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PLACE

Developing Children's Ministry

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SESSION 3

The Child in History and
Contemporary Culture

CHURCH of the NAZARENE

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The Child in History and Contemporary Culture

SESSION OVERVIEW

Children in Historical Perspective

Children in Contemporary Culture

Contemporary Cultural Influences on Children

Discerning Cultural Influences on Children for Ministry

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- identify key thoughts about children in historical context, especially as related to the history of the church.

- discover how culture influences children.

- learn to read the current culture as it relates to and affects children.

The Child in History and Contemporary Culture

INTRODUCTION

For much of history, children have been invisible characters. We know they were present, but we don't know much about them. Because children didn't record their own stories, we know very little of what the actual experience of childhood was like. We have stories of childhood told by a adults (autobiographies). We have stories of childhood told through the journals of parents or other adults. We have laws, codes for daily life and education, the writings of philosophers, and some archeological records and artifacts that tell us about the lives of children throughout history. Since scholars interpret historical records differently, we have conflicting views of how cultures perceived childhood or even whether they acknowledged childhood at all. Similarly, our own ideas remain so much a part of us and our own culture, these assumptions seem almost invisible to us. Understanding the history of childhood exposes our own assumptions and reminds us of our responsibilities with children.

CHILDREN IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A study of the history of childhood can prove important for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important reason rests with our assumptions about the world in which we live. Most people think about their culture based approximately on 100 years of experience. That 100-year "window" emerges through the heritage we receive from parents and grandparents when we are born, and continues as we encounter new experiences as we grow. So, our working knowledge of the world really resembles about 100 years of "practical wisdom," sometimes without a strong understanding of the historical forces that influence that perspective. As we study history, we discover not only the sources of our practical wisdom, but also how different they might be from other historical eras. We also develop a kind of "historical" perspective that reminds us how deeply our own perspective might be embedded in similar assumptions.

Historical eras portray a record of children being loved, cared for, and protected. Yet, for every positive picture, we can find an example of children being neglected, despised, or abused in the same era and in the same culture. One thing is certain: children usually defined the most powerless group in any society. Kids' rights and privileges—even basic needs—occurred at the discretion of the adults around them.

Childhood in the Ancient World

Through ancient temple ruins, researchers know infants and children were sometimes sacrificed. Such sacrifices were often done in response to answered prayer or to gain the favor of a deity. In some ancient religions, children were even cannibalized to ensure future fertility. God's people were forbidden to sacrifice human life through the act of God's delivering a ram to take Isaac's place (Genesis 22). This act forever left God's people with the message that God refused the human sacrifices other cultures offered. The records show that ancient peoples in Greece, Rome, India, China, Central, South, and North America, Egypt, and Japan practiced infanticide, usually by leaving newborns exposed when families could not or did not want to raise the child. An exposed child was one left to the elements, often on city dump heaps. The child either died or was picked up by slave traders for profit. These infants were typically female or born with birth defects. The decision to expose a child was most often made by the father or patriarch of the household.

Records from ancient Rome indicate people expressed grief when a child died of accidental causes. Some documents indicate that children with their baby teeth were viewed differently from children who survived to have their permanent teeth. Burial practices (cremation) for children over seven were the same as those for adults. Children who had not yet lost all their baby teeth were buried instead of cremated. This apparent "lower value" on young children may have been a response to the fact that only about 50% of children survived to the age of seven. Young children were seen as less than fully human.

In ancient times, some mothers attempted to protect their children through magical spells, amulets, prayers, and even the sacrifice of their own lives. This practice shows mothers sometimes placed great value on their children. In the book of Exodus, the Egyptians finally let God's people (the Hebrews) go after the last plague took the lives of their firstborn, an act that caused great anguish.

Interestingly, Romans dressed their 7- to 14-year-old children—those who had outlived the dangers of early childhood—in the same garb as their early kings: togas with purple borders signifying these individuals were entitled to special protection. In many ancient cultures, life was not particularly sacred, but the lives of those accepted into families were treasured and protected as the hope and future of the families.

In contrast, God impressed on His people the concept that all life is precious—that the very quality of being human requires a response of stewardship and care. As with human sacrifice, God said no to the accepted practice of infanticide, establishing the value of all human life. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that among Jews, "The Law orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause abortion or to make away with the fetus." Similarly, the first common teachings of the New Testament church—the *Didache*—recorded the precept, "You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born" [**earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html**, accessed August 2021]. Clearly, God desired for His people to show respect and care for human life, even the culturally insignificant, in ways that set the Hebrews apart from common practices of the day.

Children in the Early Christian Era

Jewish traditions about children are rooted in four primary concepts: 1) children are a symbol of creation; 2) they are the way in which a biblical heritage continues (Deuteronomy 11:18-25); 3) they are a blessing; and 4) they are a trust (Psalm 127:3-5). Perhaps we see the significance of children best in the cries of those who were barren, such as Sarah and Hannah. As a result of their

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beliefs about children, the Jewish people were concerned about loving care and education in order to mold the mind and discipline the actions of the child. By AD 64, the education of boys six years old and older was mandatory among Jews. Their education was to include memorization of Scriptures, instruction in letters, some basic arithmetic, and eventually the Law of Moses. Methods were holistic: some texts record the tradition of the rabbis spreading honey on the stone tablets from which children learned their alphabet. The children could trace each letter and lick the honey off their fingers or "pencils," reminding the children that God's words are sweeter than honey to the lips.

In the early church (through the *Didache*), parents were admonished to teach their daughters from youth as well as their sons. Christian leadership assumed children, considered part of the household, would be trained within their homes. While there was no structured congregational education system, such as the Jews had developed, older children apparently joined the classes provided for new converts. These classes were called "catechumenal schools." There were different groups formed in these schools based upon the individual's commitment. Those listed as "Hearers" were allowed to listen to the Scripture reading and the teaching. The "Kneelers" would often stay afterwards for prayer and further instruction. Since their commitment level was higher than that of the "Hearers," they were frequently examined about their Christian discipline and their life habits to make sure they conformed to the Scriptures. The highest level was "The Chosen." These individuals would be prepared for baptism through intense theological instruction.

Some of these catechumenal schools took a greater interest in those older children who were preparing for the priesthood. This invitation meant educational opportunities were again limited to boys as the emphasis became more academic.

Children in the Middle Ages

We now turn to the history of children in the Western world, as our primary interest rests in tracing the history of children through the expansion of Christianity in order to understand how children have come to be understood in the church today. History paints a picture of unacknowledged childhood in the Middle Ages. Once a child was able to dress and act somewhat independently, he or she was expected to enter the world of the working adult. Children were dressed as adults, and they worked on family property or were apprenticed out for training. Thomas Aquinas, for example, was given to the Benedictine monks when he was five or six years old, much as young Samuel was presented to the priest Eli.

Schooling was reserved primarily for those who would serve the church. Aquinas, having become a learned member of the church community, influenced the church's perception of childhood as a time when the individual is not yet rational. He taught that children under the age of seven, under their parent's total authority, should not attend school or engage in adult spiritual practices such as fasting. In middle childhood, he taught, the child would grow to be able to rationally choose good over evil. Notably, before a child given to the church might take the final vows for the priesthood, he should be allowed to choose whether to marry or enter the monastic life, whatever his parents' earlier decisions had been. While Aquinas' progression set up an early developmental view of childhood coming out of the Middle Ages, it also reinforced the idea that by middle childhood, "children are just small adults," a concept prevalent in the era.

Children in the Renaissance

The Renaissance period followed the Middle Ages. Returning to the idea of the absolute control of the father over the family that was dominant in the Classical periods of Greece and Rome, the father was the sole determiner of when the child became an official adult through the court system. This did not mean that children were indulged in any way. Children were workers in all classes. Young children were without significant identity. Until the age of six or seven, boys and girls alike were both dressed in skirts.

Education became more commonplace for children in a wider range of economic classes, and more girls were beginning to be educated, at least in the noble class. The games children played and the toys they used mimicked the vocations they were expected to choose. For example, young boys rode hobby horses and played with spears. Girls' dolls changed from one-piece baby dolls to carefully jointed porcelain and papier-mâché adult dolls, crowned with human hair and dressed for court.

Overall, the Renaissance was a period of progress for the concept of childhood. There were two extreme points of view on children that continue to influence our understandings of childhood today: the child as an innocent, and the child as evil under the dominating forces of original sin. Martin Luther tried to explain this in the Reformation period by teaching that sin at first lays dormant in early childhood, because children under seven have not developed the ability to have "real thoughts." Nevertheless, stealing cookies, for example, is the precursor to true acts of the sinful nature.

Up to this point in history, the church had been the primary source of education through monasteries. However, when many Christians abandoned monastic life, parents who considered themselves reformers began to neglect the education

of their children. Luther taught that to love one's neighbor meant to love the closest neighbor (one's own child), and Christians must protect the welfare of children. Luther taught that parents who forced their children to work rather than be educated were cheating God out of the resource of well-prepared, talented individuals to promote the work of the gospel.

Children in the Age of Enlightenment

The Age of Enlightenment brought a whole new set of ideas into the world of childhood. John Locke proposed that children were born into the world as "blank slates" to be written on. This view opened the door to the concept that children should be nurtured, molded, and shaped, and that society could hopelessly corrupt children by failing to nurture them. Some scholars have argued that there really was no sense of childhood until the Enlightenment.

Children had been dressed as little adults, and they used all the same household equipment as their parents. Toward the end of the 1700s, children were supplied with child-size chairs and entertained by children's stories and books. Special resources were created for children. Labor was beginning to be seen as the arena of adults, while children had greater access to schooling, playtime, and "proper experience." In the poorer classes, however, child labor continued out of necessity.

The family structure during the Enlightenment began to change, too. While the multigenerational extended family homes had been common in previous years, now children were beginning to be more connected to "nuclear families," consisting of parents and their biological children under one roof. Where young children throughout history had been sent off to wet nurses who fed and cared for them, now, well-to-do families were beginning to see their children as enjoyable enough to care for themselves. While apprenticeships were still common for older children, younger children performed mostly household tasks rather than paying jobs to support their families.

Those who were heavily influenced by early Protestant thinkers, such as the Puritans, were challenged by their beliefs that only the converted could enter into heaven and their belief that young children were not capable of choosing to be converted. While Catholics believed that children were brought into the church through infant baptism, and thus would be permitted into heaven, the Puritans and others like them were very fearful for the eternal fate of their children who died in infancy or before they were capable of choosing God's will for their lives. It was this conflict, in part, that drove ongoing theological development in the Protestant church.

Children in the Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution changed the social order. A growing gap occurred between rich and poor people. Many families moved to the cities and immigrated to new countries, further isolating and defining the family as a "nuclear" unit of parents and children, different from earlier ideas of the family. Children became essential members of the working class, with factories depending on them for labor. For example, children as young as four or five were hired to pick up loose cotton that fell to the floor in textile mills. Orphaned children were sometimes sent to manufacturing centers as little more than slaves. Of course, children of the factory owners began to live more protected lives, enjoying the fruits of their parents' labors and attending public or church-supported schools. Class differences became apparent for children in this era.

The church recognized these abuses and intervened with charity homes and schools. In fact, Sunday School was started in 1780 in England by Robert Raikes, a contemporary of John Wesley. The purpose was to teach skills for reading and writing to poor child laborers and give them moral instruction on Sunday, their only day off. Raikes was not a pastor; he was a newspaper man. That gave him the advantage of being able to "write his own press," and his Sunday Schools gained much attention as a tool for social reform. It also established Sunday School as a ministry of the laity, a tradition that continues to this day.

John Wesley and Children

John Wesley, the father of the Methodist movement, established boarding schools for children, though he had no children of his own. Most of his theories of childhood and child rearing seem to have come from his mother, Susannah Wesley, who raised 10 children, emphasizing academic teaching for both her sons and her daughters. Wesley recognized the strong will present in childhood, and much of his philosophy of discipline focused on the need for the child's will to be broken in preparation for obedience to God later. While Wesley was strict and did not understand the significance of play in the life of a child, he did have a great respect for the importance of childhood teaching and for children as people.

Wesley had greater confidence in the ability of young children to be in relationship to God than those who had earlier declared that children under the age of seven did not have the reasoning capacity to choose good over evil. His journals record several accounts of children under the age of six having "assurance of faith." In one entry, Wesley, in referring to revivals, stated, "God begins his work in children" (Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought*). Through Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace, heirs of Wesley believe children who die

before rejecting God's gift of salvation will be saved by God's grace, taking away the fear for an innocent child's eternal destiny, while still leaving in place the need for a child's conversion in response to God's call on his or her life. Wesley, in his practical theology, urged that children be ministered to and insisted that his Methodist pastors spend time with children regularly, whether they felt gifted for this ministry or not. Rather than relying on his educational policy, ministers can appreciate Wesley's spiritual admonitions to both inculcate children into Christian practices as well as advocate that children's spiritual lives served as a "means of grace" to others through testimonies and written accounts. Wesley's employ of the means of grace, as well as his appreciation for the spiritual presence of children in the ecology of Methodism, provide a stronger framework for the spiritual nurture and expression of children.

Children in the Modern Era

In the mid- to late-1800s, in reaction to the pressures for conversion in the revivalist environment in America, Horace Bushnell introduced the concept of nurture as a path to Christian commitment rather than discipline emphasizing the sinful nature and need for a crisis conversion. Bushnell proposed that the children of committed Christian parents might never be aware of a time in their lives when they were not part of God's family. Children, he implied, never needed to experience a conversion experience if they had been raised to think about and live in the ways of the Lord. Relationship with God would be a natural outcome of their lives. Bushnell had strong influence in the non-Revivalist churches into the 20th century. His nurture-based religious education principles are still present in modern Christian education practices.

As politicians and pastors and laity began to defend the rights of children in the Western world, literacy became a primary concern. Mandatory public schooling for all children, including the mentally- and physically-challenged, gradually became the norm throughout Westernized countries. The care and education of children became a significant public policy issue, and minimum standards of education and protection were established.

The role of the child changed from being "seen and not heard" to being front and center by the end of the 20th century. The "baby on board" generation was perceived as basically good in nature but corrupted by experience. How did this change happen? Some link the change to the development of psychological understanding and the significance of childhood experience on adult health and happiness, as well as a better understanding of what can happen when things go wrong. Others point to economic factors, particularly those that allowed women to pursue homemaking as their primary task, elevating the care of children and

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homemaking to full-time occupational status. Still others point to sociological and technological factors that reduced infant mortality and allowed people for the first time in history to effectively plan for pregnancy and medically intervene in cases of infertility. Some have even claimed that this is the age of the "too precious" child (Diane Ehrensaft, *Spoiling Childhood*, Guilford Press 1999), who leads the parents rather than being guided and directed toward maturity by parents. On the other hand, documented cases of child abuse have never been higher. The understanding of childhood depends very much on which children are being observed.

Early in the 20th century, the model for good parenting and good schooling was based on the factory model of efficiency. Parenting specialists encouraged feeding by the clock, attending to a child on a routine, and conditioning a child not to cry or disturb adult patterns in the household. In the United States, schools were run "by the bell," and scientific methods (like intelligence testing) were employed to determine which children could succeed and which could not. Children were grouped for instruction by ability levels to maximize efficient instruction.

When other scientific methodology began to prove that these non-relational strategies were not accomplishing the outcome of well-adjusted adults, alternative methods of child-rearing and education were proposed. The pendulum swung to "permissive parenting" near the middle of the century, during which much of the focus of the discipline and training of the child moved to the school and church settings. Yet many of the tools of the household of previous years were banned from the public setting in U.S. schools, many rightfully so. States outlawed corporal punishment in the schools and began to take a strong interest in preventing abusive discipline in the home. New child-sensitive discipline techniques were developed for both the public and the home setting. Spanking was replaced by time-outs or grounding, and the use of inappropriate disciplinary techniques led to both private criticism and public prosecution.

CHILDREN IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

As in all generations, parents and theorists embrace various views of how to raise children who will sustain the values of the culture and become productive members of society. It is not uncommon to hear, "What's the matter with kids these days!?" One suspects some variation of that question has been present throughout the course of history.

Best practice models of children's ministry shifted from expecting children to merely sit and listen in the church, or perhaps passively participate in programs, to a view where children engage as actively-involved learners and participants in age-graded ministries of the church. Recently, church leaders, particularly in North America, began to wonder if congregations miss something by segregating the members of the congregation into "age ghettos" that limit the exposure of one generation to another. We'll talk more about how culture is affecting children today and how children affect today's culture as well in a future session.

The important thing to remember about the modern era of childhood is that children have become more of a topic of interest than at any time in history up to this point. Children are no longer ancillary or tag-on members of society— just small people on their way to adulthood. Childhood describes a period of development that is understood to be an important part of society's interest. Today, children matter. Of course, to God they have always mattered. Our job as the Church is to translate God's care into ministry practice.

While we can't know exactly what the future of childhood holds, there are some factors that indicate children's experience with technology, their role as consumer-market targets, their exposure to a variety of forces that are unique to this generation will yet again influence how we understand the nature of children and childhood. While historically we have broken early life down into periods of seven years, we may discover that shorter periods of life can be explored in more depth for greater understanding.

Our ability to study the earliest stages of childhood has blossomed through the technological tools available to us. Scientists currently see the first three years of life as the most formative time in a human being's experience. The pattern of earlier sexual maturity may lead us to think of childhood as a shorter time and extended adolescence on the other hand could lead us to see childhood as longer! International emphasis on children's rights may change our perspective on children's degree of dependence on adult support and influence. The balance
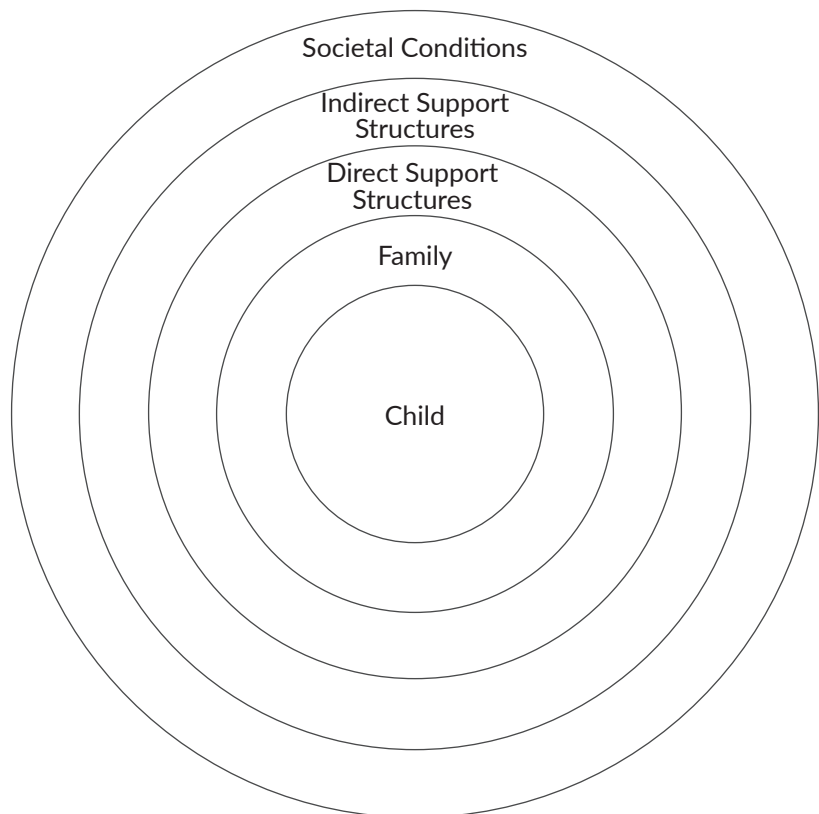
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of responsibility between parents and society for the care and nurture of children continues to be debated in the West. All those factors and more will influence the form ministry to children takes in the future. However, the goal will always be the same: to encourage a lifelong relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN

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Many books on childhood education encourage readers to get down on our hands and knees and crawl around the room in order to experience what a child sees. While this strategy changes our perspective and helps us see from the vantage point of the child (and incidentally helps us to identify some potential dangers we may not have seen from our place above the average crawler), it doesn't necessarily help us perceive all the levels of influence on a child.

Researcher Uri Bronfenbrenner has given us a picture of a child's life in the midst of contemporary culture. His illustration provides a graphical vision of the many different levels that influence children. The child at the center is influenced by things that are going on within him or her—nutrients acting inside the body, continual aging, his or her genetic background, a huge array of chemicals, electrical impulses in the brain, sensory perceptions, and thoughts and feelings that are experienced as personal. At the same time, the child is always being affected by the surrounding systems. The child constantly strives to find a place in the whole of the structure—and to discover how he or she affects the systems that surround him or her.

Societal Conditions

Indirect Support
Structures

Direct Support
Structures

Family

Child

The child's immediate context, or inner ring, is the family. Children can be well connected or poorly connected to their families. Families have personalities that are a result of the people in them, their histories, and the way they respond to their circumstances. Often, families come with healthy characteristics (communicates well, shares responsibilities, has clear and reasonable boundaries between members, etc.) or unhealthy characteristics (domestic violence, unresolved anger, addictive behaviors, loss of a family member, etc.). The factors in the innermost ring are the most directly influential in the child's life. They also are the factors that tend to cause the most long-lasting effects in a child's life because they influence perceptions of how the world operates.

The next ring consists of the factors with which the child directly interacts outside the home and family. This would include schools, churches, sports clubs, community centers, medical clinics, scout groups, and sometimes social service agencies. This ring is all about direct support interactions. How these agencies interact with the family and support the positives goals of the family determines the health of the influences in this ring. Occasionally, representatives of this ring will actually move into the inner ring of a child's life. For example, a Sunday School teacher might take a direct role in the child's day-to-day life as a childcare provider. For the most part, members of the second ring provide temporary or part-time resources. They have an interest in a particular aspect of a child's life. These entities are pulled into a cohesive background for a child's development under the oversight of parents. In the best of circumstances, the family uses this circle as a network to support their efforts to provide the best care and upbringing for their children. Families choose support sources that are consistent with their parenting goals.

The next ring shows influences on the child with which the child has no direct contact. For example, a child has little or no contact with a parent's work context. However, the work context influences the parent and has a trickle-down effect on the child. If Dad's wages are low, it will influence the child's economic status. If Mom's employer values and affirms family relationships, her child may benefit from the employer's policies about family medical care. Similarly, a child will never have contact with insurance company personnel, but that company's policies can determine the type of medical care a child does or does not receive. A child may have no direct contact with a landlord, but the child's housing conditions are influenced by the action or inaction of the property owner.

The outside ring represents the systems that are farthest from contact with the child, but they still influence the daily lives of children and families. These are the characteristics or forces of the greater culture, such as the economy, war, media standards, literacy rate, political leadership, and globalization. While a child may never recognize the power of these influences, children's lives are nonetheless affected for good or bad by these forces, both in their present and future.

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This systems approach to understanding contemporary culture provides a different cultural framework for child development. Every child is a uniquely forming individual, while conditions in the family, community, and even the world constantly form and shape the child's individuality. Incidentally, this view also helps us to understand how generations of individuals in a culture may share characteristics or defining traits significantly different from those of their parents.

This model of understanding the role of culture in children's lives is very consistent with our Wesleyan heritage. John Wesley has been called "hopelessly optimistic." He recognized Christians had to be involved in direct ways in the inner circles of each other's lives and established intimate groups for accountability and nurture of the spiritual life. He also recognized the big picture issues that individuals are not even aware of. His response to the big issues of his day was advocacy—to stand up for the good of those who were powerless to change their situations alone. Wesley understood that to influence the outer rings of a person's life—the society we live in—is to influence the individual. To work for right changes in the world (social justice) is to work for the good of the individual, and particularly, we realize today, for the good of the developing child.

DISCERNING CULTURAL INFLUENCES
ON CHILDREN FOR MINISTRY

> **NOTES**

One image that has been used for making connections to children is bridge building. The bridges we build to children are suspension bridges. We are suspended in love between the faith foundations of the past and the hope of faith firmly planted in the future. A master bridge builder knows each steel line of the design should contribute to the strength and integrity of the bridge. No line should pull the bridge in a way that compromises its strength and integrity. To help us respond to the challenges at hand, we have to pay close attention to the culture that shapes our children.

Analyzing the media children read or watch in contemporary culture provides one way to begin to understand the unique culture of kids. It changes rapidly! Animation, like other art forms, is in a constant state of change. Marketing agencies spend millions of dollars each year to keep current on what's hot and what's not for kids. If we are going to minister effectively to children, we must at least be aware of what's important to kids in our communities.

Some people might feel as though this is a good place to apply Jesus' warning to be in the world and not of it. We certainly don't need to let any of our "research" sway us from our mission and purpose as Christians. You will use it to build effective bridges. We can know what materials kids are watching, so we can gain the Spirit's direction for which to use and which to avoid, and how to talk knowledgeably to kids about what could be damaging to their spiritual growth.

It doesn't take long to look at society and its emerging generation to get an idea of what a child is experiencing. You must be prepared for what you are going to discover. It is not all lighthearted. When we start listening carefully and watching children closely, it can often be overwhelming to see what some children are facing, especially to those who have been raised in the church and have been somewhat sheltered.

Another approach may be analyzing a social condition—an outer ring issue— that affects children dramatically. Poverty may be one good example. One disclaimer: any time we talk about social issues that affect children, we talk in broad generalities of statistical probabilities, not about specific children. Specific children are influenced by specific gifts that may protect them from the statistical probabilities. It is part of what ministry to children is all about. We invest in specific children in the hope they will come to a relationship with God that will cause them to defy the odds. That is our "hopeless optimism" in the power of God to redeem His children from the pit!

With that in mind, poverty has certain documented effects on children. Children who live below the poverty level today have statistically lower cognitive skills and less school achievement. Children also have higher exposure to a number of negative behaviors: from environmental toxins to family stress and violence to personal abusive behavior.

It is easy to get overwhelmed by the vastness of the forces of society that impact children. Perhaps these are the kinds of challenges Paul spoke of when he said to the Ephesians: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

Culture is always changing. As much as we would like to relive the glory days of our past and have our children grow up in the same environment we did as children, the hard truth is that times are always changing. In fact, about the only thing that remains constant is change. If we are not careful, we can miss what is happening around us. We can only see the bad of society. Not only can we miss the positive, but we can also inadvertently reinforce the negative by either constantly focusing on it or by modeling it with our attitudes. No child is beyond the reach of God. No problem is too big for God. When we think of the complexity of children and their families, remember every child needs the following:

- Time
- Love/Affection
- Attention
- Approval
- Adult Guidance
- Hope
- Jesus

You heard today about the history of childhood and challenges of contemporary culture. You are writing the ongoing history of childhood as you minister in your local churches. What you do with children today will help to determine what those children do with tomorrow.

If we really believe children are connected to their families and communities, children's workers will take extra time to get to know the families of the children in their classes and learn something about the schools they attend. If we really believe God sees children as integral parts of the kingdom of God, a children's minister and the pastor will find ways for children to minister to and with adults in the regular activities of the church.

APPLICATION

1. Talk with parents about the current cultural forces that shape their children's lives, using Bronfenbrenner's circles, to determine both direct and indirect influences.

2. Interview leaders to see how they view children: as passive or active participants in the church? How do their views intersect with the different historical eras in regard to child safety, moral agency (the child's ability to do good or bad), and active learning?

3. How might children's ministry in your congregation address contemporary cultural influences like media or poverty? Are there basic approaches in place that support children regardless of the cultural dynamics shaping kids' lives?

EXAM

1. Matching: Match the appropriate person to the right description.

    _____ Infanticide/Exposure

    _____ Education through monasteries

    _____ Introduction of child-size materials

    _____ Education of girls as well as boys

    _____ Introduction of the idea of children as "blank slates"

    A. Ancient World
    B. Early Christian Era
    C. Middle Ages
    D. Renaissance
    E. Age of Enlightenment

2. Children may never recognize some of the most important influences in their lives.
    A. True
    B. False

3. Part of our responsibility is to build bridges between children and culture.
    A. True
    B. False

4. Since culture is always changing, we can never anticipate what children need most.
    A. True
    B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. How have the different historical eras shaped our understanding of children—both positively and negatively? Should we retain or retrieve certain emphases from history for today?

2. Just how much is our current view of children and their families conditioned by historical assumptions?

3. When we look at the number of both direct and indirect influences on children, can our church play a strategic role in helping children in specific areas of influence?

4. How do we both prepare to address current cultural influences yet also stay focused on basic ministry practices so we balance both ongoing and strategic ministry needs?

Review your answers with your mentor, then respond to the following:

How many responses focus on supporting children (particularly in areas where they are not yet fully self-reliant), and how many answers focus on empowering children?

Which of these answers support the goal of living Christlike relationships? Why?

What do we need to add to our list to make our approach more comprehensive, more faithful? Which do we need to incorporate into the role of the children's leader as one who both supports and empowers Christlike relationships with children?