
Forward

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a special mission to preach the good news of salvation to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. (Rev. 14:6). In reaching people from various backgrounds, we are reminded that “lessons must be given in the language of humanity” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 34). Implementing our mission, then, involves reaching out to people where they are and communicating the gospel to them in a way to which they can relate.

In view of this, the General Conference Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department has initiated the development of the Reaching & Winning Series, one of which is Reaching and Winning Children by Donna J. Habenicht.

Dr. Habenicht is a recognized authority on reaching and winning children.

We pray that this material will be useful in understanding this important group and will be instrumental in bringing many children into the heavenly kingdom.

May the Lord continue to bless all who use this valuable training instrument for the glory of His name.

In His service

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What This Course Is All About

Children are a Gift of God

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The objective of this course is to train pastors and church members in ways of sharing the love of God and the Gospel message of salvation with children.

COURSE LENGTH

This course is designed to be taught in seven classes. Each class is planned to be between one and a half and two hours in length, including the small group discussions.

COURSE CONTENTS

Class No. 1	Importance of Children
Class No. 2	Childhood Today
Class No. 3	Understanding Children
Class No. 4	Connecting with Children
Class No. 5	Meeting God the King of the Universe
Class No. 6	Jesus and Salvation for Children
Class No. 7	Evangelistic Meetings for Children

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

This course can be studied individually as well as in a class with a group of other people. The group activities are a very important part of the material to be learned. If you are studying individually, write your own thoughtful responses to the questions addressed in the group activities.

READING REQUIREMENTS

Read one of the following reading assignments and write a summary of what you learned about reaching and winning children:

1. *What We Believe: Seventh-day Adventists Believe for Kids*. Jerry D. Thomas. Pacific Publishing Association, 2006.
2. *God Loves Me 28 Ways*. Charles Mills and Linda Koh, General Conference Children's Ministry Department. Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2008.
3. *Desire of Ages*. Ellen G. White. Chapter 56.
4. *Child Guidance*. Ellen G. White. Chapters 73-79.



Class 1 _____

The Importance of _____ Children

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is the best time to reach and win a person for God because children are more open to God than adults. They are natural believers. Children are creative, intuitive, and open to a spiritual experience initiated by the Holy Spirit's call.

Childhood leads the way to adulthood. A child led to Christ can never totally forget Him. Today, in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, nothing can be more important than leading children to Christ.

They are not rational like adults. While they will not demand a proof-text approach to God, children do need a firm base for their spirituality. This base needs to provide a foundation on which they can build for the rest of their lives.

WHAT THIS CLASS IS ALL ABOUT

In this Class we will focus on the following:

- ◆ The importance of reaching and winning children.
- ◆ Children in the Old and New Testaments.
- ◆ The characteristics of children that make them open to the Gospel message and a relationship with God.
- ◆ The rewards of reaching and winning children.
- ◆ How post postmodern 21st century children and their families are different from previous generations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CLASS

When you finish this class, you should be able to:

- ◆ Articulate in writing or verbally the importance of reaching and winning children.
- ◆ Articulate in writing or verbally the characteristics of children that make them open to the Gospel.
- ◆ Know and be able to summarize postmodern environment of children.

CHILDHOOD COUNTS

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COMMON IDEAS

Despite the advantages God has given during childhood, many adults think it's not important to try to reach and win children. Have you ever heard someone say: "They're too young to understand." "They're too young to be baptized, so why bother." "Children are too noisy. How can we hear when they make so much noise?" "Children's programs are too expensive." "When they're older - adults or maybe seventeen or eighteen or nineteen."

JUST THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE

According to Barna's 21st century research, a person's spiritual identity doesn't change very much after age thirteen.¹ The childhood years are the most important time in life for developing a spiritual identity. Therefore, nothing can be more important than reaching and winning children.

JESUS' VIEWS ABOUT CHILDREN

Jesus made this very clear when He used a child as an object lesson for His disciples. In answer to their question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus called a little child to the middle of the group and placed His arms around the child. Then He told His disciples, "unless you are converted and become as little children [childlike, humble, innocent, weak, dependent], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . whoever humbles himself as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4 NKJV).



¹George Barna, *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions*, p. 34.

**CHILDREN
IN THE OLD
AND NEW
TESTAMENTS**

Jesus went on to make a powerful statement about the importance of children in His eyes: “Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me” (Mt 18:5 NKJV¹). Jesus identified Himself with children. What we do to or for children.

Probably the disciples were astonished. What did Jesus mean? They wanted to be important people in much importance? In Bible times children had no rights and were many times treated unjustly or even cruelly, especially if they were fatherless.²

Jesus backed up His statements about children with one of His famous stories: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one wanders away, won’t he leave the ninety-nine sheep who are safely in the corral and go looking for the one lost sheep? If he finds the lost sheep, he is happier about that one sheep than all the others in his corral that did not wander away” (paraphrase of verses 12 and 13).

Then Jesus ended His lesson for the disciples with a clincher summary statement: “In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matthew 18:14 NIV)⁴.

Make no mistake. The salvation of children is very important to Jesus the Son, God the Father and the Holy Spirit. How can it be less important to us?

In Old and New Testament times children were generally ignored and not given much importance in the common everyday life or religious life of the people. They were generally placed in the same category as the poor, the blind, the infirm, and the outcasts of society, especially if they were fatherless.

To survive childhood and become an adult was a significant achievement in a society where there were many physical impediments to reaching maturity. Many children died before age five.

Despite those prevailing attitudes toward children, the Bible includes many references to children, childhood, and the responsibilities of adults toward children.

¹Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. *Andrews Study Bible*, ©2010 by the Andrews University Press.

² *Andrews Study Bible*, notes on Matthew 18:3.

BIBLE INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN In the English *New International Version* the words “child”, “children” and “childhood” occur 573 times. “Son” or “sons” - not counting Jesus as the Son of God - occur 2,700 times. Child- and family-related words occur more than 8,000 times. The Bible includes the stories of dozens of children. God’s concern for His people is often described as a parent-child relationship and the child metaphor appears frequently.