



There are any number of ways in which one may be involved with the needs of children—teaching school, assisting in homes of the underprivileged, working with the handicapped, nursing, etc. Each can be a valuable means of expressing love and compassion. Each can be a fulfilling of the scriptural requirement for the servant of God to minister to the physical needs of the world. However, one need not be a Christian to do any of the above, and neither can we say that minis-

tering to physical needs only is what is entailed in a "call."

In order for one's ministry to be considered a call from God in the biblical sense we need to minister to the *spiritual* needs of the child also. We must be at least as concerned about the child's spiritual needs as we are about his physical needs. In fact, if we are going to err to one side, it would probably be better to put a stronger emphasis on the child's spiritual needs. "For what is a man [child] profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man [child] give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

The following are suggested as requirements and characteristics of the one who is called by God to minister to the spiritual needs of children.

ONE WHO IS CALLED TO A CHILDREN'S MINISTRY WILL BELIEVE THAT CHILDREN ARE IMPORTANT IN THEMSELVES. So often when the subject of children is brought up in Christian circles, someone will say, "Yes it is important to reach children.

You can reach their parents that way." Such exploitive reasoning is rejected by the children's worker. He does not see the child as a means to an end, or as a thing to be used, but as a person with the same basic spiritual needs (in embryonic form perhaps, but still there) as anyone else. Children are to be ministered to as persons in their own right.

The person called to a ministry among children agrees with the Talmudic statement that, "By the breath of the child the world is sustained," and with Aesop's dictum, "The child is father to the man." The child, to the children's worker, is a V.I.P. to be treated with every bit as much respect as the adult.

2 ONE WHO IS CALLED TO MINISTER TO CHILDREN BELIEVES THAT CHILDREN ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD.

Some of God's people do not believe children are really that important to God. Many, at best, are decidedly lukewarm towards the idea of being concerned about their eternal destiny.

There are many places in the Scriptures that speak against such an attitude, but perhaps the most pertinent passage is Mark 10:13-16. Young children had been brought to Christ for a Rabbinic blessing. His disciples rebuked those who brought them, "But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, 'Permit the children to come to me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'"

God's people often forget these words of the Savior, but the children's worker keeps them constantly in mind.

3 THOSE CALLED TO REACH CHILDREN ARE COMMITTED TO THEIR LIFE-AND-DEATH SPIRITUAL NEEDS.

They are convinced of the child's spiritual depravity. They are not lulled into apathy by teaching about the age of accountability which suggests that God is not particularly concerned about children until they reach the age of 12 or 15 or even older. Neither will those called be mesmerized by a philosophy that stresses children under seven cannot grasp

abstract truth and so cannot understand the Gospel and enjoy its healing power in their lives. This conclusion assumes spiritual perception is entirely dependent upon one's intellectual and psychological capabilities. It does not take into account the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit, without which no person—adult or child—can be born again.

4 THE ONE WHO IS CALLED BELIEVES CHILDREN CAN "HEAR," UNDERSTAND, AND RECEIVE CHRIST.

He realizes that the child will probably not understand all of the Gospel's ramifications but that he can understand it sufficiently to experience its transforming power in his life. The worker will believe further that children can become thorough-going disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and "grow in grace and knowledge of him."

Perhaps this was the issue in doubt when South Africa's University of Stellenbosch's Department of Divinity recently conducted a survey about Christian commitment. Perhaps some were surprised to find that most people (75 percent) commit their lives to Christ and become members of the church before the age of fourteen!

This conclusion has been repeatedly confirmed in the experience of God's people. John Wesley wrote in his diary:

"At Stockton-on-Tees, I found an uncommon work of God among children, upward of sixty of whom, from the age of six to fourteen, were under serious impressions and earnestly desirous to save their souls. . . ." (Wesley explains how he preached to these children, and how they responded.) ". . . as soon as I came down from the desk I was enclosed by a body of children, all of whom sank down upon their knees; so I kneeled down myself and began praying for them. . . . The fire kindled and ran from heart to heart, till few, if any, were unaffected. Is not this a new thing in the earth? God begins His work in children. . . . Thus the flame spreads to those of riper years, till at length they all know Him and praise Him, from the least unto the greatest."

5 THOSE WHO ARE CALLED TO A CHILDREN'S MINISTRY WILL NOT BE SEEKERS

AFTER FAME AND GLORY.

There is very little of that heady stuff available for the likes of them! They will have to face squarely the fact that in many circles children are not considered a significant ministry. This ministry is among ministries a "manger" type of work, where the one called to do it will find plenty of opportunity to learn the meaning of the words of our Lord Jesus: "And whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be the slave of all" (Mark 10:44).

6 THE ONE CALLED TO WORK WITH CHILDREN IS WILLING TO EARNESTLY STUDY THE WORD OF GOD.

Working among children is no "cop-out" for the person who cannot be bothered to study God's Word. One must be so familiar with the Book that he can take its profound doctrines and reduce them to their simplest basics. Doctrines such as the trinity, atonement, justification, adoption, etc. must be taught to hearts and heads that are young and unlearned and unable to think in abstract terms as easily as adults. This takes much wisdom on the part of the teacher and a great deal of study.

7 THE CALLED WORKER HAS AN ABILITY TO SPEAK WITH CHILDREN AT THEIR LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING.

Children belong to a culture different from that of their elders. Just as a missionary in a foreign country has to learn another's culture in order to be on the same "wave-length" as that other person, the children's worker must understand the "culture" of the child. This is especially so when it comes to communicating through the vehicle of language. "It is absolutely disgraceful that we expect missionaries to the Bantus to learn Bantu but never ask whether our missionaries to the Americans or English can speak American or English. Any fool can write learned language. The vernacular is the real test. If you can't turn your faith into it, then either you don't understand it or you don't believe it."—C. S. Lewis, from *GOD IN THE DOCK*.

Those involved in a ministry to children must be able to speak "Childrenese"!

THE CALLED CHILDREN'S WORKER IS ONE WHO IS ABLE TO BE CREATIVE IN THE WAY HE COMMUNICATES.

The child is basically one of God's most transparently honest creatures. There is very little "humbug" about him—he only learns this as he grows into adulthood. He learns from his elders to fake attention. This, of course, is not to deny that there is inherent in every human the bent to be dishonest and sinful. But because of his transparent nature, a child (unlike adults) will not sit and listen with polite boredom to a 3-D preacher (Dead, Dull, and Dismal!). If the speaker doesn't "entertain" him to some extent, the child will entertain himself! For this reason one called to a children's ministry will have the rare knack—at least in the beginning stages—of being able to hold the attention of his young hearers. To do this requires at least some degree of creativity.

Anyone who is involved in any of the arts will find a tremendous opportunity to use these talents in children's work. In fact I know of no other ministry that provides such a fertile environment for the use of drama, art, music, etc., as a ministry among children.

THE ONE CALLED TO MINISTER TO CHILDREN WILL HAVE THE GRACE OF PATIENCE . . . (OR WILL BE WORKING ON IT!)

This ministry, perhaps above all others, requires sowing, watering, and then waiting for the increase to come from God (1 Cor. 3:6). Often the full impact of your ministry to a child does not become evident until 20 or 30 years later when a young "Jim Elliot," or "Amy Carmichael," or "Polycarp," or "Isaac Watts," or "Matthew Henry," (all of whom became Christians before the age of 12 years) turns the world upside down for Him!

Are you called to a ministry among children? Consider the above carefully, then read these statistics and analyze your heart response to this great need.

—In Africa, 75 percent of the population of 350 million is under 14 years of age.

—In South America 50 percent are under 14 years old.

—In the world, probably 1½ to 2 billion of those under 14 are spiritually homeless, friendless, hopeless, Christless and Godless.

—In the USA it is estimated that about 36 million children under 14 years of age (approximately 17 percent of the population) have had no contact with Christ and His transforming Gospel.

What is your response? Do these figures challenge you, trouble you, awake in you a desire to do something about it?

If so, perhaps the Holy Spirit is calling you to a ministry among children. Consider it carefully before the Lord right now. **

****If you feel the Lord may be calling you into this ministry, please contact your local Child Evangelism Fellowship director or write: USA Dept., Child Evangelism Fellowship Inc., P.O. Box 348, Warrenton, MO 63383. Either will be glad to help you pursue the Lord's call further.**

SOME BASIC TRUTHS ABOUT GOD'S CALLING

A first thing to consider when thinking about a life calling is the subject of God's calling itself. The Word speaks specifically about this subject.

Paul writing to the Romans says of them that they are "called of Jesus Christ" ("called to be Jesus Christ's" R.V.) He then goes on to say that they are "called to be saints"—called to *BE* God's holy people, set apart for Himself (Romans 1:6-7).

This calling (for to be called to be a saint and to be Jesus Christ's are one and the same) is the one that every person, young or old experiences when, by the operation of the Holy Spirit in his life, he responds to the call of the Gospel (Acts 2:38, Romans 10:9) and "calls upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord . . ." (1 Cor. 1:2, Romans 10:13).

Accordingly, in response to the question, "Am I called . . .?" the answer is, "Yes, if you are Christ's, if you are a Christian." Every Christian is called to be a saint, and to live a life of godliness. This is the very foundation of God's calling.

But in the same portion of Scripture, Paul writes of another calling: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God . . ." (Romans 1:1). This is a calling to a SPECIFIC MINISTRY within the body of Christ.

Not everyone, of course, has received the calling to be an apostle, (1 Cor. 12:28-29) for the ministry of an apostle was dependent upon a unique spiritual gift given by the Holy Spirit who distributes His many different gifts among God's people "severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:4-11, Eph. 4:11). However, each person who is, by the Spirit baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) does receive some spiritual gift or gifts (Eph. 4:7) when he becomes a Christian. This gift(s) "is given to every man to profit withal," (to profit the whole Church, 1 Cor. 12). The gift is to be developed so the body of Christ may "edify itself in love," (Eph. 4:7-16) and be a witness to the world of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So a major question to answer as one tries to determine his particular call is "What is my spiritual gift?" God equips us for the work He calls us to with the necessary gift(s) for the ministry.*

It needs to be noted further that a ministry will not be evident or reach its full potential unless the "called one" can say with the apostle, "Paul, A SLAVE of Jesus Christ . . ." (Romans 1:1). In many cases, God's people don't know what their spiritual gifts are because Christ is not Lord and they are not His slaves. Not being slaves, they are not available to Him and so manifesting their gifts of the Holy Spirit.

***Editor's note: It is important to realize that not all are called to work with children in the same capacity. Some are called primarily to evangelize children, although they may also teach them. Others are called primarily to teach.**



*Are
You
Called
to
Minister
to Children?*



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