

# Theology of Child Conversion

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CM 205 PROGRESSIVE METHODS OF CHILD EVANGELISM

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## **The Need for Child Evangelism**

Child evangelism must be understood through the lens of careful biblical exegesis. An accurate understanding of God's Word will affect how God's truths are taught and experienced in everyday life. The writer of Psalm 111:10a (English Standard Version) states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding." God's Word is the starting point in gaining understanding of how to reach children. A proper philosophy applied to ministry will have a profound effect on the approach to how the children are taught. The teaching of the child and the curriculum used will have a drastic difference in the child's growth and development.

"One third of the world's population are children" (CEF 2012, 9). Wesley Duewel states, "The population is exploding so fast that in the next 25 years, more children will be born than have ever lived from the days of Adam until 1960" (9). God's desire is that His people impact the world by reaching everyone with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to reach the world with the Gospel it is crucial that we reach the children. Children are open to God and to the Gospel, yet many will never hear and will be lost for eternity. Careful examination of the Old Testament, the Gospels, the Epistles, current philosophies, and additional supporting evidence will show and defend an accurate understanding of child evangelism.

### **Old Testament Teaching on Children**

The Old Testament contains many references to children and how they are to be taught and trained. The Book of Deuteronomy is the second giving of the law. When Moses gathered the people together just before they crossed into the Promised Land he shared God's heart for them. God desired Israel to follow Him obediently as the One True God. The Israelite people

had wandered for forty years. The sting of disobedience was resting on Moses because they had wandered forty years because of a lack of faith. He shares the following ideas with the children of Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 4.

In Deuteronomy 4:1-10, Moses discusses the importance of hearing with the understanding to obey. The Hebrew word "shema" is used in verses 1-2, and 37 (Biblos 2011). The words that are linked in these verses are "listen", "hear", and "do". They are synonymous with each other. The intent of his message is to share God's heart so that they would be compelled to think and do what he is communicating. He wanted the Israelites to pay attention to what he was saying, understand it in their hearts and minds and to apply sandal leather to his teaching. God had brought them out of Egypt and out of the desert and provided for them. God's power had been and was being shown to the Israelites at this time. God's great love should draw them to obedience, not turning away from it.

Moses continues on in chapter 4:3-6 about the results of remaining obedient to God and being disobedient. While some in Israel may be dreaming of living in a land flowing with milk and honey, God desired them to be witnesses to the world. God was placing them in the middle of the trade roads for the entire known world at the time. He wanted to share His Good News with the whole world by placing His people in the center of all the activity. If the people of Israel lived obedient lives and remained faithful, God would cause the rest of the world to stand up and take notice. Moses also warned that God would judge them and punish them if they chose to walk away from Him. The important message of blessing if they were obedient and a curse for disobedience were to be taught to their children (vv.9-10).

Moses is building a level of teaching for all generations in this passage. The message is to be taught to their children. The greatest thing the nation of Israel could do would be to teach every generation the greatness of God and His work among the people and the law that God had given them to follow. He mentions that they should remind their children and their children's children. The Hebrew term for child is "Ben" and refers to young children (Biblos 2011). Moses was to assemble the people so they could learn and be reminded of the power of God. He also brought them together to teach them the law that God had given them. Moses continued to teach the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 6:1-9.

In Deuteronomy 6:1-3 Moses shares the blessing God desires to give to the people of Israel. He is speaking of the decrees, statutes, and rules that God has set down to bless the nation. There are four blessings they would receive from their continued obedience to the Lord. One of the blessings was to pass the blessing on to the next generations to revere or fear the Lord. The children would believe and place their trust in the Lord in worship because of His power and might. God gives the blessing of long life to those who obey Him. God said He would bless Israel's obedience by making things go well for them in the Promised Land. God would also multiply the nation of Israel for their obedience. God's desire is to bless those who are obedient to Him as they show their love for Him to others.

Moses communicates very simply in verses 4-5 that the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." The obedience required in Deut. 6:5 was to set aside anything in their lives that would distract them from a love relationship with God. Moses spoke about the heart, the seat or center of

emotions, feelings, and affection. The word used for heart is "lebab" which refers to the inner man, mind and heart. The word for soul is "nephesh" referring to the passion, self, desire, appetite, and emotion. Israel was to have a deep desire for the Lord. The word for might is "meod" which refers to, "muchness, force, abundance"(Biblos 2011). The being of a person should be turned to the Lord and used for His glory. These things were to be taught to the children. This brings Moses to the second commandment he discusses in this passage.

The second commandment is to write these items on each person's heart. The most effective people have a deep passion for what they do. It is evident in the way they talk, the way they walk, and the look in their eye when they live out their passion. Moses wanted all Israelite parents to have a passion for God that showed through to their children. They had just spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, yet something amazing happened while they were on the journey. Their sandals had never worn out; they watched a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night with the presence of the Lord in their midst; and they always had a fresh supply of manna and quail daily. God's power was evident every day of their last 40 years. Moses wanted to make sure they treasured those moments in their hearts. When the evidence of the power of God had entered their hearts and minds they were to teach their children. Moses wanted these parents to say passionately with their children what God had done, what they had seen, so that they could be the examples for their children. This is the message of Deuteronomy 6:6, take these words to heart, they are important for the future of Israel. This second command leads to another command in verses 7-9, a command to share God's Word with the children.

The teaching of God's Word was not only to be real, personal, and heartfelt; they were to be taught to their children. The souls of these children were a tender point to Moses. Moses commanded the people of Israel to talk and to teach these words to the children. The setting of these discussions was to be held in everyday moments in life. These parents should take the opportunity to share the stories of God with their children. The methods of teaching were through oral, written, and object lesson forms of communication. They were to be discussed diligently, with purpose and intent, to their kids. The laws of God were to be shared at the supper table, while washing dishes, playing in the back yard, while walking down the street, in the market place. Anywhere they were was an opportunity to share God's Word with their children. They were to write God's law on their doorposts as a reminder of the greatness of God. The importance of having a life fully surrendered to God, sharing what God has done and is doing, and teaching them to children is of great importance to Moses in this section of Deuteronomy. Moses reminds the Israelites of these same commands again in Deuteronomy 11:18-21.

After a time of sharing God's laws with the Israelites he once again reminds them of the importance of God and His Word in their lives. Deuteronomy 11:18-21 is a repetition of the same elements mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Moses reminds them to place God's Word into their heart and soul. He continues to develop this concept to bind them on their hands, in front of their eyes, and to teach them to the children. He uses the idea of teaching the children early in the morning and throughout all day until they would go to bed in the evening. The actions of teaching occur while walking, sitting, standing, and lying down. The big idea in this passage shows a definite cause and effect relationship. Moses repeats the need that if you

obey God and His Word you will be blessed. The blessing is to multiply the nation of Israel and give them long life if they obey God's commands. Moses repeats these commands to teach the children midway through his teaching of the Law to the Israelites. He will once again remind them at the end of his message.

The aim for teaching children is communicated in Deuteronomy 31:12-13 at the end of Moses teaching. Moses repeats the importance of teaching children of God's power, His Word, His mighty acts among the Israelites not once, not twice, but three times. When a communicator teaches the same principles three times the students should sit up straight in their seats and pay attention while taking detailed notes. Moses, at the end of his message, is passing on the mantle of leadership to Joshua. He commands that the Law must be read every seven years to the children. The aim of teaching the law every seven years is to gather the people together. At that gathering place they would hear about God and His Word and learn about Him. Scribes would both read and explain what was being read so that all would understand what they were hearing. When the law was read the appropriate response would be to fear the Lord, to think and obey, to do all the words the Law commanded them to do. This message would also be brought down from generation to generation to extend His work. Every seven years would mean that every child would hear God's law at least once if not twice before adulthood. This would help them have a heart for God and a desire to follow Him. Moses three times discusses the importance of training and teaching young children His Word. Children are of great importance to God and we are to help them understand God's Word and give them a love for Him. Moses' teaching on children clearly teaches that God cares for children. Psalms 78:1-8 also shares an important lesson about children.

The Psalmist writes about God's work in Israel's history. The writer opens up with an appeal to listen carefully that what he is about to share is important and to pay careful attention to what he is saying. He shares with his readers the things the Lord has done that are worthy of His praise. He reminds the people of God's power and strength in the past and all the marvelous things He has accomplished. The psalmist shares that the children must be told so they can place their faith in God and that they will not forget what He has done. He desires the children to not become stubborn and rebel like their fathers and the goal is to become loyal and faithful followers of God. Children are able to know God and follow Him all of their days. The Old Testament provides a significant understanding of how God views children and their acceptance of Him. In these Old Testament passages parents were given specific instructions about continually teaching the children about the True and Living God. The Israelites taught from the whole counsel of scripture available to them, using their knowledge of the scriptures and their experiences to help their children come to faith in God. God's desire was that the children would know Him. The Bible continues to share in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life what He believed about reaching the children.

### **Children in the Gospels**

In the Gospels, there is a passage in the book of Matthew that gives us great understanding about child evangelism. The historical background of the book of Matthew shows a group of Jewish people desiring an overthrow of the government by a promised Messiah. The political landscape of the time viewed Jesus as a political leader who would bring radical change to the world. The temptations of Christ, feeding of the 5,000, and the feeding of the 4,000 show the people's desire for a political king and proclaiming Jesus as king. Jesus was completing His

ministry in Galilee and was returning to Jerusalem. These were the last of His teachings before going to the cross. The transfiguration had occurred and He and the disciples were on the way to Capernaum. The disciples were arguing over who would be greatest in the earthly political kingdom they thought Jesus was setting up. Politics entered the picture among the disciples and Jesus had a strong answer for them. Jesus begins answering this question in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:1-5 discuss the humility of a child as an object lesson. The disciples asked the remarkable question of who is greatest in the Kingdom in verse 1. In verse 2 Jesus uses the child as an object lesson. The child he called was a "paidion," or a little child up to age seven (Biblos 2011). He brought the child to Himself and began to teach. It is possible that the child was Peter's child due to the setting at Peter's mother's house. This child had a very low position in society at this time having no rights under the law. This was a literal child, not a figure of speech about a young convert. This real, living, breathing child was being used to share a vital truth about who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 18:3 discusses the humility needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and relates it to being like the little child. The word used for converted is "strepho," which speaks of a supernatural change of the person, their whole heart and life (Biblos 2011). It is a change that only the Holy Spirit can make in the person's life. It is not referring to adults becoming children; it is the requirement to enter the Kingdom of heaven. It is an act of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sin, judgment, and God's righteousness into a person's life causing a 180 degree change in the person's life. Becoming like a little child means to be born again, adults must become like children, in attitude and acceptance of the Truth of God's Word. Jesus then uses

the strongest form of negation in Scripture which is translated, "you will never" (Matt. 18:3). The disciples desired a position in the kingdom, an earthly position, and Jesus metaphorically slaps them in the face to tell them their thinking is way out of line. "The requirement to enter the kingdom of Heaven is to be converted" (CEF 2012, 12). Any adult who has a childlike faith can be converted from which it may be confirmed that children can have believing faith. The argument for children having faith in Jesus continues in Matthew 18:4-5.

Jesus set down the requirements to be in the Kingdom of Heaven and now shifts to answer the question about who is the greatest in the Kingdom. The answer is the humble person, a person who is made low, is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. The individual with childlike faith is the greatest in the Kingdom. The person who places himself lower than others, and serves others is to be recognized as the greatest. A simple equation may be written as Heaven + Childlike Faith = Greatest in the Kingdom. Christ then mentions the word "dechomai" to show how to welcome a child deliberately and readily (Biblos 2011). Children are to be welcomed in a positive manner; showing them Jesus' love, teaching him about the truth of Christ with a caring heart. Jesus told the disciples that they needed to treat children with those four qualifications. With Jesus' comments he transitions to the seriousness of causing a young child to stumble.

Matthew 8:6-10 brings a message the disciples need to listen to and apply to their lives. He brings the discussion to a younger age child using the word "mikros" or small children (Biblos 2011). Jesus suggests that these little children can believe in Jesus. The word "believe" in this verse is the word "pisteuo" and is the same word used in John 3:16 and Acts 16:31 (Biblos

2011). This word means to “trust or have faith in”, referring to Jesus in this passage. If anyone causes very young believing children to stumble or sin, from the word "skandalizo," they would be better off being drowned with a very heavy commercial grinding millstone around their neck (Biblos 2011). The fear of drowning in their culture was heightened and intense. Jesus is saying that the disciples should never give the children a bad example, bad attitude, teach them incorrectly, discourage them, or teach them to sin or it would be better off to be removed from life itself. Jesus uses very strong language indeed from Jesus to the disciples about the offenses to children. Jesus continues to describe these things further in verses 8-9. He wants them to know that anything that causes them to sin would bring God's judgment and that they must deal with their own sin and remove it from their lives. Verse 10 shows the Messiah's heart to treat the little ones with respect. "Kataphreneo" means "to think little of" and the disciples should not discount the feelings of young ones who believe (Biblos 2011). The passage continues on to suggest that little children have guardian angels to minister to them on their behalf. God cares deeply for the children, so deeply he protects them with angels that have direct access to the presence of God Himself. They communicate with the Father and minister to them. Salvation can come to the little children under the care of God Himself as Jesus adds a parable to help the disciples understand.

Matthew 18:11-13 shares the story of the seeking Savior. The parable of the lost sheep is a simple illustration of God's love for the young children. The parable shows that God intimately loves every individual by describing the shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep to search for the one that was lost. God's love is a love that seeks out those who are lost. His love also rejoices when the lost sheep or lost child is found. The heart of the Savior to have a relationship with

every little person in the world is a profound statement to the disciples. Jesus returns from the parable to show God's passion for children.

Matthew 18:14 discusses what God's will is for the little children. The heart of God is yearning for the little ones, "mikros," to not perish (Biblos 2011). The word perish in this passage refers to the same perish used in John 3:16. The word "perish" discussed is an eternal punishment for sin. He does not desire that any little children would suffer from eternal separation from God. God shows His love and understanding that children may be saved in Matthew 18.

When we tie all the teaching of Matthew 18 together Jesus is teaching that God loves them with an everlasting love, that He cares for them so much he doesn't want anyone to cause them to sin or stumble so that they may enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The humility of a child is the way to enter into and be the greatest in the Kingdom. Matthew 18 shows that children can savingly believe in Him and His desire is that none should perish. These children should not be pushed away but they should be brought to Jesus and we should not despise them for they have ministering angels, Jesus left heaven to die for them, and God does not want any of them to suffer the eternal punishment of separation from God. Jesus confirms that the disciples should never cause the little children to stumble referencing that it would be better for them to be drowned with a millstone around their neck. Jesus is seeking these children out so they may place their faith in Him. Matthew 18 shows a strong argument that children can believe in Jesus. The book of Mark also shows evidence that children may believe.

Mark 10:13-16 shows how deep the love of Jesus is for children. He showed He loved the children when they were not an important part of society. He touched them, showing he wanted to bless their lives. He went against the traditional mindset of the time that children were unimportant. The people were bringing their children to Jesus. The word "paidion" is used in this passage referring to children ranging from babies to preteens (Biblos 2011). In the parallel passage in Luke he uses the word "brephos" referring to infants and young children (Biblos 2011). These parents were bringing their children to Jesus so that He could bless them. The disciples were trying to turn these parents away from Jesus and He was greatly displeased at them.

The timing of this story occurs after Matthew 18 and shows the disciples did not understand what Jesus had taught about children earlier. Jesus used the word "aganakteo" which is only used of Jesus one time in Scripture showing that Jesus was angry (Biblos 2011). His anger suggests how serious it is to exclude the little children from the blessings of God. He issues a double command to override the disciples' rebuke of the people. Jesus wants the disciples to start allowing and to stop preventing the little children to come to Him. Jesus had just taught the disciples about the importance of children and they did not see the importance of children and His anger showed to them the seriousness of the situation.

As He continues to teach the disciples He uses the words, "For to such belongs the Kingdom of God" Mark 10:14 which is an emphatic statement about receiving children into the Kingdom. This does not show that children are all saved, but that the Kingdom is for children like these. The meaning He is sharing with the disciples is that all children and all people who come to Jesus with childlike trust and dependence will be given access to Jesus. The definition

of Kingdom of God and Kingdom of heaven, "It means 'the rule or reign of God over His creation. It is God's present spiritual rule in people's lives.' God's rule invaded the world in the person and activity of Jesus. One must enter the Kingdom by faith in Him -- individual repentance and faith (John 3:3)" (CEF 2012). Children are the models of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. This comparison would have been offensive in the Roman world in which they lived.

The rules for entering God's Kingdom are a simple faith, with complete trust in God, and full dependence on God's grace. These childlike qualities are the standard set forth in this passage in Mark. The need to depend on God and His mercy is evident in this passage. Jesus then took the children into His arms and blessed them abundantly. His attitude was to continue over and over to show God's divine love for His children. Mark 10:13-16 reminds us of the importance of children in God's view of the world. John 21:15-17 is a discussion between Peter and Jesus referring to children.

When Jesus reinstates Peter he mentions to Peter that he must tend and feed Jesus' sheep and little lambs. The term "boske" is used for the word feed and is interpreted "to give them food" (Biblos 2011). Jesus wants Peter to give spiritual food to the little lambs clearly a reference to the young children with saving faith in Christ. Jesus also uses the word "poimaine" which refers to shepherding (Biblos 2011). The shepherds of the day protected, led, guided, and cared for their sheep. Peter was to watch over the flock of believers to surround them with love and guidance. Jesus then reminds Peter to feed the lambs, "boske" (Biblos 2011), as a reminder of the importance of overseeing the flock of saved children and adults. It is evident in this passage that Jesus' little lambs were young believing children that Peter would need to tend to and take care of after Jesus was no longer on the earth. Jesus commissions Peter to

guide, protect, and lead the families who know Christ as Savior and Lord. Not only do the Gospel accounts prove that children may savingly know Jesus Christ, the Epistles as well mention children of faith.

### **Children in the Epistles**

The Early Church recognized and believed in children having a saving faith. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he begins by addressing the believers. The holy ones referred to shows the conversion of the believers in Ephesus of all ages. In chapter 6:1 Paul mentions the children as believing children. The term used in this passage is "teknon" referring to a small son or daughter (Biblos 2011). They are instructed to obey which means to listen, submit, with listening and attentive ears intending to obey. The term, "In the Lord" refers to their status as believing children. To do "right" is to obey what God is commanding. Children who believe in Christ need to know why they should obey God and how important it is to follow Him. The church in Ephesus knew believing children and how they were to be taught; the church in Colossi knew this truth as well.

Paul addresses the church in Colossi as the faithful. The word "pistoi" is used referring to them as believing in everything in Colossians 1:2 (Biblos 2011). They believed in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In chapter 3:20 Paul directs his statements to believing children. The word "teknon" used again to refer to little sons and daughters (Biblos 2011). They are commanded to obey their parents with complete obedience because this pleases the Lord. Paul assumes these believing children have a duty to obey their parents. The churches at Ephesus and Colossi addressed believing children and Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus affirm that children can be saved.

Paul's letter to Titus has a section to give qualifications for leadership in the church. An elder needed to be able to look in the mirror and have certain character traits. The qualifications of an elder are to, "be above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" (Titus 1:6). The church Titus was serving mentions "tekna pista" as a qualifying attribute (Biblos 2011). This means the early church practiced child evangelism because the elders of the church, if they had children, needed to have faith. If his children were not of the faith he would be disqualified from being an elder. The teaching of these fathers to their children would show they were teaching solid doctrine to their kids evidenced by their faith in God. The children under Titus' leadership knew Christ and Timothy was raised in a household of faith.

2 Timothy 3:14-15 discussed the heritage of faith that was passed down from his mother and grandmother. Timothy was exhorted to continue on in the faith. His mother and grandmother taught him from the Scriptures. The Scriptures were what Timothy believed in at an early age. Timothy was encouraged to continue in learning about Jesus. Teaching children early brings children to salvation. The early church practiced child evangelism through the teaching of the Word of God to bring them to salvation. The whole of Scripture from the Old Testament to the Gospels to the Epistles show that children have the ability and opportunity to, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved" (Acts 16:31). The application of this truth varies widely due to different philosophies in the church and in the world today.

### **Philosophies of Childhood Conversion**

The traditional philosophy can be stated as

The Christian life of the child is formed by his environment. Conversion is the phenomenon of adolescence and until he has the use of reason (around twelve years of

age), the child is not lost, since he is **safe under** the **covenant** by belonging to a Christian family. (CEF 2012, 24)

This philosophy states that a child cannot savingly believe. The following 5 items are the problems with this philosophy and verses to refute this philosophy:

1. Children are not lost -- Romans 3:23, 6:23
2. The child is safe under the covenant -- Matthew 18:14; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9
3. Teaching Christian life to unbelievers -- I Corinthians 2:14
4. Wait until adolescence in order to make a decision of faith
5. Children in non-Christian homes -- Mark 16:15

Matthew 18 discusses that we are to not be a stumbling block to the little children. The stumbling block in this philosophy would be to state that the child cannot believe in Christ until a certain age. It is also important to note that James Dobson was saved at age 3. Amy Carmichael, Jonathan Edwards, Franklin Graham, and many other well-known Christians believed in Christ at a young age (Doherty 2011, 168). Billy Graham is quoted as saying, "I am certain that the gospel is just as real to the small child as to the educated adult. Christ seems to have a special affection for the children . . . I sincerely believe that child evangelism is one of the greatest mediums for reaching future generations for Christ that there is today" (CEF 2012, 25). The difficulty if we wait to share the Gospel until kids are 12 is that they may have already been won to the cultural worldview of advertisers, school teachers, and other outside influences. The traditional philosophy falls short of an accurate biblical description of how to reach children.

The Educational philosophy is "The child should receive biblical knowledge from a very young age and develop Christian habits and attitudes. One day he will make a personal decision for Christ, and be saved" (CEF 2012, 26). This philosophy attempts to place education as the goal of filling a child's mind with Christian things and by osmosis the child will grow up and never know

a time when he/she was not a Christian. They will accept Christ on their own. This philosophy on the surface sounds appealing, yet there is a fly in the ointment. Three difficulties arise from this philosophy:

1. Without Christ children are spiritually dead. -- 1 Corinthians 2:14
2. The belief that children will come to Christ on their own is faulty. Romans 10:14.
3. Emphasis is placed on good programming without consistently and intentionally sharing the Gospel (Herlein 2012).

The child that is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit is not able to discern spiritual things. Scripture tells us in Romans 8:5 "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." Only a believing child can discern spiritual truth and random education will not bring about the desired change at a later date. The Educational philosophy also does not fit a biblical model for reaching children, similar to the psychological philosophy of a child being unable to understand.

The psychological philosophy is, "The child is incapable of understanding symbolism and abstract concepts and is unable to reason; therefore, he cannot make a decision for Christ" (CEF 2012, 27). Howard Hendricks says, "If you doubt the child's ability to communicate with God, don't doubt God's ability to communicate with the child" (Herlein 2012). The debate of a younger child not being able to understand abstract concepts would be similar to saying that math should not be taught until children are older and can understand these concepts. "All abstract concepts can be understood through concrete examples" (Herlein 2012). Object lessons may be used in a way to present the gospel message so children may be saved. Each

age range can be taught the Gospel message according to their level of understanding with different methods, the message should not be ignored, and the method needs to be tailored to the child. In this model the work of the Holy Spirit is ignored as written in Hebrews 11:3 and John 16:13. The psychological philosophy also does not fit within Scripture since this theory would make salvation intelligence based. Scripture clearly teaches that salvation is of faith in Romans 10:17. The position that is most accurate to Scripture is the Child Evangelism Philosophy.

The Child Evangelism Philosophy states

The Gospel should be presented to the child at an early age so that as the Holy Spirit works, he will come to know Jesus as his personal Savior. As a result the child can begin to develop Christian character, which is the outward expression of a new inward life. (CEF 2012, 28)

"Research by George Barna shows that 85% of all Christians receive Christ between ages 8-14; that there is a 32% probability that people will accept Jesus as their Savior between the ages of 8-12; that by age 13, a child's spiritual identity is largely set in place; and 85% of teen Christians received Jesus as their Savior before age 15" (CEF 2010, 16). The Bible states that children are lost -- Romans. 3:23, 5:12; Psalm 51:5, 58:3. Jesus commands us to evangelize children in Mark 16:15. Jesus affirms these truths in Matt. 18, Mark 10, Ephesians, Colossians, Titus, and Timothy. Children are set as a standard of faith. Biblical salvation requires childlike faith, Matthew 18:3, Eph. 2:8-9. The Bible clearly states that children can receive Christ as their Savior. Upon examination of the Bible, evidence for child conversion is overwhelming.

The Word of God, when interpreted correctly, clearly shows that children may come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ at a young age. The Bible clearly states that we are saved by

grace alone, through Christ alone, by the Word alone. Reason or mental assent cannot bring us to a saving knowledge of Christ. Only a supernatural event can bring our life to Jesus Christ in a childlike faith. Romans 3:23 states that everyone has sinned. Romans 6:23 shows that we have earned death and punishment, yet God gives eternal life to those who believe on Jesus' name. We have access to the Father through Jesus Christ, His only Son, that we may believe on Him. Being a good person does not enable anyone to cross over to heaven. Only a humble childlike faith that believes Jesus lived, Jesus died, and Jesus rose again to pay the penalty for our sins. The Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin, judgment, and God's holiness to bring us to a place to receive Jesus as Savior. Because of this simple faith all may become children of God. Hallelujah for so great a salvation!

#### **Additional Supporting Evidence for Child Evangelism**

Two more pieces of evidence exist in my own personal life to confirm what I believe in the Scripture. Our oldest son, Stephen, received Christ as his personal Savior on March 22, 2008 approximately 10:00 in the morning. Friday evening our family attended a candlelight communion service and Stephen, being 4 years old, wanted some grape juice. We told him he couldn't share communion with us. He seemed very upset because he was thirsty. After the service we told him that communion was a celebration to remember what Jesus had done on the cross for people who believe in Him. That night he went to bed and we are convinced the Holy Spirit began working on his mind and heart that night. The next morning I was home with Stephen and he came down to ask me a question. He wanted to know why he couldn't have the grape juice on Friday night. I then shared with him how we are all sinners and that we needed to admit we could not meet God's perfect standard. When we admit that we are

sinner we then needed to confess our sins to him and believe that Jesus died and rose again to pay the penalty for our sin. In order to do that he would have to talk to God about his sin and ask Jesus into his heart. When I asked if he wanted to accept Christ he looked into my eyes and said, "Yes, I want to ask God into my life because he is bigger than Jesus." I explained that he needed to ask Jesus into his life as well and he confessed his sin and trusted Christ for his salvation.

Luke, our middle son, accepted Christ in apartment 101B at Child Evangelism Fellowship headquarters Tuesday, August 28, 2012, 8:30 pm. While practicing the Wordless Book for our practicum the next day I had a captive audience to share the gospel with. Luke came into our bedroom with Jonathan, his younger brother, and I pulled them up onto the bed and began to share. Jonathan was not interested very long and he went back to the other room. Luke listened intently and placed his faith in Jesus Christ.

### **A Christian response to Child Evangelism**

As Christians we have the responsibility to not hinder anyone from placing their faith in Jesus Christ. We are called to be salt and light to a darkened and dying world filled with sin. The result of the curse is everywhere to be seen in our culture today. We must do our best to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone, including children. Our response must be to maintain a humble, simple childlike faith in the midst of this world and faithfully share the gospel with others. Trusting the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives will help us see the harvest fields before us.

## Conclusion

After careful examination of the Bible, current philosophies, and additional supporting evidence it is clear that all of humanity has an opportunity at all times to be saved. Jesus Christ died on the cross for everyone's sins and He desires us all to come to Him with humility like a little child. He will give us the strength, wisdom, and desire to share the gospel to all creation. May we depend on the Holy Spirit to clearly present the gospel to children, allowing them to be assured of their salvation. May we allow God to bring us to a point of confession of sin, to walk with Him daily, and share the Gospel. May the Holy Spirit do a work in our lives to be broken and poured out vessels for His use. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen" (Gal. 6:18).

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