



# It Begins Now!

by Marshall Bruner

One recent evening, as my wife Jan sat at the table tutoring our fourth-grade boy Micah in geometry, she stated something that caught my attention: "Micah is learning some of the same geometry lessons Meagan did when she was in sixth grade!" My daughter Meagan is 7½ years the senior to Micah. Within that short time span, educators have determined that children can comprehend even more than expected at an earlier age.

Would you think that maybe we as children's leaders should begin teaching kids now how to evangelize, how to be in ministry, and how to mentor—instead of waiting until they are teens or even adults?

George Barna, in his book *Evangelism That Works*, stated, "Only one out of every three churches offers its people any kind of formal evangelism training." He included, "Eight percent of the churches in the nation do not engage in community outreach." Then he added, "We have become accustomed to thinking of evangelism as the exclusive domain of three types of people: pastors, missionaries, and people who have the spiritual gift of evangelism."

If Barna has measured the evangelistic efforts of the adult church today, would this, then, reflect the lack of time children's leaders invest in the lives of children to train them to evangelize?

There's a saying worth repeating here: "Spiritual passion is caught more than taught."

We must begin now to exemplify and teach the passion



of Christ so that children will role-play the love Christ has for everyone. The Great Commission can begin now in the lives of children as they share Christ in their communities, as they minister to the needy, and as they mentor children into spiritual maturity. That's right! It begins now.

My good friend, AGHM Missionary Jim Hall, recently told me something that struck my heart: "Children cannot assume they can bring their friends to church so that the children's pastor can lead them to Christ. They must be taught to lead their friends to Christ right there on the school campuses, then to begin the discipleship process. What happens to the child who may never go to church?"

2 Timothy 1:6 states, "Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of...hands." So let's begin to fan the flame of evangelism, ministry, and mentorship in the lives of the children whom we minister to and influence each week.

## Involve Kids in Ministry

If you haven't done so, begin to teach the kids in your church to be the greeters, the puppeteers, the praise and worship leaders, and the altar workers of your children's church. Then provide the "laboratory" in which children can practice those skills at church. Help them to avoid the fear of failure and to expand on their successes.

The next application is to

allow the children to put their ministry skills to use. If it's a puppet team or a "Sticks" ministry team you've trained, then enable them to demonstrate their gifts at a public mall, in a senior citizens home, or even at a classroom of an elementary school.

George Barna, in his article "Research Shows that Spiritual Maturity Process Should Start at Young Age," on The Barna Group website, stated, "Four out of five pastors, church staff, and lay leaders trained had been consistently involved in the ministry to children for an extended period of years prior to age 13."

- "The [child's] moral foundation is generally in place by the time he reaches age 9."

- "In essence, what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing."

In short, we are obligated not only to ground children in God's Word, but to develop their evangelism, ministry, and mentorship skills, then give the opportunity to fly—at church and in their communities. Train the children in the way they should go and they will not depart from it.

## **Help Kids to Be Evangelists and Mentors**

Children have tremendous opportunities in their communities and in their schools to share

their faith and the love of Christ with other children. So teach them how to share their faith with others. Demonstrate how they can comfortably share their stories (their personal testimonies of what Christ has done for them) and The Story (the story of Christ and His redemptive plan for mankind) with other kids at school.

The elementary campus is where children spend the majority of their time during a given school year. During lunch breaks, recesses, and before and after school activities, they have ample time to share their story and The Story with schoolmates. So why not teach them how to naturally share their faith with others?

Begin by teaching your church kids how to establish relationships with others, how to be sensitive and a helper to the needy kids on their school campuses, and how to live out the character traits many of the schools now teach. Next, illustrate how the children can, through everyday conversation, share their stories and The Story with other children. Then provide the "laboratory" in which the kids can experience the process, learn how to improve on their newfound skills, and become comfortable with what should become the lifelong process of every believer.

Teach the children the important principal Missionary Jim Hall shared with me: Children cannot rely on bringing their friends to church so they can be led to Christ; they must take the salvation message to their schoolmates. Then, after having led others to Christ, they must begin to disciple them right there at school and in their communities.

How awesome it would be to raise up an entire army of children to become evangelists and disciples! Just think of the strength of the Church of tomorrow! Barna's research finding that, "Eight percent of the churches in the nation do not engage in community outreach," could become "Eighty percent of the churches in the nation do engage in community outreach!"

The challenge is before us. The objective is clear. The job seems overwhelming at times. But the All-Sufficient One, the I Am, will lead us and guide us and empower us. So ... let it begin now!"