for our children, we must practice it ourselves, and we must help them to forgive as well. It is only with the power of forgiveness that truly transformational healing is able to occur.

Receiving Forgiveness

“Children who have themselves caused suffering, and feel responsible, such as the child soldier, will need a special touch of God’s forgiveness as they come to the cross. Forgiveness is a legal act, releasing the offender and the offended from the bond of the wound, enabling both parties to let go of the burden.”³⁵

³³ Please refer to Workbook 8 which explains how staff may experience trauma themselves vicariously when encountering trauma in the children with whom they minister

³⁴ Miles (2003), 203

³⁵ Miles (2003), 202

Case Study³⁶

Phung, a former street child, returns to streets of Ho Chi Minh City to help young street children understand about children's rights and basic health issues, including protection against HIV/AIDS, the disease that affects more than 280,000 children in Viet Nam today.

Phung, 15, walked about Gia Dinh Park, looking for children about her age. The search began from a parking lot, up the sidewalk where couples are dancing to the cha-cha-cha, past a miniature merry-go-round, and across the street to a sidewalk where vendors sold jellies with coconut cr me soup. It was a fine winter evening for most park-goers, but for street children, this was when they made their living to support their families.

"One, two, three... There they are!" says Phung, pacing towards a group of children.

Despite Viet Nam's fast growing economy, there are more than 12,000 children making their living on the streets in Ho Chi Minh City. Children roam the city, selling chewing gums, lottery tickets, and flowers or collecting plastic bottles from trash bins, or in some cases even themselves. They are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS transmission, drug abuse, and sexual exploitation.

"HIV/AIDS is a big, big, big problem here. Ho Chi Minh City has the second highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Viet Nam," says Le Thi Thu Thuy, Thao Dan Programme Manager.

Phung led the children to relax on the sidewalk where they quickly exchanged stories of the day. Then, Phung started singing a song. Others quickly joined and clapped along. They were in their world and for a short moment, they muted the noisy honking of motorcycles and the harsh reality of street children's lives.

After the group finished singing, Phung handed out leaflets about HIV/AIDS and drawings about children's rights.

"We talk about HIV/AIDS, children's rights, girls' puberty and physical development. At the beginning they don't know anything about HIV prevention and transmission. Now, they know how to protect themselves," Phung says with a smile.

Phung and her friend Tam sat chatting with the group for the next 20 minutes until the children stood up, walked away and disappeared among the crowd.

³⁶ http://seap.savethechildren.se/South_East_Asia/Latest/Teens-talk/

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Many children face _____ of all types. When faced with pain and injustice, it's difficult to _____ how God could allow such suffering to happen and even more difficult to know how _____ . How does God respond? He knows what it is to _____ ; Jesus is our _____ healer. His ultimate power, authority, and love remain _____ in the face of suffering. As _____, we are especially prepared to help children who are suffering. _____ and _____ from our own suffering allows us to minister to others. Our response should include _____, raging with God about _____, _____ on God and _____. There are times when we should _____ with children. We should model _____ toward those who cause suffering, we must _____ it ourselves, and we must help them to forgive as well.

Discussion questions

1. What kinds of things have you experienced yourself that help you to appreciate the suffering of others?
2. How can children use their own suffering to help other children and even adults?
3. What evidence have you seen of the way children are empathetic and compassionate to others?
4. How can you encourage this in the children with whom you work?

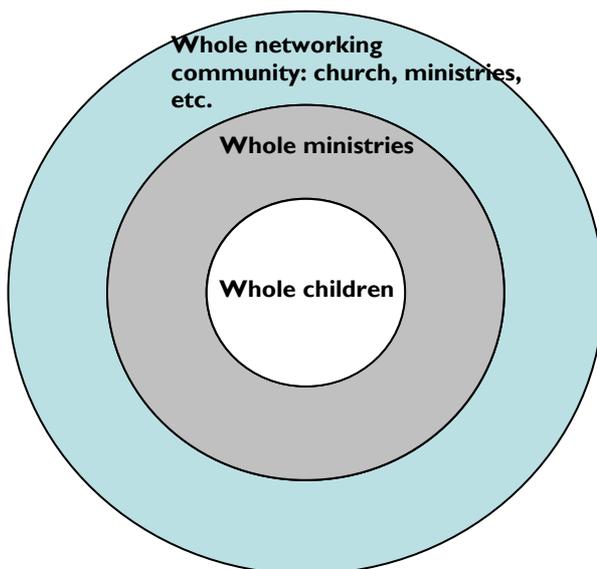
Lesson Seven: What is holistic mission?

Summary

- What is holistic mission?
- Serving whole children
- Networking with others

We have explored how God created children holistically and relationally. What, then, is Biblically “holistic” mission with children and how can we practice it in our ministries?

Mission has been defined as “the purpose and activities of God in and for the whole universe”.³⁷ It is the central message of the Bible and the Church is its primary agent in the world. Because this mission is for the “whole” universe, and thus for “whole” people, it is a *holistic* mission. God desires to bring “positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, and spiritually”.³⁸ Children need to embrace their “true identity as human beings created in the image of God”, enjoying His abundance in all areas of life. None of these is more or less important than the others in God’s eyes! The Bible does not encourage a divide between evangelistic mission and physical mission, but instead blends both into the fullness of the truth of the gospel.



Ministry that serves “whole” children

Sometimes, as Christians, it is tempting to focus the majority of our ministry on one aspect of children’s lives. For example, churches can spend much of their time on the spiritual well-being of children because they feel that the restoration of children’s relationship with God is the most important transformation they must experience. Or NGOs can spend much of their time ministering to children physically or emotionally because they feel compelled to bring tangible healing to their immediate pain.

We are right when we understand that a child’s spiritual well-being is important, for without a relationship with God, children have no hope of becoming fully who God wants them to be. Children are made up of more than just souls, however. They are “whole” children with bodies, minds, and emotions and they exist in spheres such as a family, school, work, society, and other structures. Each of these

³⁷ Kirk (1999), 25

³⁸ Myers (1999), 3

aspects of a child is equally important. If children do not have enough to eat, if their bodies are broken, if their communities are in extreme poverty, if they are in deep emotional pain from abuse, then they are not free to become fully who God wants them to be.³⁹

It is not enough to preach salvation and only talk to children who are suffering. It has been said that “an empty stomach has no ears.” If we only focus on teaching children to pray, read the Bible, and say they are Christians, we only teach them part of the Gospel. As we have noted, mission to children involves responding to their physical and social as well as their spiritual needs.

The importance of networking with others

Does holistic mission seem like a monumental task? Perhaps you already feel overwhelmed with what your ministry is doing and the thought of attempting to do more is extremely discouraging and seemingly impossible. Of course you can't do it all! According to Patrick McDonald, founder of Viva Network, “isolation is perhaps one of the biggest and most crucial problems among Christian childcare workers”.⁴⁰

Viva describes a network as a group of individuals or organisations that come together around a common vision and purpose to exchange information and/or undertake joint activities in order to increase their impact.

Just as individual relationships are important in the lives of humans, organizational relationships are also important for ministries. Building relationships with other official organizations such as ministries, churches, NGO's, schools, and governmental agencies through networking is a vital aspect of holistic mission. Relationships can also be made with individuals such as members of the community. In collaboration, the body of Christ can make a large difference in the lives of many children at risk.

The beginning of a network in Argentina:

“Everyone present at the launch conference stood up to introduce themselves. One man described himself, with a note of pride in his voice, as a representative of ‘the only children’s prison ministry in Córdoba and probably all of Argentina.’ Then he sat down. The man next to him took his turn with a somewhat bemused smile on his face and proceeded to describe himself as representing ‘the second only children’s prison ministry in Córdoba and probably all of Argentina’...”⁴¹

³⁹ See Workbook 3, Part 2 for more on children's needs

⁴⁰ McDonald (2003), 154

⁴¹ McDonald (2003), 154

Case Study

(1) It happened in an Asian city near a market. Many children were drawn to that market, either because it seemed a more exciting place than at home, where there was no room due to being cramped into a small space in a squatter area or maybe due to the fact that there was always some money that could be earned or stolen. However, it was also a dangerous place as all sorts of people wanted to take advantage of the children.

Different Christian projects were located in the area, as they had realised what was going on. However, they did not coordinate and therefore their efforts actually contributed towards helping the people to stay on the streets. You might ask how... Each of them offered a service to the children but this meant the children could just go round to each project: at one place they would get regular showers, the next place offered food once a day and another project contributed medical services. There was no planned focus of looking at the situation holistically and the Christians didn't pro-actively plan to reach each child jointly. Each of them had to find out what the situation of each child was and made its own independent decision.

(2) In every country of Latin America, visitors are certain to come across two things: a high number of street children and small, committed church groups trying very hard to help them. In Cochabamba, Bolivia, there are lots of projects, but they faced barriers related to capacity and coordination. The existing projects could not take care of more than 3 or 4% of children in need of attention. Also, street children have a very clear idea of how to 'play' the system: they circulate round the different projects to find what they need (clothes from one place one day, food from another, shower from another). This leads not only to duplication of effort but also a situation where the projects are actually enabling the children to maintain a street lifestyle rather than helping them realize their potential and actually leave street life.

In 2006 a Christian network was able to start a coordinated, city-wide approach to the problem of street children, based on identifying children at risk of entering a street lifestyle and referring them to the most appropriate Christian projects that can help meet their needs. They are also involved in work to prevent new children leaving their homes and finding their way to the streets.

The Bolivian government actually had a programme to help street children in Cochabamba, which rescued approximately 100 children in five years. In the first six months of the network's programme 300 children were reached through its preventative measures.

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

_____ is “the purpose and activities of God in and for the whole universe”. Because this mission is for the “*whole*” _____, and thus for “*whole*” _____, it is a _____ mission. The Bible does not encourage a divide between _____ mission and _____ mission. Sometimes our ministry focuses on _____ of children’s lives, however, mission to children involves responding to their physical and social as well as their spiritual needs. One ministry cannot _____ alone. Building relationships with other official organizations such as _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____ agencies through networking is a vital aspect of holistic mission. Relationships can also be made with individuals such as _____.

Discussion questions

1. Look at the two case studies for this lesson and for each one answer:
 - (a) What is the problem facing children?
 - (b) What is being done?
 - (c) Is it transforming the lives of children?
 - (d) Why / why not?
2. Can you think of local examples (past or present) that remind you of either of the case studies?
3. How could your organization/church be more holistic in the way you view children?
4. How could your organization/church work more effectively with the NGOs and churches in your community/nation?
5. Think about practical ways you can help to make this a reality in the next 3 months

Lesson Eight: What are some principles of holistic mission?

Summary

- Some practical principles for holistic mission with children
- Evaluating our work holistically

The Bible shows God's concern for the whole person and offers some practical principles to guide us in our ministries. The story of the birth of Ishmael to Hagar (the maid of Abraham's wife) in the book of Genesis, is an example of how children suffer when adults make poor decisions in their lives. Hagar and Ishmael are out in the wilderness after Abraham has sent them away. Before long, whatever food and water they carried along is finished, and they have no further resources. They are about to die. Understandably, Hagar cannot bear to see her child die, so she puts him in the shade of a bush and goes off some distance, knowing that she and the child are doomed. But God had other plans! Genesis Chapter 21:17-21 is a good passage to study to understand God's concern for the physical as well as the spiritual needs of children. The following ideas from the passage illustrate the holism of God's care for children.⁴²

God hears the children crying

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying... Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.' Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. ... God was with the boy as he grew up. (Genesis 21:17-21)

- Have a **compassionate heart** - *"God Hears the Children Crying"*
Our mission to children begins with the sensitivity to hear the deep cries of children. We must ask: "Why do the children cry?" Children cry because they are hurt, rejected, suffer loss of dignity, respect, love and basic needs for survival.
- Be the **messenger from Heaven** - *"The angel of God called to Hagar from Heaven"*
In reaching out to hurting children, we are in fact allowing God to use us as His messenger to speak on His behalf.
- **Ask** about the child's problem - *"What is the matter, Hagar?"*
We must interact with the caregivers and find out about the real needs of children in each situation.⁴³
- **Encourage** the caregiver - *"Do not be afraid."*
Mission to children involves caring and encouraging the caregiver.⁴⁴
- Provide **holistic care** to the child - *"Lift the boy up."*
Our mission to children must take the holistic approach outlined in this workbook – offering physical, emotional, social, and spiritual support.
- **Disciple** the children - *"Take him by the hand"*
Mission with children involves long-term commitment. We need to walk with, encourage, support, disciple and be a friend to children until they grow and thrive.

⁴² These insights from the Genesis 21 passage are due to Dr. Alemu Beefu

⁴³ See Workbook 7 for more on this topic

⁴⁴ See Workbook 8

- **Declare God's promises** over children - *"I will make you into a great nation"*

God's promise over Ishmael was for much more than just the immediate need – God sees his potential. It was given when all hope was gone. It was fulfilled in God's time.

- Open your eyes to **available resources** – *"Then God opened [Hagar's] eyes and she saw a well of water."*

God showed Hagar possibilities she didn't know existed. One of the challenges of mission to children in challenging contexts is in seeing what is available. Not seeing the resource – such as those available through networking – leads to discouragement, hopelessness, despair, and frustration.

- Be a **friend** to children – *"God was with the boy as he grew up."*

The presence of God brought life and hope beyond the desert. Being a long-term friend to children is crucial to introducing a God who is a faithful and loving protector of the poor and hurting.

Evaluating our ministry holistically⁴⁵

How will we know if we are following holistic principles in our ministries?

We must engage in ongoing assessment and evaluation of our ministries, asking ourselves in which areas we are succeeding and in which areas we need to change. Holistic assessment means that we are not simply evaluating ourselves technically but also spiritually.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For more information on ministry evaluation, see Workbook 7

⁴⁶ Myers (1999), 188

Case Study

The one-child policy—a special opportunity for Chinese churches?⁴⁷

China's One Child Policy is one of the ways that children are victimized. This policy has caused a disdain for girl children, and, neglect, abandonment, and even infanticide.

Unfortunately when one seriously examines the one-child policy, it is clear that these are not the only catastrophes that have emerged. One acquaintance who works in China made the obvious point that the One Child Policy means that children today have no brothers and sisters. But if the policy is continued for more than one generation, it also means that the child has no aunts or uncles, no cousins, no nephews or nieces. In fact, the policy destroys the entire extended family, for such children have no relatives except their parents and living grandparents!

However, it may also be true that the One-child Policy in China may provide significant ministry opportunities for Chinese churches.

In urban cities or more developed places in China, even where conditional exemptions for going beyond the policy are available, many families do not opt for it because today's couples in China (and elsewhere) often prefer career success to children. These educated and economically better off couples are typically having either have one child or no children. Since the third generation is already being born under the shadow of this policy, a very unique phenomenon has emerged that these little ones receive full attention of six adults – their parents and four grandparents. Together with the families' economic improvement, children are often spoiled by the material supply, but with a spiritual and mental emptiness.

This opens the opportunity for local churches to reach out to these children. In demonstrating their love for the children, churches may be able to win the confidence of the parents and win their hearts for Christ.

In countryside, the dynamic is quite different but still presents the chance to reach out for Jesus. In remote places where agriculture remains as the main economic activity and people are less educated, families often break the One-child Policy for various reasons, such as lack of knowledge on contraception or the traditional cultural preference for boys. Breaking of the policy will cause suffering in both the “non-first” children and their parents.

The “non-first” born will not be entitled to any social benefits, such as free education. As the families are poor in general, these children will rarely have the chance to go to school and may suffer for lack of access to proper medical treatment. The parents and the children are viewed as outcasts. But perhaps this too presents special opportunities for the churches. If the churches are willing to love these children by caring their practical needs, they will not merely minister to these needy children, but also have a good chance to reach out to their families.

⁴⁷ This case study is an adaptation of a portion of an article by Dan Brewster

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

The Bible shows God's concern for the _____ and offers some practical principles to guide us in our ministries, for example in the story of the birth of _____ to Hagar. Some principles include: have a _____ heart; be the _____ from Heaven; _____ about the child's problem; encourage _____; provide _____ to the child; _____ the children; _____ over the children; open your eyes to _____; and be a _____ to children. We must engage in ongoing _____ and _____ of our ministries, asking ourselves in which areas we are succeeding and in which areas we _____.

Discussion questions

1. Was your ministry started through a compassionate heart of someone seeing the suffering of children? Has it still got that at its core?
2. How are we being God's messenger on behalf of children?
3. Do we know the real needs of children? Have we carefully assessed this by asking children and their families?
4. Do we care for the staff in our organization/church? In what ways?
5. How do we consider all of children's needs – physical, emotional, social and spiritual?
6. How does our organization disciple children in the long term?
7. How do we declare promises of hope over children we serve?
8. How do we access resources of others? How do we share our resources with others?
9. How do we encourage children to enter a loving and faithful relationship with God?

Lesson Nine: What role should families play in the lives of children?

Summary

- Children's need for parental love
- What to do when families are broken

Quality holistic ministry must make strengthening a child's relationship with his or her family a top priority, whenever possible. Ministries must seek the healing and restoration of whole families, knowing that this is God's ideal for each child.

Children need parental love

The *Understanding God's Heart for Children* framework states the importance of parental love:

"Children need parental love in a broken world" (UGH #2)

"God's design is for each child to be born, vulnerable and dependent, to loving parents within the covenant of marriage. God's desire is for each child to grow in this secure, caring environment. In a fallen world, people and relationships can be damaged. When parents struggle to fulfill their intended role, others must provide dedicated care for them and their children. God intends for all children to be raised by at least one loving, committed adult."⁴⁸

When children do have at least one adult family member who is able to care for them, our ministries must do whatever we can to support the child's family. Whenever possible, it is always better to strive toward the restoration of families and allow them to remain intact rather than further disrupt a child's relationship with the family by removing him or her.

David's story: a struggling family

David's family is a good example. After his father passed away, nine-year-old David's mother was left to support herself and her three young children in the crowded capital city of Columbia, Bogotá. With only a shack to provide shelter and little money, she has been forced to beg for food and now she is very sick. To survive, David, as the oldest, has begun begging on the streets and is spending more and more time there instead of at home. He has now started sniffing glue to ease the hunger in his stomach.

A Biblical approach to ministry with David would include his whole family. What support will enable his mother to care for him and his siblings? A ministry might provide her with medical care, help her train for and find a job, assist her in caring for her children and finding adequate housing and food, and minister to her spiritually and emotionally. Of course a ministry would include the holistic needs of David as well physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Overall, ministries must take initiative to involve families as fully as possible.

⁴⁸ McConnell et al (2007), 51

When children experience broken family relationships

While intact families are God's ideal, we know that family relationships are too often broken for children, sometimes permanently. When children experience the death of both parents and have no other living family member to care for them, others must step in to provide care. Even when this is the case, ministry with orphans must be creative and hold Biblical values, striving to place children in situations as close to God's ideal intention as possible.⁴⁹

An Enormous Task

You may be tempted to ask the question, "How can one ministry accomplish all of that?" Especially with limited resources, expertise, and time, the scope of caring for entire families or orphaned children might seem unattainable. But ministries must be creative in thinking of new ideas, while not being afraid to question current models of care. As mentioned in the previous lesson, networking with others is an important step in ministering to the whole family. One of the best gifts you may be able to give a child is either the restoration of his or her parent(s) or the opportunity to grow and develop in a situation as close to God's intent as possible. Finally, we must not forget the power and wisdom of the One who strengthens us to participate in His mission with these children. It is He who guides us and provides.

⁴⁹ Please see Miles and Stephenson (2001) for more information regarding care for orphans. See also Workbook I, lesson 8

Case Study⁵⁰

Casa Viva began with a dream of an idea and the ingredients for growth—the support of the local church and families willing to become the solution for children in need of care. We grew the idea by creating a team that would handle all the details of government relations, legal decisions, relationships with the biological families—all the details that limited a church’s ability to respond.

We are clearing pathways for life-giving families to connect with children who desperately need them. And it’s working. The garden of families is growing, with bright splashes of color scattered across the city. Little by little the idea is taking root, children are being cared for, and growth is happening. Here is one example from Costa Rica:

We slipped into church just as the lights were dimming. The Latin rhythms started. The music was amazing, the choreography even better—children singing and dancing and enjoying their moment in the spotlight. Proud parents sat throughout the crowd snapping pictures.

Most amazing to us was how “normal” it all was. There, hidden in the midst of all the other children, was sweet Anna. There was no reason to believe her story was different from anyone else’s on the stage that morning. Only we and the Casa Viva family caring for her knew of the pain in the early chapters of her story. Watching her brought such a sense of peace—once a girl with danger signs in her future, now a girl with an embracing family and a welcoming circle of church community.

Anna’s story includes an abuse by her father that landed him in jail and landed Anna in a children’s institution for girls. Her mother died of cancer. She fell out of contact with her three brothers. The institution caring for her would only provide a solution for her until she turned twelve years old, a typical practice of homes unable or unwilling to care for the unique needs of adolescents. Anna had been declared in abandonment, but at nine years old was a poor candidate for adoption (most adoptive families in Costa Rica want children three or younger). The only option looming on the horizon was a government home for teenage girls—a difficult situation at best.

But along came Marcos and Marielos, a servant couple open to receiving in their home the child God would give them. The Casa Viva team arranged for a meeting, and soon, Anna was “welcomed home.” Casa Viva helped track down her brothers and arranged for a monthly meeting to help them stay in contact. The family has expressed interest in adopting Anna, but for now, she prefers to keep the last names she shares with her rediscovered brothers. So for the next ten years, Anna will live with Marcos and Marielos, experiencing the love, warmth, and challenges associated with family life.

Anna is an example of Casa Viva’s long-term family-based care in action.

⁵⁰ ‘Welcome Home’, Casa Viva newsletter, Autumn 2008

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Quality holistic ministry must make _____ a child's relationship with his or her _____ a top priority, whenever possible. Understanding God's Heart for Children states that 'children need _____ in a broken world'. Whenever possible, it is always better to strive toward the _____ and allow them to remain intact rather than further disrupt a child's relationship with the family by _____ him or her. While intact families are God's ideal, we know that family relationships are too often _____ for children, sometimes permanently. Even when this is the case, ministry with orphans must be _____ and hold _____, striving to place children in situations as close to God's _____ as possible. Ministries must be _____ in thinking of new ideas, while not being afraid to _____. _____ with others is an important step in ministering to the whole family.

Discussion questions

1. What is the typical provision of care for children who cannot be cared for in their own family in your context? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this provision?
2. How can ministry with orphans best reflect God's intention for children to be cared for in a family?
3. What are the main barriers and challenges to putting this into practice? How could these be overcome?
4. In what ways does your church or organization support families that are at risk of breaking?
5. What are other ministries in your area doing to strengthen families and care for orphans and vulnerable children in the community? How could working together make your work more effective?

Lesson Ten: What role should society play in the lives of children?

Summary

- Society's responsibility for children's wellbeing
- Advocacy
- Child advocacy and mission

Holistic ministry with children must involve the larger community and society. As we learned previously, systems and structures affect children enormously. When they are broken, children may suffer as a result. But when they are healthy, children will benefit.

Society has a Responsibility for Children

Understanding God's Heart for Children framework affirms the biblical importance of society for the well being of all children.

"Society has a God-given responsibility for the well-being of children and families" (UGH #4)

"All children and families live in society and are dependent on institutions for healthcare, shelter, access to social services, safe drinking water, information and safety. The church must collaborate with these institutions for the common good, and if they fail, the church must speak and act with and on behalf of the vulnerable. God intends children to flourish in a just society"⁵¹

Why should we be advocates for children?⁵²

The Bible often calls for justice, especially for the poor, orphaned, and oppressed. There are numerous references in Scripture describing God as the defender of the fatherless. The Old Testament contains nearly 30 passages, such as this one from Psalm 82:3-4: "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

Advocacy takes its roots from the legal profession. It means speaking or pleading on behalf of another. It has to do with speaking for, acting for, or defending someone or something, before someone else.

Child advocacy is a mindset

Child advocacy is a mindset which allows us to "be in the arena," in regional, and global discussions on child and mission issues and positions us to take our place in a variety of forums on child issues.

If this sounds daunting or you feel you do not have the right qualifications, think of Moses or Joshua who were reluctant advocates. You do not have to be gifted speakers or have a lot of learning to speak up in regional and even international forums. Sometimes the main qualification is a willingness to speak and a true understanding of the issues – by spending time with children.

Viewing ourselves as advocates encourages us to "lift up our eyes" and to view our ministry not just as administrators on behalf of children, but as advocates for children - speaking out and acting on their behalf. As such, advocacy allows us to multiply our ministry rather than just add to it.

⁵¹ McConnell et al (2007), 133

⁵² See also Workbook 1, lesson 15; Workbook 2, lesson 15

Child advocacy and mission go hand in hand

You may have heard it said: Give a child a fish, feed him for a day; teach a child to fish, feed him for a lifetime. But what if the child has no access to the pond? What if the water has been polluted up stream? What if the wealthy forces the child to turn the fish over to him? What if other things keep people from using the skills and abilities they already have?

Often ministries with children do not get to the root of the problem. Advocacy deals with the structural aspects of poverty, exploitation and injustice, which address these issues more directly.

Some strategies in this example could include:

- Appealing to decision makers to give poor people access to the pond
- Presenting the need for legal reform to protect the rights of child fishers
- Drawing attention to the problem of pollution in the stream

Child advocacy with children and parents

Parents need to be involved in advocating for their own children. We need to be careful not to disempower them by advocating for things they could be doing themselves. However, we can work with parents to help them see the issues, the stakeholders, and their responsibilities while guiding them to understand the risks involved.

Case Study

Advocacy work of the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia⁵³

The government of Cambodia is concerned about the issue of pornography. The church and many other groups agree with the government's stance and want to show that they support it. This not only gives the government confidence to act in a stronger way, but encourages churches to co-operate and have detailed discussions about how to achieve this joint aim.

The Youth Commission, a working group of the EFC, made up of Cambodian pastors, Christian professionals and Christian youth, are encouraging the churches to organise a March Against Pornography. Women's groups from churches in the city of Phnom Penh and beyond, will be invited to the march to protest against the rapid increase in explicit videos and magazines. Many talks are planned in churches before the march. The march includes the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia Youth Commission, the Women's Commissions and the public.

Advocacy practitioners in Ethiopia⁵⁴

Many people who suffer injustice feel unable to take any action. They may fear further injustice, they may be poor and feel they are of no importance or they may lack understanding of their rights. The advocacy department in Kale Heywet Church in Ethiopia has been training church leaders as advocacy practitioners to support people when they suffer injustice.

The practitioners have received training for one month a year over a four-year period. The training is given by six lawyers, all of whom are church leaders within the Kale Heywet Church and other evangelical churches. The courses cover: the Ethiopian constitution; introduction to law; human rights; a detailed study of laws concerning business, public finance, labour, civil society and penal law; Sharia law (as over 30% of the population are Muslim); support courses in English and mathematics.

Forty-six trainees graduated in 2005. Their certificate is recognised by the government. The practitioners, who come from all over the country, have formed themselves into local and national networks to support each other. Some would like to become full-time advocacy workers. Their training has given them the understanding and confidence needed to speak out and challenge injustice in the courts.

One of the practitioners, Endale Ero, found two girls crying. When he asked about the problem, they told him that they had applied and been interviewed and accepted for posts within the local government. However, when they reported for work they found that others had been given the posts. Endale asked for permission to speak on their behalf. He took the issue to court and won the case for them. Not only did they receive their jobs but they were also compensated.

⁵³ Source: ROOTS 1: Understanding Advocacy, Tearfund 2002, p.41
<http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Churches/6.3.3%20Case%20study%20EFC.pdf>

⁵⁴ Negussie Zewdie, FOOTSTEPS 66 <http://tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/Footsteps+61-70/Footsteps+66/Advocacy+practitioners.htm>

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Holistic ministry with children must involve the larger _____ and _____. When the _____ and structures of _____ are broken, children may suffer as a result, but when they are healthy, children will benefit. Understanding God's Heart for Children framework affirms that 'Society has a _____ for the well-being of children and families'; when society fails, the _____ must speak out. This is what _____ is about. Child advocacy is a _____ which allows us to 'be _____', in regional, and global discussions on child and mission issues and positions us to take our place in a variety of _____ on child issues. The main qualification for child advocacy is a _____ and a _____ of the issues. Advocacy deals with the _____ aspects of poverty, exploitation and injustice. _____ need to be involved in advocating for their own children.

Discussion questions

1. Besides Abraham and Moses, can you name at least two other advocates in the Bible? How were God's purposes achieved through their roles in advocacy?
2. What sorts of strategies for advocacy can you think of? Discuss these with your peers. Which strategies and approaches would be more effective in your cultural context?
3. What are the risks of doing advocacy as a church, as an organization in your context?
4. What concerns do you have about being an advocate for children? How could you overcome these concerns? Whose help would you need?
5. How will you make advocacy for children a mindset for yourself, for your church, for your organization? Give some specific steps that you will take

Part Three: What are the roles and responsibilities of the church and children in God's mission? ⁵⁵

The church plays a vital role in holistic mission with children! First, we will explore mistakes that churches have made and ways in which churches can effectively fulfill their responsibilities toward children. Then, we will explore the vital role that children themselves play both within the church and in mission. Not only are they objects of mission, but resources for mission as well: in other words, they do not only need to receive ministry but are also part of the way God's mission reaches out to others. Children must be equipped to participate fully in holistic mission.

⁵⁵ In this workbook, the term "church" refers not only to churches, but also to Christian NGOs. Christian NGOs often represent the church

Lesson Eleven: What role should the Church play in the lives of children?

Summary

- Children and the church
- A covenant for churches

Children and the church

God has placed the church in a unique role as His agent of holistic mission in the world. Just as other systems and structures, the church can either hurt or help children.

“God welcomes children fully into the family of faith” (UGH #6).

Understanding God’s Heart for Children framework affirms the role of the church:

“Children are essential to the life and ministry of the church, bringing spiritual gifts and abilities and fulfilling definite roles. The church needs to be a place where children may dynamically connect with God and engage in meaningful participation; disciplined, equipped and empowered for life and ministry. As members of the family of God, children are to be cared for as sons and daughters and are part of the admonition to love and serve one another. God intends for churches to provide children with opportunities to know him and fulfill their calling in the body of Christ.”⁵⁶

What the Bible says about the Church

Paul describes the living Church as “God’s household” where there is a caring community of believers who are role models in the way they manage their lives and their own families (1 Timothy 3:15). As traditional family structures continue to break down, the Church’s function as a safe family environment for children cannot be overemphasized.

In the early Church, children who are fatherless or orphans need special attention (James 1:27) because they are outside the “normal” household family unit. This is an extension of God’s particular defense of the fatherless expressed in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 68:5).

Covenant for Churches

Mr. Michael Shiferaw has done much work with the churches in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa. Over a period of several meetings, Shiferaw brought church leaders together at all levels – National Fellowship level, Denominational Leadership level and local church level – and asked the question: “What should a child expect from the Church?” One of the more significant outcomes of his exercise has been the “Covenant for Churches on Ministering to Children.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ McConnell et al (2007), 225

⁵⁷ For the full covenant see Brewster (2005), 108-111

The Covenant looks at the responsibilities of each level of the church, and sets out minimum standards, such as:

- Child Discipleship Training

The Church shall enable children to serve in their homes, the church, and in their community. Each child shall be encouraged and given an opportunity to become a disciple of Jesus through the teaching from the Word of God, appropriate to their age and capacity. Child workers must not be distracted by the outward misbehavior of children but instead seek to discover their hidden talents and potential in the Lord. The Church shall have regular training courses for all its teachers and caregivers. Children's classes shall be monitored and evaluated regularly. Only trained and experienced teachers and caregivers shall be assigned.

- Family Equipping and Support

The Church shall educate, encourage and follow-up parents to enable them to 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. It shall provide regular and varied parenting classes and support for parents in difficult situations.

The Church shall also try to provide resources for the home in the form of classes, books, DVDs and other materials whenever possible.

- Protection from Harmful Traditions

The Church shall make efforts to enable children to grow without being adversely affected by harmful traditional attitudes, beliefs and practices. It needs to train caregivers to help children who have been abused, mistreated or are homeless. As discussed in a separate lesson in this module, each local church is called to be an advocate for children in its community. It should aspire to take concrete action with respect to the care and protection of the rights of children in especially difficult circumstances in cooperation with the individuals and organizations in its area.

In summary, the Church shall be a safe place where children can grow holistically as Jesus did – “in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

Case Study

Preschool Educational Programme (PEPE) in Mozambique (by Terezinha Candeiro)

I am a missionary who has worked in Mozambique for about 15 years. During the last 5 years in that place, I have worked as a national coordinator of PEPE - Preschool Education Programme, which benefits children from deprived communities who would otherwise not be able to afford pre-school education, and would therefore find it very difficult to enter the local education system with any chance of success. The target of PEPE is disadvantaged children who are between 4 to 5 years old.

One of the communities I had the privilege to work in is Matacuane, in the city of Beira. Matacuane has a population of about 2,000 people. Many are jobless and have an average of 4 to 5 children. Most of the men make a living by selling handcrafts and the women work in small farms. Education is a big issue here because schools are few and poorly equipped. Poverty is a big issue here and children are often exposed to exploitation, violence, and abuse. Positively, since the year 2000, the government has asked churches and institutions to help minimize the economic and social conditions of the population with the slogan: "Let's overcome poverty through education and work."

With this open door and through PEPE, I started a training program for the lay educators in the church. After 3 months of training, we started a preschool program for the Matacuane's children. Initially, we started off with 25 children, a recommended number for initial stage of implementation. At the end of the first year, the church had a celebration with all the parents and the entire community to celebrate the positive changes in the children's lives.

At the end of 2005, there were 26 churches and more than 1200 children enrolled in the PEPE program. Today the number of children and educators are bigger. God gives growth! The PEPE initiative is making a great impact upon the lives of entire communities. PEPE has helped the Church to enhance awareness in developing a holistic ministry among children and their family in this deprived community.

The long-term results have been thus:

- For the children...many have now graduated from the pre-school education program, successfully enrolled in primary schools, and achieving good results. They have good self esteem and the social and educational skills necessary to progress well in life.
- For the churches...many people have visited churches with PEPE units, and accepted Christ as their savior while many others have been exposed to the Gospel. The PEPE program is helping to mobilize the gifts of the church members so that they can express their faith in word and deed for the benefit of the local community.
- For the educators...with the help of courses and various seminars, many missionary educators feel better equipped and encouraged to better develop the potential of the children under their care.
- For the government...they are very favorable towards PEPE and have endorsed the Pre-school program for children in challenging situations.

To God be the glory!

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

God has placed the church in a unique role as His _____ of holistic mission in the world. Understanding God's Heart for Children framework affirms that 'God _____ fully into the family of faith.' Paul describes the living Church as "_____"; as traditional family structures continue to _____, the Church's function as a _____ environment for children cannot be overemphasized. The "Covenant for Churches on Ministering to Children" looks at the _____ of each level of the church, and sets out _____, including: Child _____ Training, _____ Equipping and Support, and Protection from _____.

Discussion questions

1. Are children truly an integral part of your church, its life and work? Give evidence to support your answer.
2. In what ways could you influence your church to give children real responsibility and to let them share in church life in ways that make a difference?
3. Does your church provide children with nurture that is appropriate to ability and stage of development?
4. Jesus' growth 'in wisdom, stature and in favor with God and man' provides a model for the growth of all children. List at least three ways your church can help children grow in each of these three areas.
5. Referring to the Covenant for Churches on Ministering to Children, what two things can you do to help your church be more responsive to children:
 - At the national level
 - At the denominational level
 - At your local church level

Lesson Twelve: How do children develop in their faith?

Summary

- What is the 4/14 window?
- How does a child's faith develop?

Holistic mission with children should strive to foster spiritual development through a personal relationship with God.

“The 4/14 Window”

Children are uniquely receptive to spiritual development. In an eye-opening presentation Dr Bryant Myers, noted that in the USA nearly 85 percent of people who make a decision for Christ do so between the ages of four and 14!⁵⁸ The “4/14 Window” refers to the reality that most people who make decisions for Christ do so between the ages of 4 and 14. In non-Western contexts, informal research suggests that generally at least 60% of Christians make their first decisions to follow Christ between the ages of 4 and 14.⁵⁹

A child's faith development

All children have some faith from the earliest months of life. The infant in her mother's arms shows faith by simply trusting. It is, therefore, very important for us to ensure that faith grows in children right along with their physical, social, and emotional growth.⁶⁰

Children seem to have a particular sense or sensitivity to the Divine, to “mystery”, and to the touch of God in their lives.⁶¹ A child's faith may be characterized by:⁶²

- A special openness to nature, to feelings, and to others, and a simple yet profound sense of awe and wonder.
- A sense of the present – the ability to live in the “here and now”; a tendency to be direct and in touch with their feelings, and a natural openness and welcoming spirit.
- An uncomplicated view of life, finding it easy to trust and accept the things of God.

The analogy of a tree is one way to show the stages of the growth of children's faith. The stages may differ in various contexts.⁶³ As you read these stages ask yourself if or how they might apply in your culture and faith tradition.

⁵⁸ Myers (1992)

⁵⁹ The author has confirmed this through informal surveys of more than 100 large and small groups, amongst people from Asian, African, Latin and Western contexts

⁶⁰ For more on child development, see Workbook I

⁶¹ Brewster (1995), 96

⁶² Copsey (2003), 9

⁶³ Westerhoff (1976), 88. Westerhoff describes the growth of faith like a tree that expands from one ring to several rings as it matures

Experiencing Faith



This is the earliest style of faith and is found in the preschool and early childhood years of children. Faith here is more experienced than understood. A child at this stage “explores and tests, imagines and creates, observes and copies, experiences and reacts.”⁶⁴ Therefore, as James 2:18 instructs, we need to ensure that our actions support our words. We need to give children positive experiences of trust, love and acceptance as a foundation for their faith experience.

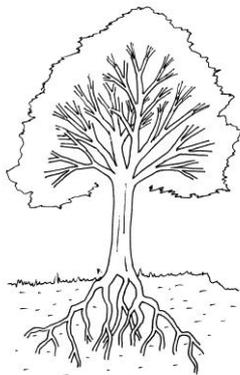
Belonging Faith

This is the stage where children begin to see themselves as belonging to the faith community. It is essential at this stage that children be given opportunities to serve community both within and beyond the church walls. Involving children in drama, music, dance, sculpture, painting, and storytelling are important to their spiritual growth.⁶⁵



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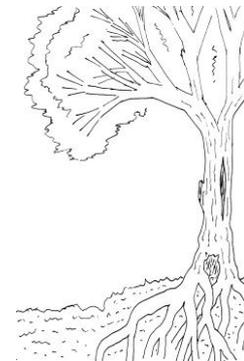
Searching Faith



In this next stage, the young person may begin to ask hard questions about the faith and may even “experiment” with other beliefs and traditions. This is the process wherein Christianity becomes both a “religion of the head” and “a religion of the heart.” Intellectual understanding and faith experiences are equally important to children at this stage. When both of these elements are present, children can then make a definite commitment to follow Christ.⁶⁶

Owned Faith

When a child moves from experienced to belonging faith through searching to owned faith, conversion takes place. This is the ultimate purpose of God every child. Children possessing *owned* faith will strive to be a witness both words and deeds (1 John 2:6).⁶⁷ The Church, therefore, plays a crucial role providing an environment that encourages the expansion of faith in children.



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Pete Hohmann sums it up well: ⁶⁸

“Kids have a tremendous spiritual capacity. They can bring joy to God’s heart. They can hear and obey God. They can minister to others... Our lack of vision for the spiritual capacity of children can cause us to do things that actually harm or stunt the spiritual growth of children. Children are dreamers. They are idealists, they always have faith in a better tomorrow. No wonder Jesus told us to be like little children. God often accomplishes His greatest purposes through children.”

⁶⁴ Westerhoff (1976), 89

⁶⁵ Westerhoff (1976), 91-92

⁶⁶ Westerhoff (1976), 93-94

⁶⁷ Westerhoff (1976), 95-96

⁶⁸ Hohmann (pre-publication draft)

Case Study⁶⁹

Part of the family team

John is an 11-year-old boy from the US. Together with his family he came to live in South Asia. His family was, among other things, involved in ministering to street children. John and his brothers and sister were part of the family team. Together they often went to spend time in a slum area to play soccer with the local boys.

Recently the family decided to participate at a conference for children held in South Asia. Mary, John's 15-year-old sister was part of the worship team.

John decided that he would give a testimony. Together with his mother he stood in front of over a thousand children, sharing with them how when he and his family had gone to see the majestic Himalaya mountains the weather was dull and very cloudy and there was not much chance to see anything. He prayed, knowing that for God nothing was impossible. Then he waited and sure enough he saw the clouds rise and disappear and the Himalayas appear! Together as a family they enjoyed the creation of an awesome God who listens to the prayers of an eleven-year-old boy.

Interestingly, through a mistake John was announced by the local newspaper as a main speaker for the conference. Who knows, maybe for the children who heard him he was, encouraging them to step out to trust God and to get involved in His ministry without having to wait till they were all grown up!

Jesus Power

A drop-in ministry in India also organized camps for the children who came from slums and the streets to have a different experience for a time.

One of those camps took place at one of the hill stations in India, where the team and the children together did outreaches to different churches. One of the girls there was 9-year-old Anita. She participated in the worship times, in dances, and she was always very involved in the prayer times.

After the camp, the children returned to their lives. Anita lives in the streets with her five siblings and her grandparents.

One day I met Anita in the streets. Another girl was going around with some oil for people to worship gods. Anita looked at her and then turned to me and said, *"We don't need something like that anymore. We now have Jesus power!"*

⁶⁹ Names changed for security reasons

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children are uniquely _____ to spiritual development between the ages of _ and _____. This is known as the _____. All children have some _____ from the earliest months of life. Children seem to have a particular sense or sensitivity to the _____, to “mystery”, and to the _____ in their lives. Faith develops like a _____ growing. The first stage is _____ faith: faith here is more experienced than understood. Next is _____ faith, when children begin to see themselves as belonging to the _____. The third stage is _____ faith. In this phase a young person may begin to ask hard questions about the faith and may even “experiment” with _____. When a child moves from experienced to belonging faith through searching faith to _____ faith, conversion takes place. This is the ultimate purpose of God for every child.

Discussion questions

1. Does your experience of faith development go along with the illustration of how faith grows like a tree? How?
2. Do you believe that there may be special receptivity for faith decisions among children between the ages of four and fourteen? Why or why not?
3. Give an example from your culture / experience of the first faith experience of very young children being more ‘experienced than understood’.
4. Give an example from your culture / experience of childhood faith being characterized by ‘questioning, doubt, searching and experimentation.’

Activity

Survey at least 50 Christians – members of your church or other Christian groups – over the age of 30. Ask them when they made their first significant decision to follow Christ.

What are the implications of your findings for the way your church or your organization addresses the spiritual development of the children in your care?

Lesson Thirteen: What are some cautions in sharing the Christian faith with children?

Summary

- Issues for ministry with children in non-Christian contexts
- What is proselytism?
- Guidelines

Ministry with children in non-Christian contexts

Ministry and mission to children from non-Christian contexts must be approached wisely. Just as cross-cultural missionaries must study the cultures and the context of the adult peoples to whom they minister, so those who would do inter-faith mission with children must be extremely *wise*, *sensitive* and *cautious* in holistic ministry with children from non-Christian contexts.

Just because children tend to be very receptive to the gospel does not mean that we can be careless or insensitive in how we approach them or their parents. Indeed, that openness should cause us to be even more cautious and discerning, for the possibility of exploitation or abuse is also heightened.

We must remember that most non-Western peoples tend to come to Christ as family groups or clans. All major decisions are group decisions – and no one decides until the whole group is ready to decide. This should almost always be the approach in cross-cultural situations involving children and young people.

What about proselytism?⁷⁰

Proselytism is seeking a change of another person's religion under duress (under the dominating influence of the stronger powers) or when it is economically or socially advantageous to do so. Charges and accusations are sometimes made about "proselytizing" among children. There are laws in many countries prohibiting proselytizing. We sometimes also hear accusations of "forced conversions." Some countries have made laws against any conversion from one faith to another.

Guidelines⁷¹

While presentation of the Gospel, even to children, is both legitimate and mandated by Scripture, there are indeed circumstances which make evangelism improper and unethical. Here are a few:

- **It is unethical for Christians to pressure for conversion in situations where the children and/or their parents are completely dependent on the financial and/or material support of Christians.** This may occur in orphanages, children's homes, day care centres, refugee camps, and social aid projects or communities heavily sustained by Christian development efforts resourced from outside the community. Children are so conscious of their powerlessness that they are likely to accept any conditions attached to the support they are

⁷⁰ See also the Code of Conduct for the Red Cross and NGOs in disaster situations <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/>

⁷¹ Thanks to Sujitha Siri Kumara, a Sri Lankan working with ESCAPE in Colombo for some of the thoughts in this section. His paper presented in a class on Child, Church and Mission at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary in June 2003, helped shape many of the points in this lesson

provided with. Whether it is children or adults, Christians should not put pressure on them to convert to Christianity.

- **It is unethical to seek the conversion of children with a patronizing attitude that distances oneself from the painful reality that the children are experiencing.** We must relate empathetically to suffering children and their families who are extremely vulnerable and have no control over their circumstances.
- **It is unethical for Christians to work independently of those of other faiths when we are striving to achieve common development, justice and freedom objectives.** There are struggles facing the needy in which we can and should hold hands with those of other faiths and ideologies to attain specific goals, even though one of our main aims is to see the saving power of Christ reaching those children. When a common view of justice is held, Christians can work together with others in achieving common goals for children.⁷²
- **It is unethical to offer to children a Gospel which undermines or despises or denies the validity of their culture.** Christian conversion sometimes becomes synonymous with cultural conversion. We must be aware of cultural factors while at the same time not allowing them to undermine the power of the gospel. Acts 17:16–34 gives us a clear example of the apostle Paul’s strategy to build on the culture of his hearers (by quoting their poets) and on the religion visible locally (the altar ‘to an unknown god’).
- **It is unethical to guide children to become Christians in instances where they do not have a proper understanding of what it entails.** We must continue to teach them about Christ to help them gain a proper understanding of Jesus with a sensitivity to each child’s spiritual needs.
- **Finally, it is unethical to evangelize a child if the parents are not informed or in opposition.** Children who cannot act independently of their parents should not be encouraged to become Christians. Moreover some would suggest that responsible missionaries or church leaders should never baptize a child until the parents are also ready to be baptized. Once the child reaches adulthood – usually 18 years – then we may be comfortable in leading converts into baptism.

Compassion International

Compassion International includes Christian training as part of all the programs and projects it supports. We intentionally enrol children from both Christian and non-Christian families. However, our expectation is that all our actions, intentions and objectives, and those of the churches with which we partner, should always be transparent and obvious. Almost always the activities of the project take place in the church itself, where the Christian intention is very obvious. We always make it explicit that Christian training will be provided to all enrolled children. But we will never enrol a child, from any background, without the express consent of the parents or primary caregivers.

There are many instances in such programs where children give their hearts to Christ. Again, parents are always made aware of what is happening. Parents of all children are encouraged to participate in Christian training themselves, so they know exactly what their children are learning.

But more than just parental consent is needed before we would encourage our church partners to baptize new young believers. We believe that children living in non-Christian contexts should not be baptized unless their parents are also prepared to make that declaration of their new faith. This recognizes the vulnerability of children, in all respects. A conversion to Christianity from a non-Christian background is so sensitive that the support of the parents is crucial both to ensure the safety of the children as well as to provide “soil” for Christian nurture.

⁷² The UNCRC is a useful tool in this regard. See Workbook 1, lesson 13-15

Case Study

Lin Lin, a Malaysian Chinese

“I am a first generation believer. My family are religious Taoists.⁷³ As a Chinese, my mum used to remind me that as long as I am not married, I am still a child! So, when I accepted the Lord at age 25, I chose to be a secret believer for one year because I was afraid of offending my father and my older brothers. I have heard of a number of Christians who were disowned, beaten or chased out by family members when they became Christians. Some Chinese families allow their kids to go to church but not to be baptized. Reason: they too believe that there is no turning back for a baptized believer (very biblical, don’t you think?).

So, when the time came for me to be baptized, I couldn’t hide anymore. The church needed my parents’ consent (even though legally I wasn’t a child anymore...this is Asia!). I was also expected to invite my parents to be present to witness my water baptism service and which I did. With fear and trembling, I submitted to authority and got my father’s consent without much problem and they witnessed my water baptism too.

My sister told me later that I got off easy because I am the youngest daughter and was father’s pet. Traditional Chinese parents are easier on a girl child accepting Jesus but would be very upset when they “lose” their eldest son to Christianity. The eldest son has a special status in the family as the bread winner and protector of the family’s interests.

Then, when my dad died and I had to make the very difficult stand of not “honoring the dead” by again, seeking permission from my mum not to participate in the 5-day funeral rituals of my dad. And then two years later, I had the call to go to Bible school. I did the same thing - sought Mum’s blessings ... But all these gradually narrowed the gap between my family and the church to the extent that most of them have responded positively to attending special church meetings with me.”

⁷³ Taoism is a traditional Chinese religion, found in many East Asian countries. It is polytheistic, an important element involves revering ancestors and there are many rituals and food sacrifices for the spirits of the deceased and gods

Lesson Fourteen: How can we learn from the Church's experience of mission with children?⁷⁴

Summary

- Lessons from the church's mission with children in the past
- Mistakes from the church's mission with children in the past
- Mission with children today

Christianity has a long and diverse history of mission with children. In this workbook, we have learned what an important role the church has in this mission. Now we will look back at the long legacy of Christian ministry with children to learn lessons from both its successes and mistakes. We will see that Christian mission with children has been influenced by theological interpretations of how to raise children, by cultural views of children and childhood, and by Western scientific thinking about child development. Huge shifts in these areas have resulted in drastic changes in approaches to childcare through the years. We want to learn from the past as we strive to be faithful participants in God's mission and serve His children most effectively.

Throughout this workbook we have explored God's heart for children and how it was manifested in the life and actions of Jesus. He inspired a shift in how children were viewed and valued (see Lesson Two) that went against the common negative cultural views of children as simply property.

Lessons from the church

Leading the way

The early church carried on Jesus' tradition during Roman times in caring for abandoned children and children of the poor. In fact, the early church fathers led the way in advocating for and rescuing unwanted children (girls, malformed children or children of the desperately poor) who were either abandoned, sold, or killed and thus the first orphanages were started.

From the time of the Reformation (16th century), Catholic and Protestant Christians alike often took the lead in working with poor children. Evangelical Christians in the 18th and 19th centuries continued in this tradition with abandoned infant hospitals, work with street children, and education among others. Many other significant Christian figures made important contributions.

George Muller (1805-1898)

First orphanage in 1836 for 30 children, 4 orphan houses in 1870 for 2050 children

Provided for approx. 10,000 orphans over the course of his lifetime

Purpose was to give his congregation a demonstration of God's faithful care

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951)

Founded the Dohnavur Fellowship, India

Rescued orphans and temple girls

Bob Pierce (1914-1978)

Innovator of child sponsorship

Founded World Vision in 1950

⁷⁴ This lesson is based on Besford and Stephenson (2003)

Harsh discipline

The strongest motivation for both Catholics and Protestants between the 15th and 19th centuries was to save children's souls from eternal destruction. The most common view of children was that they were born evil and thus in need of extremely strict discipline. Theologian John Wesley instructed parents and child workers to "break their wills...whatever pain it costs, break the will if you would not damn the child".⁷⁵ It was believed that in order to create an ordered society, children needed harsh discipline and should be "seen and not heard." This contributed to child care practices that were often harmful to children for example corporal punishment.

Clash of culture

As Christian missionaries traveled to different parts of the world, from the 15th century their service to children frequently included schools, hospitals, and orphanages. However, these were often flawed. They required children to leave their "wicked" communities and cultural identities. For example, when a child came to live in institutions such as boarding schools or orphanages, he or she needed to learn a new language, dress code, and value system, resulting in living two lives. Western missionaries brought their views about childhood, often as a time of innocence, playfulness, and freedom, which clashed with other cultural views of childhood. The need to reject ones cultural identity in order to convert to Christianity caused an "identity crisis" for many children.

Mission with children today

Christian mission with children is vibrant and widespread today. Viva Network estimates that the worldwide Christian movement serves more than 20 million children through approximately 25,000 workers. Today, many ministries participate in truly holistic mission, as they are not simply concerned about children's souls, but also their minds, bodies, and relationships. Contemporary theological understanding of children (such as *Understanding God's Heart for Children* and the Child Theology Movement) is much more balanced, presenting a Biblical understanding of children as valuable contributors, instead of previous views of them as totally evil.

Additionally, many ministries now realize the need to work toward the transformation of entire communities, families, and structures within which children live, instead of removing children from them. These ministries understand the importance of keeping children's families as intact as possible and are increasingly creative in approaches to orphan care.⁷⁶ Together, we are continuously learning, both from those in the past and from our fellow child care workers today as we participate in holistic mission with children.

⁷⁵ Besford and Stephenson (2003), 145

⁷⁶ For more information on alternative models to orphan care, refer to Miles and Stephenson (2001)

Case Study⁷⁷

Soon after the [earth]quake in Haiti [in January 2010], 10 US Baptists were arrested trying to smuggle 33 children out of Haiti.

The village of Callabasse is perched on top of a hill in the lush St Jacques mountains in Haiti. It was in this small, remote rural community that a bus arrived towards the end of January. Out stepped 10 American Baptists. [...] They had come, by their own reckoning, to bring God's love to the precious children of Haiti. Their God-given mission was to heal the orphans of the disaster, helping them to "find new life in Christ".

With the help of a young man from the village, [...] the Americans asked all the 500 people of Callabasse to assemble on that soccer pitch. With Adrien translating, the Americans handed round leaflets illustrated with pictures of a hotel swathed in greenery and a swimming pool, just a short walk from the sea. It was here, in a seaside resort in the neighbouring Dominican Republic, that the Americans promised they would take children from Callabasse and offer them a new life. "We love God," the leaflet says, "and he has given us tremendous love for the children of Haiti."

Over the next few hours forms were signed, farewells made and about 20 children ushered into the Baptists' bus.

Though the missionaries made no mention of adoption to the parents in Callabasse, their true intentions are made plain in [one of their] documents. Their goal, it says, is to give each child "opportunities for adoption into a loving Christian family". In the long term, they even conceive building villas near the orphanage in which adopting parents from the US could stay.

A puzzling fact is that of the 20 children who boarded the bus at Callabasse that day, many were not orphans. They had loving, albeit desperately poor and struggling, parents. Maggie Moise, standing outside her home, described the moment she handed over her nine-year-old twin sons, Volmy and Kimley. She had been approached by a local translator, who told her some white people wanted to help her family.

"They said they wanted to go with our children. They put the names of the children on a piece of paper and asked me to sign it. A white woman told me, 'Don't worry, you will be able to access your children.' They showed me a brochure of where the children would be going to live. I signed the paper." Why did she sign it? "The country is going to be bad for some time. I cannot help my children. So I gave my boys to the white people," Moise says.

Child care workers of SOS Children's Villages International feel [very] angry about what happened. The aid organisation is looking after the 33 children retrieved from the Baptists in one of its purpose-built compounds outside Port-au-Prince. The kids arrived there with their names written on pink tape attached to their clothes. They were hungry, thirsty and in some cases dehydrated. A girl aged nine told an SOS worker that she could not wait to be reunited with her family. But she added that she wanted to be with her father, not her mother "because she gave me away". Several of the children were depressed and confused because they too were having to deal with the shuddering realisation that their parents had willingly handed them over. He was baffled why the Baptists would have consciously inflicted such deep trauma on vulnerable kids.

"How can you rush into a family and tell them: 'You are so poor you cannot care for your child'? How can you say: 'We know what's best for your child, it's God's gift'? That takes away the dignity of the parents. It is against all human nature," says Willeit.

⁷⁷ Adapted from Ed Pilkington and Inigo Gilmore, 'Haiti Earthquake: In God's Name', *The Guardian*, 13/02/2010

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Christianity has a long and diverse history of _____. We should look back at the long legacy of Christian ministry with children to learn lessons from both its _____ and _____. The strongest motivation for both Catholics and Protestants between the 15th and 19th centuries was to _____ from eternal destruction. The most common view of children was that they were born _____ and thus in need of extremely _____. This contributed to child care practices that were often _____ to children. As Christian missionaries traveled to different parts of the world from the 15th century their service to children frequently included _____, _____, and _____. However, these were often flawed because they required children to leave their “wicked” _____ and _____ and live in institutions like orphanages or boarding schools. Today, many ministries participate in truly _____ mission. Many ministries now realize the need to work toward the transformation of _____, _____, and _____ within which children live, instead of removing children from them.

Discussion questions

1. What is the history of Christian work with children in your country? What have the priorities been? What are the greatest achievements?
2. What are some mistakes that have been made in Christian work with children in your country? Have the church and Christian ministries learned from these mistakes? Why or why not?
3. What is the reputation of Christian ministries with children in your country / your community? What are the most important factors?
4. Think about your own organization or ministry with children. How did it begin? How has it changed over the years?
5. How does your ministry or organization make sure that it is reflecting on the biblical foundations for what it does regularly?
6. What mechanisms does your ministry or organization have to make sure that it learns from its successes and mistakes?

Lesson Fifteen: What role do children themselves play in the mission of God?

Summary

- God uses children for mission
- Children are resources for mission
- The church's role in equipping children for mission
- Giving children a vision for mission

God uses children for his mission

Not only are children objects of God's love and story of redemption, they are significantly used by God to fulfill special roles in His mission. Often, we see that they are God's secret agents for furthering His Kingdom. Throughout Scripture, we see God entrusting special truths to children or using them as His messengers or instruments.⁷⁸

Dr. Wess Stafford, the President of Compassion International, likes to say that often, throughout the Bible, when God had something REALLY important to do – something that He couldn't entrust to adults – He used children instead. "Sometimes," Stafford says, "God seemed to pause, rub his hands together, smile warmly, and say, 'I need someone really powerful for this task. I know—I'll use a child.'"

Imagine what a difference it would have made if children had not done what God asked them to do. What if, for example, Moses' sister, Miriam – just a child herself – had not rescued Moses from the Nile (Exodus 2)! Or when God needed to get a stern message across to Eli, think of why He confidently entrusted that message to a very young Samuel (1 Samuel 3). How about the young captive servant girl, who knew how God was using Elisha, and urged Naaman, the powerful Syrian General, to go to him for healing (2 Kings 5:1-3)? All are remarkable examples of God valuing children enough to deploy them for special tasks in accomplishing His Mission.⁷⁹

Children can be resources for mission

Investment in holistic mission with children is valuable because they are so valuable to God! The main reason for caring for children is not to gain better access to their parents or other adults. It is true however, that in many cases, children may be significant resources for teaching Christian truths to their parents and to other adults.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus intentionally performing the miracle on Jairus' daughter in the presence of "the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with Him" (Mark 5:40). The Bible records a "commotion" in the house which indicated the presence of many other adults at that time. Imagine the impact of that 12-year-old girl's experience on the guests in the house and the neighborhood.

Children are important resources to improve the well-being of parents and other adults. For example, children are often effective resources for health education and family development.⁸⁰ In many societies a great deal of primary learning takes place first in the children who help to transmit information and life-style improvements to adults in the community. Some national development strategies are not only looking at children as recipients of health and education efforts, but also viewing children as very effective community health and education resources. The Child-to-Child initiatives around the world recognize the

⁷⁸ For more information on Child Participation, see Workbook 2

⁷⁹ Brewster (2009), 36

⁸⁰ Brewster (2005), 80

role that children play in dissemination of information.⁸¹ In the same way that children are resources to their parents and other adults in the area of health and development, so they may be key resources for spiritual development as well.

The role of the church in equipping children and families for mission

Children of different shapes and sizes are prominent in God's mission. God uses many of them without regard for their status or qualifications. Equipping children to minister may require a lot of effort. But, can we afford not to? Children who minister to others are excited about their faith. They acquire a proven knowledge of God through real-life experiences. These experiences become the building blocks of character. Children who minister to others also find a purpose in life that is greater than themselves.⁸² Children need to be challenged. Children (as well as adults) usually live up (or down) to our expectations of them. When children become dissatisfied with Christianity, a problem may be that they have not been given opportunities to put their faith into action. Their ideas and beliefs remain untested and, therefore, are not integrated into their own faith in a meaningful way.

My Father's Prayer

Dan writes, I am told that on the day I was born, my father carried me in his arms and prayed that I would someday be a missionary. Our family tradition says that he did the same for all of his six children. Occasionally when I speak in Asian mission conferences, I ask how many of the Asian parents carried their very young children in their arms praying that they would be become missionaries. Only very rarely has anyone been able to say that they had. Much more often, the question is a shock. But children who are prayed for in that way, and then have that dream nurtured throughout their childhood, very often may make such a commitment.

Giving children a vision for mission

There are several ways we can help children be agents for holistic mission:

- Children can be effective in praying for others. Because of their sincere faith and believing hearts, children may be in a particularly good position to make a difference through prayer.
- Children can share their faith. They often have a greater boldness in sharing than many adults.
- Children can make a difference in their community. Outreach in the community is the perfect "classroom of life" that builds character in children. Outreach is where children test out their ideas and beliefs and discover what is real and who has the power.
- Children can make a difference through involvement holistic mission, not only in their own neighborhood but around the world.

In the midst of our often busy and heartfelt mission **to** children, we must not forget that we should participate in mission **with** children, guiding them to step fully into their role in God's holistic mission.

"Our vision for children is often so future oriented that we fail to see the tremendous spiritual capacity children have today. God has placed within children the same Holy Spirit that He has placed in adults, and He wants to powerfully touch and anoint kids."⁸³

⁸¹ See Workbook 2, lesson 1

⁸² Brewster (2005), 4

⁸³ Hohmann (1997), 6

Case Study

Including children in mission

In King's Kids (a ministry of Youth With a Mission) we have been organizing outreaches to different countries for many years. The outreaches are designed for children or teenagers to get involved in missions and experience God first hand while doing His work.

A few years ago I took a group of teenage girls to a country in Eastern Europe. The first two weeks we lived in a hospital and every day we played with the children on the TB ward. We took them swimming, played with them, told them stories and many more things that were a lot of fun and relationship building.

After this time we moved to another place where we had been invited to come as a team. Our job there was to paint a Kindergarten that was run privately and was in desperate need of painting. After two weeks of fun with the children this was hard and tiring work. We did not have the right paint brushes, the paint was very smelly and it took far longer than we had expected. Many of the teenagers were in a bad mood.

In the evening they went back to their place and the oldest two suggested that they would have a prayer time. No adult was present. During this time the Holy Spirit started to move and God was speaking to the girls. One after the other they realized that their behavior during the day had been wrong and they repented from it.

The next day they were completely different. They took to the painting with renewed vigor and in no time the work was done. While we, the adults, cleaned up and finished here and there the girls went outside to befriend the local children who by now had been attracted to the place and wanted to see what was happening. After two weeks of experience in the country, the girls had soon organized some games and spent a lovely time with the local children.

Talking together that evening they were in awe of what God had done in and through them. And it was not the end: together with a friend I went back shortly before Christmas and we found out that through those girls coming to serve, the whole atmosphere in the community had changed. Where there had been a lot of hostility towards Christians before, now there was a new openness. What a testimony for the girls!

Exercises

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children are not only _____ of God's love and story of redemption, they are also _____ by God to fulfill special roles in His mission. Investment in holistic mission with children is valuable because they are _____. They may also be significant _____ for teaching Christian truths to their parents and to other adults. Children are important resources to improve the well-being of _____ and other _____. For example, for _____ and _____ development. Children who minister to others are _____ about their faith. Children who minister to others also find a _____ in life that is greater than themselves. Children need to be _____. In the midst of our mission _____ children, we must not forget that we should participate in mission _____ children.

Discussion questions

1. What experiences do you have of young people as resources for mission. How have you seen or heard of children being involved and making a contribution?
2. What attitude does your church or organization have toward involving children in mission? What about parents?
3. Why is it important for children to be involved in mission? Who can benefit and how?
4. What information, training or opportunities do the children in your church have to inspire them to be involved in mission?
5. Think of at least three ways you will challenge your church / organization and the children in your church / organization to be involved as resources for mission.

Conclusion

Isn't God's story of mission in the world amazing? Knowing where our children, our ministries, our churches, our cultures, and we fit in His larger story gives us peace that He is ultimately in control. Knowing how he created children and His heart for them gives us insight into how to treat them and how best to serve them. Knowing the importance of relationships, the role of sin in breaking them, and the central importance of the family, the community, the larger society, and the church provides us with principles for holistic mission.

We have learned from a close analysis of the Bible that holistic mission includes God's plans and purposes for the transformation of "whole" children spiritually, physically, emotionally, and socially. It identifies how their "whole" individual stories exist within His "whole" story for the world.

The same Biblical principles needed in working with children also apply to you! Throughout this workbook, we have highlighted how you, the childcare worker, can be faithful to God's design for you. You were created with holistic needs, including the need for healthy relationships. You have been and are being transformed, allowing you to be a "Wounded Healer", just as Jesus was. You have the opportunity to model holistic mission in your own life as you join with children on their unique journeys. You are truly *with* children in this mission.

May God bless you richly with all the abundance of his goodness and wisdom as you continuously seek His will in your ministry with children.

Exercise

- How can you participate in spiritual formation and professional training to develop your capacity for holistic mission?
- How can you ensure that your holistic needs are being met?
- What principles can you use to evaluate how holistic your own work is?
- What about for your team and your organization or church as a whole?

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