

Children are the Vision of the Church

by Doris Bush, April 2012

Introduction:

If we are to see a new generation rise up from the 4/14 Window, who know, honor and praise the Lord, we need the whole church to capture the vision, write it on their hearts and run with it. It will be a vision for pastors, Sunday school teachers, para-church groups, mothers, fathers, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, and the whole church! Each of us has a role to play in helping raise the next generation to know God and love Christ.

This is my testimony: Luis' older brother shared with us the beautiful gospel of salvation, in 1968. Then the pastor of prayed with us as we opened our hearts to Christ. Ten years later, we were arriving in the country of El Salvador, where Luis was pastor for 7 years. We arrived with three daughters and our son, Daniel, was born there. Our children spent part of their 4/14 Window years in that church. Thankfully, the church put into practice the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:14 and contributed greatly to our children's love for the Lord which continues to this day.

To better understand children as the vision of the Church committed to raising up a new generation from the 4/14 Window to transform the world we will be considering four things:

- I. Learn from the Old Testament: the importance God gives children; who is to teach the children; children as contributors to spreading the knowledge of God.
- II. Learn from the example and words of Jesus.
- III. Recognize what are some of the obstacles that prevent children from coming to Jesus.
- IV. Dream together with God in order to overcome these obstacles so that the children of the 4/14 Window may come close to the Lord and grow in His love, and worship Him.

I. Learn the Old Testament

A. The importance God gives children.

Children are God's dream. Reading from Genesis, at the very beginning of creation, God ordered Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." Children are God's idea. Someone said that every baby that is born confirms that God wants the world to continue.

Today it is up to the generation that can still be reproductive to continue the mandate of God. Couples who know the Lord are to be fruitful and fill the earth with godly children.

God focused on children when he gave his law.

Deuteronomy 6:2 "for you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as we live, keeping all his decrees and commands that give you and for you to enjoy a long life . "

God gave His law to build his people up individually and collectively as a nation. There is always the danger that a new generation rises up, forgetting where the blessing comes from and become prideful, thinking that God blesses them because they are better than the previous generation. Moses was to remind them that they were blessed as a result of the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Today, we are blessed thanks to the new covenant that Jesus made through at the cross, the new covenant through His death on the cross (Luke 22:20) (1 Corinthians 11:25). We are blessed because of who we are in Christ.

Who is to teach the law?

God gives the parents the privilege of teaching God's commandments. They are granted the privilege of educators, trainers, coaches, mentors of their children, as they are with them 24/7. This takes place in a very natural way, speaking of God with the children when they wake up, when they sit down around a meal, when they go for walks with the parents, and when they are tucked in bed at night.

Deuteronomy 6:6,7: "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons".

Who else is responsible for this task? The spiritual leaders.

The leaders of each tribe of Israel were called to take a stone from the middle of the Jordan River to serve as a sign that God stopped the flow of the Jordan River so that Israel could cross into the Promised Land. In the future, children would ask: "What do these stones mean?" God is concerned that children know how great He is, and how great His works are, delivering them from slavery

Joshua 4:4-6 "Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from among the children of Israel, one from each tribe. And said, " Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan and each of you take a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, for this to be a sign among you. And when your children ask their parents, saying, 'what do these stones mean?' Tell them that the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, when they crossed the Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut and these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."

B. How God used children in the OT?

God uses children in the OT to help others to know God.

1. The story about Naaman's wife's young servant girl.

Children are the delight of God throughout the Old Testament. On several occasions He entrusted to them a very special task. A young girl is the servant of Naaman's wife. Naaman is a Syrian army commander who suffered from leprosy, an incurable disease. The answer came through this young girl. She told her mistress of Elisha, a prophet of God who could help heal (2 Kings 5:2). Mrs. Naaman told him Naaman sought Elisha and was

miraculously healed. Beyond physical healing Naaman experienced a spiritual revelation: "Behold, I know there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

2. The story of Josiah, the boy-king

Josiah was a boy-king through whom God brought religious and social reformation to his people (2 Kings 22). Josiah was only eight years old when he began his just government. He later made further dramatic reforms as a teenager (2 Chronicles 34).

God allowed these stories to serve as an example

C. Our grandchildren

Our grandchildren, Ezekiel, and Landon, 8 and 6 years of age were listening to the pastor's message on Josiah, and wondered if God would want to use them too. So after lunch on that Sunday, during which they asked many questions to their parents, their father, also a pastor, took them for a walk one by one. He realized that the two youngsters fully understood God's love for them as He gave His Son Jesus to die on the cross for them, so they may be saved. One of them said, "I felt my heart was at my feet, but then I felt that I get to my chin. Now, I know it's in its right place and Jesus live there." Both children were baptized last October.

A child of OT contributed to two children in the 21st century to know the love of God.

II. Learning from example and words of Jesus

A. His actions:

Jesus walked from one village to another and along the way he must have crossed so many children playing and running around. His body language showed how much he cared for them. He bent down to their level, opened his arms, embraced them, he lifted them up high and put his hand on them to pray for them and bless them.

"Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them..." Mark 9:36.

"After laying His hands on them, He departed from there" Matthew 19:15.

B. His teaching:

Matthew 19:24. Jesus said, "Let the children come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:14.

To be like children to enter the kingdom of heaven is to be humble as a child. They also model the dependence we should have on God, as they depend on an adult.

Matthew 18:3. When the disciples asked who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus put a child in the midst, and said the one who humbled himself as that child would be greatest. Matthew 18:4

The person who receives the child in the name of Jesus receives Jesus himself, and also receives the Father. To accept, love, appreciate and respect a child is to welcome Christ himself. Mark 9:37

However, those who neglect, abuse, and hinder the little children will face a severe judgment of God.

III. Recognize what are some of the obstacles that prevent children from coming to Jesus

A. The enemy of our souls

The obstacles to obeying God's commands have been with us since the Garden of Eden. The enemy of our souls, disguised as a serpent, approached Eve and suggested that perhaps God had deprived them from something good. That was a lie. When Adam and Eve believed the lie, the beautiful relationship between God and man was broken.

The enemy of souls has sought to "kill, steal and destroy" since the beginning of time. He wanted to destroy God's masterpiece: the human being, and he seeks to do it as early as possible in the life of a person, even before birth through abortions!

Thankfully, Christ says in John 10:10 "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly".

Although Satan was defeated at the cross, his antics continue to assail. His lies have filled the minds of many and have harmed the innocent who are so willing to know and love the Lord.

B. Divorce. Matthew 19:1-12

The words of Jesus Matthew 19: 24, "Let the children come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" are delivered in a wider context. This context helps to understand a couple of other obstacles.

Divorce is an action between two adults. However, the impact it has on the next generation is enormous. The foundation of the world of the young is shaken and they suffer a great loss. Unfortunately, the number of divorces is increasing, even among Christians. One of our daughters, who has gone through a divorce has said that the wound is so deep that unless it is absolutely necessary it is preferable to not to proceed with that decision but try at all costs to reconcile.

C. Riches: Matthew 19:16-24.

On the other hand, the story of the rich young man shows how material possessions can be misleading. They can provide false security to those who have them, or they can become an idol. Children once again suffering from this imbalance and are often neglected when fathers and mothers spend long hours at work. Someone has called them "work orphans" who are raised by outsiders.

Although this passage took place many years ago, it is very relevant in the world we live in today. It's almost as if the Lord was walking the streets of one of our major cities, instructing his followers about the importance to love children who grow up in a society that leaves out.

D. Leaders, followers of Christ

Besides these two major challenges: divorce, causing deep wounds and the desire for wealth, causing abandonment, children face another major obstacle: the disciples of Christ! Matthew 19:13 says, "the disciples

rebuked the people "bringing children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But Jesus went into action immediately. He opened his arms and called them to himself.

The world today is very similar to the time of Jesus. Children are being impoverished by broken families, and parents worried about finances and often rejected by the religious leaders. Our Lord has given the answer to all this: the children must remain our priority.

Today's church must be able to offer what Christ offered to the next generation. We must be approachable, loving with open arms, hands ready to lay on them in prayer, offering unity in the body of Christ to nurture them and enabling them to exercise the spiritual gifts God has given them.

IV. Dream together with God

We do so in order to overcome these obstacles so that the children of the 4/14 Window may come close to the Lord and grow in His love, and worship Him.

1) Repent.

We repent of our own attitudes and actions towards children. We repent of wrong attitudes of past generations towards children. We repent of the evil deeds of the world we live towards children.

Jesus told the women of Jerusalem when he was being led to the cross: "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" Luke 23: 28.

2) Treasure them as God treasures them: Let lush to love them!

Psalms 127:3 "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. "

Proverbs 17:26 "children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children. "

3) Be proactive:

a) Mothers are called on to be intentional intercessors over their children.

In 1992 we moved to a different city to live. Our children were in their early teens and went to the local public school. There they were faced with many temptations, such as going to parties where alcohol was served as well as drugs. After one of these parties, a young man named Quinn, who had been drinking, drove his jeep back home. He sped past a stop sign, lost control of his jeep which turned over and he died instantly. This was a huge blow to everyone in the community. A few days later, someone wrote on the back walls of the school: "Roses are red, violets are blue, this time it's Quinn, the next time it's you."

I asked myself: "Who wants to see our children killed?" I immediately felt the need to find other believing mothers who are confident that God has a future and a hope for our children. I found several willing to meet weekly to pray.

We prayed for our children, their teachers and classmates. The weekly meeting takes only an hour. We started praising God for his attributes in the Scriptures. Then we took a time of confession, followed

by thanksgiving for answered prayers, and ended up pleading, praying the Word of God over each of the children, teachers and classmates.

We praise the Lord for the many answers to prayer in those days and continue to share a wonderful fellowship with the mothers, whenever we reconnect.

Lamentations 2:11 "My eyes fail because of tears, my spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is poured out on the earth because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, when little ones and infants faint in the streets of the city".

b) Fathers are called to love their children.

Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming day of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse. "

Unfortunately, in many countries, fathers are estranged from their family. They spend very little time with their children. God will work deep in the hearts of fathers to be reconciled with their own children. This will give the child a sure foundation of great worth and value.

Thank God, we can break this cycle of abandonment of fathers towards their children. We met a group of ex-gangsters in El Salvador, who shared with us of God's transforming power in their lives. Their fathers had abandoned them and they found 'refuge' in a gang. In prison, God touched their hearts. Their greatest desire was not to lose their own children. Two of them brought their own sons to the meeting.

Psalms 112:1,2 "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,

Who greatly delights in his commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright shall be blessed. "

Proverbs 14:26 "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children will have refuge."

c) Pastors and teachers;

Thank you for good Biblical teachings! Please teach the Word with love, giving encouragement to the next generation. How many have turned away from the Lord because of a harsh correction from a leader in the church!

We're all are called to train the next generation.

Psalms 78:4,6 "We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done". "That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children". Do not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord. And his power, and the wonders he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded that our fathers to their children, so they know the next generation, and the children yet unborn, and those who raise them to their children. "

4) We need to instruct young children to pray

Cheryl Sacks has written a book "Prayer Saturated Children". In it, she shares seven keys to train children in their prayer life.

1. Emphasize that prayer is a relationship with God
2. Teach God's attributes
3. Teach children to pray the Word of God
4. Train their ears to hear God's voice
5. Share how God responds to the simple faith
6. Teach children how to handle disappointments with prayer
7. Help children receiving and share the prayer of salvation

Conclusion

Jesus asked his disciples: "When the Son of Man returns will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:8.

The precious Christian faith is always two generations from being extinct. This happened in the OT, not to God's people, though.

God sent the prophet Jonah to give his famous message of barely 8 words to the people of Nineveh: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3: 4) The people of Nineveh repented and God preserved their city.

One hundred years later, the prophet Nahum, preached judgment to the offspring of the same people (Nahum 2:13) This time the prophecy was ignored and was promptly fulfilled. Nineveh and all the people were destroyed. Today, Nineveh is just a historic point in a Bible map. In just two generations!

Today is our opportunity! If everyone recognizes the privilege we have as a church to raise up a generation who knows, honor and praise the Lord Jesus Christ, we will see a beautiful heritage spring forth from the 4/14 Window which will fill the earth with faith and hope.

Children are like beautiful vessels that we can and should be filling with love, the Word of God, blessing, encouragement and training.

When this happens, they become vessels of blessing in their homes, churches, schools, communities, countries. They are encouraged to grow in their faith and trust in God. The result is the emergence of a powerful army of faith, prayer and service from the 4/14 Window.

The entire church has the privilege of capturing this vision that comes directly from the heart of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We're each to assume our own responsibility, whether we are a pastor, Sunday

school teacher, mother, father, grandparent, uncle, brother, friend. In this way there will always be a new generation rising from the 4/14 Window who will know, honor and praise the Lord.

Amen!