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CHILDREN AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

By Joy Shearer

I have worked for the past 10 years as a Director of Children's Ministry, or some churches call the position a Children's Pastor. During this time I have had the opportunity to work with many children and observe their Worship. I have often wondered if a young child could have a spiritual relationship with Jesus, or if I was just babysitting during church?

One question I had was, is it more likely for a child to be a Christian if that child grows up in a Christian home, than if he/she is raised in a non-Christian home?

An article by Mark A. Jeske (February 17, 1983) 'Teaching the Child of a non-Christian Home' states that the home environment has an enormous influence on a child's faith, ability and work. Where the home is not Christ-centred, the children's church teacher has some serious handicaps. Problems he notes are that non-Christian parents often ignore the importance of Sunday morning worship, leaving the children to get to church on their own or not at all. This burdens a child with decisions he/she shouldn't have to make and curses the child with a poor example. A non-Christian home increases the risk of child abuse, neglect, alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence as a way of settling differences.

For these reasons, we need exciting children's ministries in our local church. What a mission field! When the children get excited, they take it home to their non-Christian parents. Isaiah 11:6 says 'and a little child will lead them'. We must be willing to go out and get the children and bring them into the church.

Deuteronomy 6:7 states, 'Impress (these commandments) on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up'. In other words we are to share the gospel. It is the parents' job to teach their child about God at home, while at work and at play. But when parents neglect their duty, the church must be willing to bring the children in and teach them. The task of working with children from non-Christian homes is worth the effort, due to the answer to my question.

Question number two 'Can a young child have a relationship with Jesus?' The Holy Bible says in Matthew 21:16 'Jesus replied, "from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise."' I have seen a child under conviction- as humbled as any adult wrestling with salvation. Matthew 11:25 states 'At that time Jesus said, "I will praise You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children."' And in Mathew 19 verse 14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these". God can do mighty works in the life of a child. I have watched as God changed a young wild preteen boy from someone I thought was going to drive me nuts, into the greatest helper in children's church.

There is something so genuine about a child. I love to lead children in worship, when I look out at their faces, hands held up, eyes closed in worship, I understand what it means to be child-like.

Over the past 3 years I've observed 30 children in our church. Of these children 2/3 are 'church children' meaning their parents bring them to church, and 1/3 are 'bus children', meaning their parents do not come to church. The children range in age from 5 to 11. To date, 21 of the 30 children have accepted Jesus into their lives, 8 church children and 13 bus children. I have been

privileged to witness the salvation of 12 of these children! Of the 21 saved, 12 have been baptized over the last 3 years. 3 of the 30 children have only a basic awareness of the Gospel, one is a church child, and two are bus children. All three of these children are 5 years old. These children are our greatest challenge! My goal is for every child to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Through searching of scripture and observations made during 10 years of work, I Believe that after the age of 5 a child can have a basic understanding of a Relationship with Jesus. I also believe that while it is important to have Christian parents, it is not absolutely necessary. A child can lead a Christian life, with non-Christian parents- as long as they have a strong support system of Christian fellowship.

That's where the church comes in! We need children's ministries that are alive! I believe a child living in a Christian home has more opportunity to become a Christian than a child in a non-Christian home. But I also believe that if the church is willing to bring children in, then those children will also have the same opportunity to accept Jesus into their hearts. This is the call of God in Mark 16:15 'He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.'" Our local community is our 'world'. We are so ready to send missionaries across the waters to foreign countries, but many times we are too lazy to reach out in our local communities. We are commanded to go---so what are we waiting for? Let's go!

Joy Shearer is a mother, a grandmother and has worked in Children's ministry in the U.S.A. for 9 years. Joy states that she is now working as a "musicianary"—spreading the love of Jesus through testimony and music.