





4 Facts Every Leader Should Know About the First 6 Years of CHURCH


by Sharon Ellard


1 Young Children Hold a Special Place in the Heart of God


God includes children in His plans throughout the Bible. In Matthew 18, Jesus focuses attention on them when He answers a question about who is greatest in the kingdom of God, He sets a "little child" in the middle of the group. Then He makes six statements that can guide ministry to young children.

 "Become like little children [or] you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (verse 3).


 "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (verse 4).

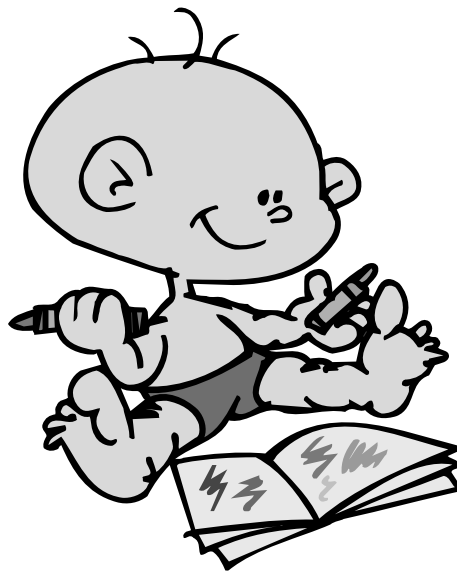
 "Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me" (verse 5).

 "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned" (verse 6).

 "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see

the face of my Father in heaven" (verse 10).

 "Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (verse 14).



2 Government and Culture Want to Shape Young Children

Within the past five years, medical technology has revealed how the brain develops during the first years of life. The PET brain scan is able to show how the brain responds to different activities. It turns out that the

brain grows the fastest during the first six years of life. The brain grows faster when others interact with babies, toddlers, and preschoolers—when they talk with them, read to them, play with them, nurture them.

As a result, the government and influential, well-known celebrities are using their influence to pass legislation about how young children will be "educated." There are proposals for full-time preschool under consideration.

The Church can respond to the new research too. We can use the new understanding of how God designed young brains to disciple little ones more effectively in the early years of life.

3 The Effects of Early Childhood Last a Long Time

Dr. Harry Chugani, a researcher of early brain development, has said, "Early experiences are so powerful they can completely change the way a person turns out." Other research in New York and Hawaii show that positive early childhood experiences can lower the juvenile delinquency rate by 16 percent and protect against damage from at-risk families through the age of 30 years.

4

How We Teach Young Children Affects How Well They Learn

What young children learn about living for Jesus can affect them during their teen and adult

years as well as during childhood.

Spirit-filled, fully-trained teachers are essential in early childhood discipling. Why? The learning style of young children is very different from that of older

children. Young children are global learners who learn best when all their senses are used. Teachers need training in order to understand why to and how to use hands-on learning as they disciple young children.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What statements does God make about children?
2. When does a child's brain grow the fastest?
3. How can the Church put into use the new research about the development of a child's brain?
4. What does the term *global learners* mean?
5. Knowing that children are "global learners," how should you present your lessons?

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