

Volume 4 Issue 2



REACHING

Children at Risk

For Christians in front-line child care



Justice

Listening

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Children



Children have an inherent sense of whether something is right and fair. C.S. Lewis suggests that behind the use of the word 'right' is a tacit acknowledgement of some external standard or norm. As Christians, we believe this standard is God's righteousness and justice (Isaiah 5:16).

Rights are not an obligation of one person to act towards another because they deserve it or are owed it, but because God demands it. Responsibility for orphans is therefore primarily a responsibility to God (Exodus 22:22, James 1:27). In the Old Testament such acts of charity were enshrined in law. In the New Testament, Jesus underlines the Old Testament principle that the greatest commandments are that we should love God with all our being and that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. Human rights are not something to be demanded but something given and conferred on others, by active obedience to God, as modelled by Jesus.

We must listen to and dialogue with children so that they can make informed decisions and advocate for themselves and their peers.

- It is an inappropriate use of power to withhold from children information that would help them make decisions.

Bible Study

Read the story of three young men; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 1:3-17 and 3:8-30).

What does this passage teach us about 'speaking out' (advocacy) in terms of:
a) Preparation
b) Risks ?

- In the Messianic age, God will pour out his spirit on all humankind: sons and daughters will prophesy (Acts 2:17).
- Scripture encourages young people to have an impact on their communities by maintaining personal purity and by obeying God's Word (Psalm 119:9), to be exemplary in their speech, life, love, faith and purity (1 Timothy 4:12), to pursue godly virtues (2 Timothy 2:22) and to be self controlled (Titus 2:6).
- The story of Samuel gives a picture of God speaking directly to a child and through the child to His people (1 Samuel 3). It is important to remember that this story isn't only about listening to God: it shows too that adults should listen to children as Eli did to Samuel so that he could hear God's message.
- God gave Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (young men in their teenage

years) knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning, and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds (Daniel 1:3-17). As a result they were able to speak out as adults against King Nebuchadnezzar, even under extreme persecution (Daniel 3:8-30).

In two research projects I conducted, one about drug misuse in Thailand and another looking at sexual exploitation in Sri Lanka, I asked children what they thought would help children not to get involved in these things, and what they thought would help children once they were already involved. Their responses demonstrated a sense of injustice towards the adults who created the dangers. They felt they should be punished. In situations where the blame is often put onto children it is a reminder that we need to look at ourselves. In Thailand, the Chief Medical Officer of the Province listened to the responses and tightened up security measures.

Do you know situations where children's views were used to bring justice to an unjust situation? How could you listen more effectively to the children you work with?

Please contact me and tell me how you do it.

