

1.2 Why is it important to teach the children?

Note to the trainer: Before teaching this section, spend some time letting the area leaders discuss attitudes toward children, ways of treating children, and blockages to teaching children in the area. This will help them to see the contrast between what God’s Word says and what their current practices are.

Here are some suggested questions to help get you started:

- How do people feel about children in this society?
- Can you give some examples that show this?
- How do parents feel about children? Older adults? Pastors? Leaders?
- How are children treated at home?
How are they spoken to? How are they treated when they misbehave?
What do they do with other family members? What are they excluded from?
What chores do they have? What fun things do they do at home?
What is mealtime like? Homework time? Bedtime?
- What stops parents from teaching their children? What stops the church?

Many times we think that those who are really important, “big” people are those who hold titles of respect. We think they are those who have positions of great authority within the church. We may think of those who teach adults as being very important people. When we consider greatness, many times we think of things like good pay, respect, power and appearance. Wouldn’t you agree that this is true?

Teaching adults is a very important work, it is true, but we should also understand the vital importance of teaching children. We should understand that those who teach children faithfully and well are equally great in God’s eyes as those who teach adults.

I believe there are at least eight very good reasons why we should actively be teaching the children in our homes and neighborhoods, our villages and our churches. Here is the first reason we should teach our children God’s Word:

1. GOD’S HEART REACHES OUT TO CHILDREN. CHILDREN ARE IMPORTANT AND OF GREAT VALUE TO GOD.

We know that children are important and of great value to God, because Jesus Christ gave His time to blessing them. Read Matthew 19:13-15. What did the people want Jesus to do for their children?

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Think about this: They wanted Jesus to bless their children and pray for them. The disciples felt that children were not very important. How do we know this is how they felt?

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Think about this: Their thoughts and feelings are reflected in their actions. They scolded those who wanted to bring their children to Jesus. Maybe they thought that Jesus had such big, important work to do that He could not be bothered with them. But if so, Jesus did not agree with their ideas. The disciples scolded the parents who were bringing their children to Jesus, but when Jesus saw it, HE in turn scolded THEM! He saw that the thoughts of their hearts were evil. What two things did Jesus say about children in Matthew 19:14?

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Think about this: First, Jesus commanded them to allow the children to come to Him. Second, they must quit stopping them or hindering them or standing in their way from coming to Jesus. After Jesus said this, He laid His hands on them and blessed them. Jesus gave freely of his time to the children. Even though He had much important work to do teaching adults, He gave of His time and energy to the children because He understood their importance. He gave His disciples this example, and He directly commanded them to follow His example. Think about your own attitude towards children. Does your attitude match what Jesus wanted and taught? Write here what you feel needs to change in your attitude and actions toward children:

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Now pray for God’s help to change these attitudes and actions. Write your prayer here:

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2. CHILDREN ARE SINNERS, SO THEY NEED TO BE SAVED.

Many times we think of children as being free from sin. We think that God must take all children to heaven. Is it true that children are free from sin, and all going to heaven? Think about this: Have you seen a child who did something wrong, knowing and understanding that it was wrong? Yes, I think we’ve all seen that. I’m thinking right now about an experience we had with our first child. She was only five years old at the time. When we saw what she had done, we called her to answer for her actions. But before we could even begin to ask her a question, she ran away. She hid herself under her bed. Why do you think she ran away?

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Think about this: She ran away because she understood very well that she had done wrong. That's why she was afraid. Yet, she was only a child five years old!

Many times, children understand that they are doing wrong, but they themselves choose the wrong way. I cannot say at what age children begin to understand right and wrong and to choose the wrong way with understanding. It is different for every person. A smart child who has received good teaching may understand right from wrong at the age of 4 or 5. Some children may even understand earlier than that. Others, who are slower learners, or have not received good teaching, might be 7 or 8 before they begin to understand right from wrong. Some children are mentally handicapped. They will never understand right from wrong, even though they become adults. There's no way anyone can say at what age a child becomes responsible before God, but God Himself knows what age this is for every person.

When a child has come to the age or the level of understanding to know the difference between right and wrong, that child is then responsible before God and to God. If he understands that something is wrong, but he chooses to do it anyway, he has sinned in God's sight, and God holds him accountable for his sin, even though he is young. Read Romans 3:23. How many people have sinned? What does this have to do with children?

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Think about this: All sinned—everyone. Children are surely included in this "all". Children also have sinned. Read Romans 6:23. Our sin has brought us what?

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Think about this: Our sin has brought us spiritual death. Since children also have sinned, they also have this problem of spiritual death. If children have chosen to do wrong, and they have understood that what they have chosen is wrong, they have sinned, and they need to be saved, just like adults. Read Matthew 18:14. Jesus said, "Your Father in heaven does not desire that even one little child amongst these perish." How do we know that it is possible for children to perish?

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Think about this: Since God says He does not want one little child to perish, this shows that IT IS POSSIBLE for one to perish. It is possible. They can perish, but God does not desire it to happen. Read Matthew 18:10-13. Before Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep, what was Jesus talking about?

Answer: He was talking about children. The lost sheep in the parable referred to a CHILD. As soon as a child grows a bit, he begins quickly to fall into sin, because he has a sinful heart, just as adults do. If a child has begun to choose to do what he knows is wrong, he has become accountable before God.

Our own actions show the truth of this, as do the actions of our children. If a three-day old baby cries, we do not spank him. We do not punish him, because he does not know what he is doing. He doesn't understand good from evil. But if a three-year old child cries for no reason, it might be possible for his parents to punish him. If an eight-year old child keeps on crying, we might very likely punish him, because we know he is just crying to try to get his own way. God is just. Children who don't know anything, we'll just leave those children in God's hands. But we must understand that many times, children do understand what they are doing. They know very well they are sinning, but they want their own way, and they do it.

What do you think? If such a child dies, where will he go? There's no way he can go to heaven if he has sinned. The Bible says that there are only two places someone can go after they die. There is heaven, where God lives. There is hell, the lake of fire, where Satan will live someday forever. If a child has willingly and knowingly chosen sin, he needs the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ. If he does not receive Jesus into his heart and life, there is no way he can go to heaven.

3. CHILDREN CAN BE SAVED. THEY WILL COME QUICKLY TO JESUS CHRIST IF WE WILL TEACH THEM.

Have you ever seen wet cement? Before it dries, it is easy to change its shape. Children are like wet cement. They can be changed easily. If we teach them Bible truths, we can easily lead them to Jesus Christ. They are sinners, it's true, but they have not yet become hardened in the ways of sin. Their life patterns have not yet formed fully. They do not have MANY MANY sins they must overcome. They understand quickly their need of Jesus as their Savior. In the Old Testament, the book of Ecclesiastes 12:1 said it this way: "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come that will bring you no pleasure."

After children have grown up, after they have become adults, evil days will come. Then many bad, sinful habits will have taken deep root in their lives. Then their hearts will not be so quick to come to Jesus. Adults are more like hardened cement. It is not easy to draw people to Jesus in adulthood.

Some people have done surveys to find out amongst all believers, how many came to Jesus first in childhood and how many in adulthood. They asked many, many people this question: "When did you first trust in Jesus as your Savior?" The answers people gave show that most Christians by far came to Jesus in childhood or youth. The older the adults, the fewer of them came to Jesus.

Some people doubt the sincerity of a child’s faith. They think that a child’s faith is not as good or as strong or as real as that of an adult. Therefore they see little need to teach children the Word of God and to lead them to Christ.

Did Jesus doubt the faith of children? Read Matthew 18:6. What do you think?

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Think about this: Jesus never doubted the faith of children. He said, “amongst these little ones WHO BELIEVE IN ME...” Children can believe in Jesus. Jesus Himself said so!

Read Matthew 18:1-3. Jesus did not say that children must become like adults in their faith, but what instead?

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Answer: Jesus never said that children must change to become like adults, but that adults must change to become like children. Read Mark 10:15. What is real faith that is accepted by God like?

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Think about this: Jesus said that true faith is like that of a child. Children’s faith is strong, true faith—faith that God Himself approves. Let’s teach children the Word of God, because if we teach them well, they will be quick to put their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior.

4. CHILDREN CAN SERVE JESUS IN THEIR CHILDHOOD, AND ALL THROUGH THEIR LIVES.

A fourth reason that we should teach the children is this: If children receive Jesus Christ during childhood, they can then begin to serve Jesus while still children, and continue to serve him for the rest of their lives.

It is not only adults who can serve the church. It is not only adults who can lead others to Jesus. It is not only adults who can pray and receive answers to their prayers. It is not only adults who can honor Jesus in the way they live their daily lives. Believers of every age can do these things. Children also can serve Jesus, even in their childhood!

Do you remember some children in the Bible who helped the church? Read Acts 12. You will find a story about a girl named Rhoda. She prayed for the Apostle Peter along with the adults. I think it must have been the faith of Rhoda that got Peter out of prison, because none of the adults believed it when God answered their prayers. Only the girl Rhoda believed it. The prayers and the faith of this little girl helped the church. If Peter had died in prison, we would not have the books of 1 and 2 Peter in our Bibles today. These books, in one sense, are a gift that this girl

Rhoda gave the church. Truly, this little girl saved the Apostle Peter’s life through her prayers and her faith.

Can you think of one way children can help the church today?

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Think about this: Children can help the church by their prayers, because they have strong faith. In Acts 23, you can see again the way a young boy saved the life of the Apostle Paul. We would not have the 12 or 13 books written by the Apostle Paul had this boy not served the church. What did this boy do?

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Answer: This boy told the authorities that some people had plotted to kill Paul. His courage to speak up to his elders saved Paul’s life.

When Andrew came to Jesus, the next thing he did was to bring his older brother Simon Peter to Jesus (see John 1:41). I have seen that many times, after a child has received Jesus, when his family sees the great change that takes place in their child, they also want to receive the Lord. A child can lead his entire family to Jesus Christ. Do you know a family that came to Jesus because their child first received the Lord? Who?

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Whose name did you write? Many times children have led their families to Jesus. In the United States, a little girl begged her father to come to Sunday school with her. The father was not a believer. He was not interested in the things of God. He promised his daughter that he would come only because she kept begging him, but he said he would not really come into the church. He would only put one foot inside the door. When he came to the church, the little girl pulled hard on her father’s arm, and pulled him into the church. He stayed, and he heard the Gospel. He received Jesus as his Savior. After that, the father loved to come to church. He traveled far to help many villages start Sunday schools. He himself began 1300 Sunday schools in the United States, when it was just a new, undeveloped country. He led thousands to Jesus. Look at the way that young daughter served the church! What is another way children can serve the church?

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Children can give their entire lives to God, and only they can do this. Adults no longer have their entire lives before them. They have already used up part of their lives. Consider Romans 12:1. The Apostle Paul begged believers to give themselves to God. But think about this: If someone comes to the Lord at the age of 60, how many years of love and service can he give to God? Even if he comes to the Lord at the age of 30, he still has thrown away many years in sin. God wants all believers to give themselves to Him, it is true, but **ONLY CHILDREN** have an entire lifetime to give Him. Everyone can give God some of their lives—whatever they may have

left—but only children can give their whole lives to Him. Who can give God the greater gift, then, an adult of maybe 40 years old, or a child of 8? What do you think?

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Answer: I think the child can give God the greater gift, because he can give his whole life. He can serve God now in his childhood, and also later in adulthood.

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Have you seen a child here in Africa who served Jesus and His church effectively? Who and what did you observe?

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If you have not yet observed this, keep your eyes open. I think you will soon notice many children serving God effectively. However, if we do not see much of this, it probably indicates that we have not been teaching them the Word of God. We must begin to teach them and lead them to Jesus. Then they will gain confidence and begin to serve Jesus.

5. CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE—THE CHURCH, THE STATE, AND THE PARENTS OF TOMMORROW.

They are children today, but they will not remain children for long. Before long, they will become teenagers, then adults and leaders of our churches and communities. They will become parents. They will become the future leaders of our governments. Every person who will be a leader in 20 or 30 years is a child today. Today you and other children’s teachers have the opportunity to teach him and lead him in the right way, so that later on he will become a good citizen and maybe even a good leader. You may be teaching a future pastor, church leader, village chief, or head of a family. Think about those who are leading the church and the nation today. Write their names here :

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You have written the names of present leaders. It is evident that all these people were once children. Who will be the future leaders of your church and nation ? We don’t know, but we know that they are children right now, or they are yet unborn and will be children in future years. If the church teaches all the children the Word of God, it will also be teaching and preparing the leaders of the future.

If we do not teach children the Word of God, then we must understand that when we adults die, Christianity will die with us. Faith in Jesus will no longer remain on the earth. Children will now longer confess Jesus as their Lord. How can we be assured that in the future, people will keep on following the Lord ? Only if we teach our children God’s Word today !

You know a little of the history of your country. Do you know of some villages that were once strong in God’s Word, but are no longer so? Write your observations here:

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Think about this: If some villages were once strong in faith, but today are no longer so, in all probability the parents and the leaders of the church did not do an adequate job of teaching their children the Word of God. This happened to the Jewish people, too. Joshua was a strong and good leader. Read Joshua 24:24. Under his leadership, what promise did the people make to God?

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Answer: They promised to follow God, and they did so all the days of Joshua’s life. The elders also followed God throughout their lives. But then a very sad thing happened! They had not led their children in the ways of God. Read what happened in Judges 2:12-13. After they died, their children strayed from God’s way and made and served idols. God was very angry because of the evil they had done, so He cursed their land. O what a sad thing, and all because they did not lead their children in the ways of God!

After 20 years, what will the leaders of the church be like? After 30 years? After 50? The welfare of the church in the future is largely in our hands today. We are the ones who are able to teach the children who will become the leaders of the church someday. We know that if someone has not been born of God’s Spirit, he cannot understand spiritual truths. Even though he may attend worship services right beside believers, even though he might talk like a believer, even though he may have gone through some outward ceremonies like baptism or taking communion, if he has not been born of God’s Spirit, he will not seek spiritual things. He will not understand spiritual things, and he will not desire them. Read 1 Corinthians 2:14. What does it say about the person who does not have the Spirit of God?

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Answer: This verse tells us that the person who does not have the Spirit of God cannot receive or welcome spiritual things. He cannot understand spiritual things, because these things come from God, but he does not have God’s Spirit within him. He thinks the things of God are foolish. How can he understand their importance?

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Think about this: We can understand the importance of spiritual matters only through the Spirit. That’s why we need God’s Spirit. If we do not lead our children to Jesus, they will not have God’s Spirit. Maybe they will learn to talk like Christians, but they will not really be Christians. Maybe they will come to church. Maybe they will seem to be Christians. They might sing in a choir. They might get baptized and join the church. Will these things make them true believers?

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Answer: No way. They will be true believers only if they repent of their sins and place their trust in Jesus Christ. Without that, all these other things cannot please God. Read Romans 8:9. How does one receive the Spirit of God?

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Answer: God gives His Spirit whenever someone repents of sin and trusts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. All believers have God’s Spirit, but not one single other person does. Children also can understand spiritual truths only if they put their trust in Jesus. If later on they become leaders and elders in the church, yet they never knew Jesus in their hearts, they can only follow their natural desires. As church leaders their thoughts and desires will center on their own advancement and well-being. Lies, jealousy, fighting, pride—all these will grow freely in the church. What can we do to assure that it does not happen like that?

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Think about this: I think we can help keep this from happening by teaching our children the Word of God, and leading them to put their trust in Jesus. That way, they will become Christians not only in profession, but in heart. I am not worried only about them appearing to be Christians, but really being counted by God Himself as being true believers. If we teach our children God’s Word and lead them to Jesus, they will follow the things of the Spirit. They will understand the teaching of the Bible, so they will become better leaders someday. They will lead the church aright. Read Romans 10:14. Before children can worship God, what must they do first?

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Answer: First, before anyone can worship God, they must trust in Him. Romans 10:14 asks, “How shall they call on Him, in whom they have not believed?” Before children can believe in Jesus, what must we leaders do?

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Answer: We must teach and preach the Word of God so that the children can hear and understand it. If we want people to put their trust in Jesus, we must first teach them God’s Word. If we want the leaders of the future to know Jesus, we must teach them now. If we want the leaders of the future to follow spiritual truths, we must teach them those truths from God’s Word now, while they can still come easily to Jesus.

6. GOD HAS COMMANDED US TO TEACH OUR CHILDREN. We should obey His command.

Ever since Old Testament times, God has shown His people that they must teach their children. Read Deuteronomy 6:2,6, and 7, and verses 20-25. Think especially about verse 7. God told us



1.2 Why is it important to teach the children?

that we should BE DILIGENT to teach our children, and that we must be at the task ALL THE TIME, taking advantage of every opportunity He gives us. Do these verses teach that we should be teaching our children just a little? Just if we feel like it? How do you understand these verses?

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Answer: God has commanded us that we must be diligent all the time about teaching our children. In the morning, at noon, and at night—all the time—we must work hard at teaching them. If there were no other reason at all to teach our children, surely God’s commandment would be sufficient reason. God has told us or commanded us to teach them! We call God our “Lord,” so we ought to be willing to obey His commands.

7. THE EARLY CHURCH SET THE EXAMPLE FOR US IN LEADING THEIR CHILDREN TO JESUS.

Read Ephesians 6:4. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to believers in the town of Ephesus. What did Paul say parents should teach their children?

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Answer: Paul said they should teach them about how to live as Christians. What does “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” mean?

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Think about this: The nurture of the Lord means how to live as believers. It is showing believers what they should do to please God and what sins they should avoid. The Apostle Paul here is telling parents to train their children as believers. This takes for granted that the children must already have become believers in Christ. Think about 1 Corinthians 2:14. If the children had not received Jesus, how could they understand this teaching?

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Answer: They can understand spiritual things only if they are believers. Those who do not have God’s Spirit cannot understand spiritual teaching. They think of it as foolishness. Paul is teaching parents to teach their children in the things of the Lord. Therefore, Paul assumes the children can understand this spiritual teaching. He is clearly inferring that they must be believers already. Someone had already led these children to Jesus. Probably it was these very parents who had led their own children to Jesus.

These children must have already been believers. Therefore, Paul told their parents to teach them the things of God, so they may understand how to bring God pleasure. Many children in the church were already believers. Read Ephesians 6:1. Is Paul talking to children within the church or outside of it?

1.2 Why is it important to teach the children?

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Answer: He is saying that these children were inside the church, that they were already believers. Now read Ephesians 1:1. Notice that Paul is writing the book of Ephesians to people who were believers. He addresses them as saints or holy people of God.

Read Titus 1:6. If the church wanted to choose an elder, they looked at his children. What must his children be like?

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Answer: The children of an elder must first of all be believers. Second, they must be polite and obedient. If Paul can give a rule such as this to the churches, it shows that many of the believers were leading and had led their children to Jesus. The early church gave us a good example in this matter. We should lead our children to Jesus, too, just like they did!

8. GOD REWARDS THOSE WHO LEAD CHILDREN WELL, BUT PUNISHES THOSE WHO LEAD THEM AWAY FROM GOD .

Read Luke 9:46-48. Jesus said that if we welcome a little child in His name, it is just as if we had welcomed Jesus Himself. Jesus wanted us to understand that children are very important. Jesus compared the importance of little children to His own importance! When we welcome one little child in Sunday school, Jesus says it is as if we had received Himself, because when we receive a child in this way, we are doing it for love of Him.

Jesus’ disciples were discussing this question, “Who is the greatest?” Jesus answered like this: the one who is greatest is the one who serves even little children. God has promised a great reward to those who teach children, but also a great punishment to those who lead children astray. Read Matthew 10:42. To whom does God promise a reward in this verse?

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Answer: He promises a reward to all who give even a simple cup of cold water to a disciple who is considered the least important. A cup of cold water is a very small thing that hardly anybody would consider important. Maybe you teach children, and others think your work is not very important. They take it as a very little thing. But think about this! God considers it a very great and important work. You are offering the children not just a cup of cold water for their physical thirst, but water of life, water of the Spirit. What is more important—the evaluation people make about your work, or God’s evaluation of it?

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Think about this: God’s evaluation is TREMENDOUSLY important, but what people think is of little real consequence.

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1.2 Why is it important to teach the children?

What is the reward God will give us who serve Jesus? I can easily see three kinds of rewards in the Bible. The first kind of reward I see is the crown that God will give us. The Bible says that believers can receive crowns for the way they have served Jesus. Consider 1 Corinthians 9:25, 1 Peter 5:4, and Revelation 2:10. What crowns do you read about?

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What will we do with these crowns? Will God give them to us so we can be honored ourselves? Oh, no! The Bible says that we all cast our crowns at Jesus’ feet. See Revelation 4:10. Why do you think we will do that?

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I think we will throw our crowns at His feet because we will love Him so much, and so want to honor Him for saving us. But I said that I see three kinds of rewards in the Bible. One kind is the crowns Jesus will give us, the crowns we will throw down before His feet to honor Him. Another kind of reward is the converts themselves that we have led to Jesus. The Apostle Paul told those he had led to Jesus that they will be like a “crown of rejoicing” to him (Philippians 4:1). They themselves were his reward! When you come to heaven, and you see there those that you have led to Jesus, won’t that give you great happiness?

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I believe that must make any believer joyful. Maybe someone will come up to you in heaven and say something like this: “Dear friend, thank you. I was traveling on the way to death, but today I am here in heaven because you led me to Jesus.” If someone told you they were there in heaven because of your teaching, wouldn’t that be a wonderful reward?

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For me, I think that would be a delightful reward. So then, one reward is crowns to lay at Jesus’ feet, and another is the joy of meeting in heaven those whose lives have been changed through your ministry. Another reward will be hearing Jesus Himself say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” When we hear that, it won’t matter any more whether or not anyone else thought our work was important. The important thing then will be knowing that Jesus approved of it. What a great reward it will be to hear Jesus say, “Well done.” How happy we will be to hear Him call us His “good and faithful servants”! Don’t you think that Jesus’ approval would be the ultimate reward you could receive for your teaching?

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LET’S REVIEW

Finish each phrase to review the importance of children:



1.2 Why is it important to teach the children?

It is important to teach children:

1. Because they.....
2. Because they.....
3. Because they.....
4. Because they.....
5. Because they.....
6. Because God.....
7. Because the early church.....
8. Because God will give.....

LET’S PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

I have discussed several reasons why it is important to teach children the Word of God. Now I want to ask you, Will you commit yourself to teach children? Will you begin at least by teaching your own children and those of your nearby relatives and neighbors? If the church recognizes that God has given you the gift of teaching children in the church, will you agree also to become a Sunday school teacher? Think carefully, because you will not be promising me, but God.

WRITE OUT YOUR SPECIFIC PROMISE TO GOD IN REGARD TO TEACHING CHILDREN:

I promise God that:

