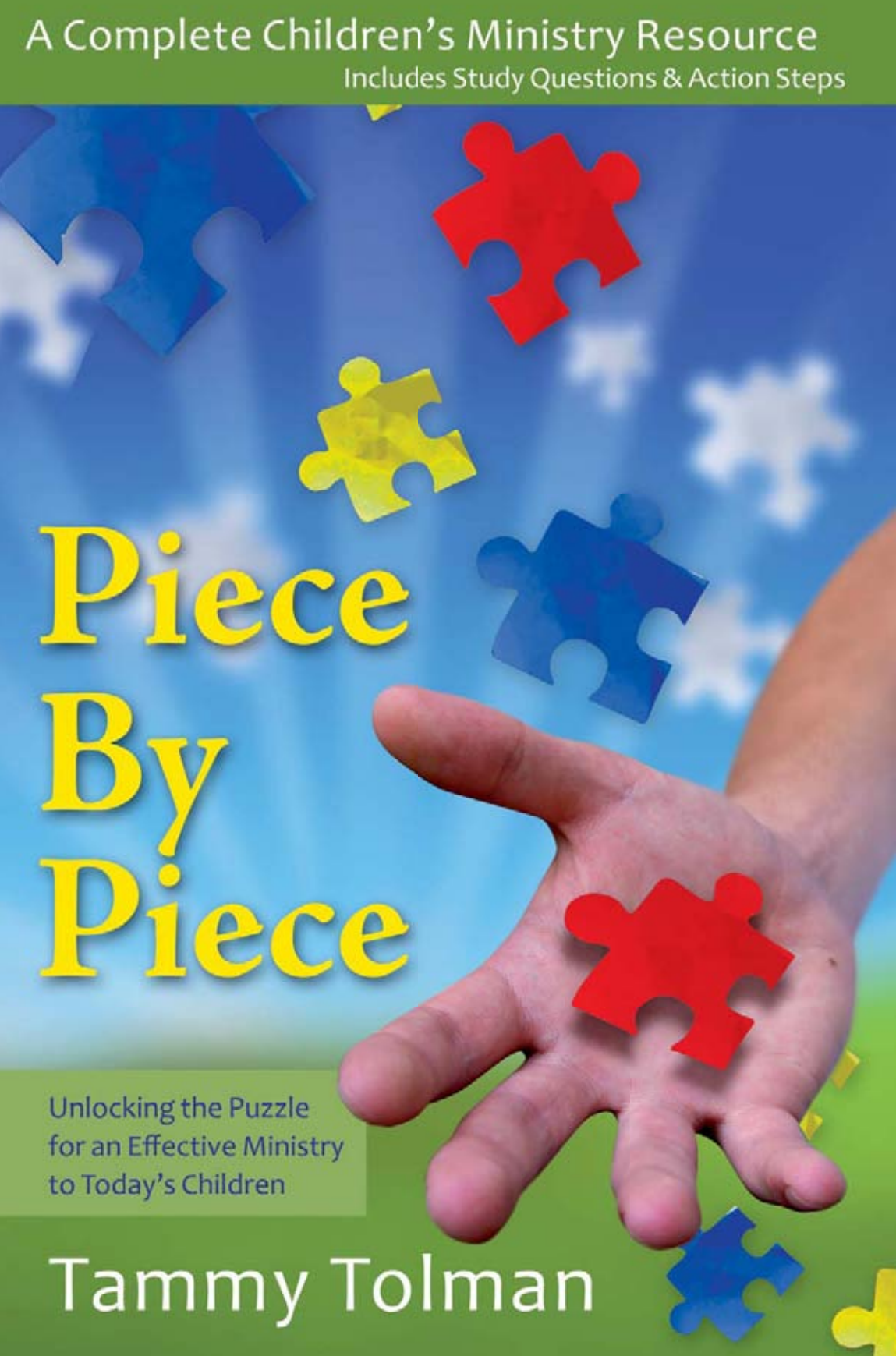


A Complete Children's Ministry Resource
Includes Study Questions & Action Steps



Piece By Piece

Unlocking the Puzzle
for an Effective Ministry
to Today's Children

Tammy Tolman

Piece by Piece:

Key Pieces for effective ministry to children today

Tammy Tolman



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Introduction

When my son was 4-years old, I watched him try to do a puzzle. He was putting pieces every which way in odd spaces. Of course, they didn't fit, and as I felt his frustration, the teacher in me stepped in and began guiding him about how to put a puzzle together. Thankfully, he is a compliant child and was open to my leading. As I verbalized the process to him, I saw the sheer joy and satisfaction on his face when he was able to complete the puzzle and see the picture in its finished form.

There are many similarities between ministry and doing a puzzle. I see so many people struggle in ministry, placing people and programs in a free spot and hoping that it all comes together. Yet with a simple process, ministry can be so much more effective.

Sam and I began by sorting out the pieces. We looked at each piece and saw that there are three kinds of puzzle pieces. There are the edges, the corners and the middle pieces. Then by looking at the guide picture we began by placing the corner pieces, then putting together the edge pieces and then finally the middle pieces. With the guide picture always as a point of reference, while putting together the puzzle was always a challenge, it was a positive experience for my son.

As we piece together the vital aspects we need to effectively minister to our children in the 21st century, it is my prayer that you, too, will



Are you puzzled?

Our children are just as puzzled as we are about life

After speaking at a conference dealing with 'Children in Worship', a member of the audience came to me in tears. She said she had been working with kids for fifteen years and had never considered they could actually worship God. My first thought was, "Well, what have you been doing with them all this time?" This woman explained that all the examples I had just given them regarding what *not* to do – making children sit down, be still, and sing songs that just get the wriggles out – was what she thought it was all about! I am continually amazed at what leaders in children's ministry think their purpose is.

A farmer told this story about how cows end up on the road lost:

A cow is nibbling on a tuft of grass in the middle of a field, moving from one tuft to the next, and before you know it he ends up at grass next to the fence. Noticing a nice clump of green on the other side of the fence, the cow stumbles through an old tear in the fence and finds himself outside on the road. "Cows don't intend to get lost," the farmer explained, "they just nibble their way to lostness!"

The farmer didn't know it, but he was talking about more than cows. None of us intends to wander from the green pasture of God's Voice!

¹ Michael Yaconelli, *Dangerous Wonder: The Adventure of Childlike Faith*, NavPress Publishing Group, 1999, pp. 14-15

So many leaders and teachers are puzzled. We 'nibble our way to lostness' doing the same old things we have always done and find ourselves puzzled by today's child. We are puzzled because the kids won't listen to us anymore. We are puzzled because kids just aren't interested in the Ten Commandments, much less knowing what the Old Testament is. We are puzzled because kids only seem to answer questions with a shrug and an "I dunno". We are puzzled because kids would rather stay home and play their PlayStation than go to a church program. Children's leaders are puzzled because when faced with a problem, kids would rather turn to the Internet for answers than ask anyone who might actually know. Mostly, we are puzzled because we feel lost in the world that our kids live in daily. The truth is, we are not just in a changing world, we are in a whole new world.


I remember the Christmas my parents gave me a DVD player. Now let me put this into context. I love movies; they are my escape from reality. I love to put movies on and watch them at home since there is rarely anything on TV worth watching. Needless to say, I had a wonderful and considerable collection of videos that I had been buying for a number of years. I had become quite proud of my collection and had accumulated nearly all of my favorite movies.

I ought to have seen it as an incredibly thoughtful and generous gift when my parents gave my husband David and I a DVD player, especially since at the time they were quite expensive and certainly not something we were able to buy. Yet as we opened it, what do you think was going on inside my head? "But I don't need a DVD player! I am happy with my video player and I have all my favorite videos... You mean I have to start recollecting? That's crazy, especially now that videos are getting cheaper! (They were being superseded by DVDs...)"

David was excited about it and declared it an awesome present, as he firmly believed at the time that the quality of DVDs was so much better than video. Meanwhile, I was trying to hide my disappointment. I didn't want to transition into a whole new world; I was comfortable with the old one.

You see, our kids are in a whole new world. It is not simply a matter of changing – of improving what we already have. It requires a complete transition of thoughts and processes. Even as I write this, I am aware that before long DVD players, too, will be on the way out as they introduce the next best way to watch movies. For many church leaders, there will need to be a radical change of methods and style if we are going to really connect with the kids of today.

One of my favorite authors, Leonard Sweet, would say that we are like aliens in this whole new world. As a parent, I am amazed at how consuming it is to keep up with the language and information that our kids are being immersed in. It is not just a matter of *talking about change* any more; we need to *be in transition*. Just as I had to be prepared to transition to a DVD player



***...we are like
aliens in this
whole new
world***

and leave my videos behind, we must be willing to transition to the new world if we are going to prevent ourselves from becoming aliens who can no longer communicate to our kids.

Today, our kids live in the world of virtual reality, surfing the net, yogurt sites, SMS, emoticons, advergaming, cybersquatting, and YouTube. If these are all foreign words to you, you need to spend a brief amount of time on the Internet with a 10-year-old and let them open up a whole new world for you.

We live in an information age with which we can't keep up. One out of six teens told the Barna Research Group in 1998 that they expect to use the Internet as a substitute for their church-based religious experience.²

Futurists say that 95% of the jobs today's high school students will hold in their lifetime have not even been invented yet. Here are some of the job titles of the future, according to Danish futurist Rolf Jensen:

² Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsumani: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1999, p. 420

- Director of Mind and Mood
- Chief Imagination Officer
- Creatologist
- Intangible Asset Appraiser
- Director of Intellectual Capital
- Visualiser
- Assistant Storyteller
- Chief Enactor
- Court Jester³

As a children's worker it is important to me that I stay 'at the cutting edge' of what is going on. I am continually amazed at the journey this has taken me on. I can be feeling young in my mind when in an instant my son unintentionally makes me feel like an alien.

I went on an excursion with my son as a parent helper. We were going to an historic house that was set up to show the children what it was like to live in the past. I showed Sam and two other boys around and helped them answer their worksheets. We came to a big box, and as I opened the lid I realized it was a record player. I began to explain to the boys what it did and how it worked and said that I'd had one when I was little. Sam looked at me, his eyes round with amazement, and said, "Wow, Mum! You're from the olden days!" The boys looked at each other and giggled, and right then and there I felt so old! It doesn't take much to realize that the reason we might feel so puzzled is that we are in a *whole new world*.

When was the last time you stepped into the world of a 10-year-old boy or girl? When was the last time you read the latest magazine for kids this age? When was the last time you watched a music video show? If the answer is longer than 6 months, then no wonder you are puzzled!

³ Leonard Sweet, *SoulSalsa: 17 Surprising Steps for Godly Living in the 21st Century*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2000, p. 50

Do you know what this is? If so, what does it say?

"Wilufon mewnugt hom?"

No, it is not a dialect from the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* world. (That would be much more complex!) This is called 'kidspeak'. It is the SMS for, "Will you phone me when you get home?". The SMS language is a form of shorthand for the mobile phone that kids use all the time.

I am not suggesting that we even keep up with the intricate worlds our kids live in, but at least staying in touch with the everyday things would be helpful. It is simply a matter of connecting with kids regularly. We need to listen to them, watch them, read and take note of the community around us and the things that influence us all. More importantly it is our responsibility to question and seek answers for why these things are happening. The worst thing we can do is to accept it all and simply go along with it because it is 'in', or to just stay the same and never change the way we do anything.

Mike Yaconelli says: "The critical issue today is dullness. We have lost our astonishment. The Good News is no longer good news, it is okay news."⁴

Our kids see church and Sunday school and think '*dull*'. Not only have they lost their astonishment; I believe we teachers have as well. We are puzzled because the latest curriculum, which we are pinning all our hopes on, is not at all interesting to the kids; and we don't know what to do about it. The influx of curricula and resources is wonderful in so many respects, but not when we feel we do not have the right to question and change or reject stuff that does not relate to our kids. We continue to use the same material and methods because it has worked for twenty years, and yet our children leave bored and conclude that Jesus is *dull*. This leaves us puzzled.

Mike Yaconelli:
***"The Good News
is no longer
good news, it is
okay news."***

⁴ Michael Yaconelli, *Dangerous Wonder: The Adventure of Childlike Faith*, NavPress Publishing Group, 1999, p. 24

Of course Sunday school seems dull compared to the world that Middleton and Walsh describe as "...a cable culture. We can simply switch channels to sample other, easily available worlds."⁵ We cannot compete with this world, and we are not meant to. If anything, we are to be picking up the pieces of the mess that this world leaves behind. It is not real, is not healing, it does not contain the answers this generation is seeking.

Not only are we puzzled, but so are our children. The postmodern world view that says that everything is 'right' and you can do what you want is very frightening for our kids. They are thrown into this world view and it strangles them. As we work through this together, you will discover that there are many issues for this generation that are not very positive. This makes it imperative that we stop being puzzled and begin to offer some answers, wisdom and guidance for this generation. Children will look for answers to their many questions anywhere that someone will speak to them. It's time that God had a stronger voice in this generation through His people.

Let's flesh out a few of these big issues. If we do not understand the picture, we'll never know what to connect with to reach these kids. Let's look at some of the things that puzzle our kids.

OBSESSED WITH THE WAY THEY LOOK

The media and marketing have become the major influence in this area for our kids. The reality is, the only way your children are not going to be influenced by media and marketing in western society is to keep them trapped in a box all their life. Of course this is neither possible nor legal, so we must find better ways to help our kids through it. The fact is, as a Christian parent this is one of the most challenging things I do. At a very young age our children are getting messages from everywhere.

It is important to constantly be counteracting the culture that says you have to wear a certain thing, eat certain things, and do certain things to be 'cool' or acceptable. When I was growing up, the first time

⁵ J Richard Middleton and Brian J Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1995, p. 42

I ever used a hairdryer was in high school. Now 4-year-old boys are using them. When children walk into your ministry, what is the first thing you say? "Hi... You look great today. Hey, cool shoes!" You are trying to be encouraging, but what are you saying in that comment? Sometimes we need to make sure that we are not feeding the lies of 'consumerism'.

When I was just starting in ministry, I went to the USA for a holiday, and it was the time when LA Gear clothing was beginning to be the rage in Australia. When I got to the US, LA Gear shoes were really cheap. Purple is my favorite colour, and there was a great pair of purple LA Gears for just \$19.95 US. I love getting a bargain so I bought them. I will never forget the moment when I got home and went to church on my first week back. Instead of the kids looking me in the eye and saying, "Hey, it's great to have you back. How was your trip?", they looked straight at my feet and said "Hey, LA Gears! They're unreal... they are so cool!" It felt like I spent the next few months explaining to the kids that I got them really cheap in America, because it was so important to me that they didn't think that I would spend \$100.00+ on shoes (which is what they were priced at, at the time).

Now, some of you will be saying, "What's the problem?" To a degree we are all sucked into fashion and having the latest thing. I really struggle with this and believe that as Christian parents/leaders there must be somewhere where we deal with the fact that materialism, consumerism and the obsession with how we look are out of control in our society.

FAMILY BREAKDOWN

I know it seems that, as a society we have been talking about this for so long, but I don't believe we have seen the worst of it yet. I am not just talking about families that actually break down physically. There are many forms of breakdown. I believe that a really big issue for the present is to help parents be parents. They are crying out for guidance, help and support.

Over the years I have run a number of community programs for kids that help them with 'Life Skills'.⁶ When we ran an 8-week course that offered teaching and guidance on issues such as setting boundaries, managing anger, conflict resolution and making friends, families from all sections of the community were virtually busting down the doors to get their kids into the program. We were unashamed about the program teaching Christian values and they didn't care, as long as we helped them. When they dropped their kids off for the afternoon, many of the parents chose to hang around. They started talking to the other parents and soon enough we had a little self-help group going on in the foyer. As a result, we started supplying tea and coffee, food, and a counsellor who could help guide a discussion for the parents. That proved to be a great link for these families into the church.

We cannot minister to children in isolation, because the family is integral to the child's ability to change his or her circumstances.

This highlights a very important point. We cannot minister to children in isolation, because the family is integral to the child's ability to change his or her circumstances. We need to be resourcing and supporting parents as they raise their children.

When you look at their families, some kids just don't seem to have a chance these days. As I was writing this book, I had a scary experience. I was at a pool with my kids. They were playing with some other children in the pool. I saw a young boy about 5, and an older sister, about 7, jump into the pool near my kids. Their father walked up to his kids and said to the older sister "Watch Jordan, you know he can't swim. I'm going to the bar for a drink." I was thinking "You have got to be joking!" So of course I couldn't stop watching his kids.

⁶ "High Five" - www.life4kids.com.au
"Kids With Courage" - www.careforcelifeykeys.org/aus/

Sure enough, five minutes later, I looked to see this little boy going under the water and beginning to drown. I jumped up and yelled to my son, "Sam, the little boy beside you is drowning, grab him and bring him here!" As he did that, the older daughter panicked and jumped onto her brother, causing them both to begin to drown. Sam was now trying to carry them both to me as I waded through the water to grab them. The girl was going under screaming, "Save me!". A number of others watched as I pulled them out of the water and checked to see that they were okay, but there was no sign of their parents.

Once Jordan had recovered, I asked him where his parents were. In response, he ran straight to his mum who was in the spa talking on her cell phone. I walked over to inform her that her son had nearly drowned. She stopped talking on the phone to hear the story, and then proceeded to relate the story to the person on the other end as if it were some kind of funny joke. I left with my heart beating and feeling rather angry at the mother's response. She continued to talk on the phone and it wasn't long before her little boy was back in the water and being saved for the second time by an elderly man. I couldn't believe what I was seeing and couldn't help but think that some kids just don't have a chance of growing up feeling valued and secure.

The family is in great need of support, care, training and prayer. We need to view the picture of children's ministry with the care and support of families being an extremely important piece.

QUESTIONING SEXUALITY

In 2004, I was in America speaking at a conference. The *big* issue in the media was whether it was right to allow gay people to marry. There were talkback shows and news coverage on every channel. At that time there were four states that allowed gay marriage and as a result, gay people were flocking there by the thousands to get married.

I watched one talk show host interview three people, one of whom was a Christian minister. When asked the question, "Do you agree with gay marriages?" he answered, "I don't believe it is a lifestyle that God agrees with, so I don't either." The host's response was simple.

“Well, that’s fine if you don’t agree with it. But what right do you have to tell anybody else how to live?”

As Christians, we are allowed to have our Christian values (although we are often put down for them), but we have no right to set the rules for anyone else. This is a result of the postmodern worldview that ‘truth is relative to the individual’, and our society is paying the price. Kids are questioning their sexuality because they are encouraged to do so. Any view appears to be acceptable, even though the Bible says ‘there is only one truth, and that is God’s truth’. If we don’t teach our children what God says about sexuality, no one will.

OPEN TO SPIRITUAL THINGS

This is a subtle but powerful and scary issue for our kids today. Yes, our kids are very spiritual. In fact this whole generation is very spiritual. Unfortunately that has nothing to do with Jesus and Christianity.

Here is an example. I believe Harry Potter has had a strong influence on changing the rules as to what is spiritually acceptable in our society. In the first movie, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Voldemort says to Harry, “There is no good and evil. There is only power and those too weak to seek it”.⁷ This principle changes everything. Many Christians encourage their children to read these books. I have had many a conversation with parents and children’s workers over these phenomena, and many Christians believe that there is nothing wrong with Harry Potter. After I read the first two books and had seen the first movie, I had seen enough to know that my children do not need to see them. We have talked about the fact that Harry Potter does not get his power from God. He gets it from the Evil One. Even though he may do good things with it, that doesn’t mean he is on the side of God.

This is just the beginning of a generation where the line has been crossed. There is a lot further to go and we will see where these phenomena – a spiritual awakening started by the *Harry Potter* series – will take our society in the next ten years.

⁷ JK Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Warner Brothers, 2001.

The following quote captures what I believe is the current spiritual trend being followed by our kids: "Whereas just a decade ago younger people were saying no to church but yes to Jesus, increasing numbers are now in search of a transcendent spirituality in which Jesus no longer occupies a central place."⁸

Oprah Winfrey talks of 'spiritual things' but they are not Christian. She is one of the most powerful and influential people in television in America and does some amazing things for people. However, there's a subtle undertone to her message that does not necessarily lead people to God, but rather to self or the higher being of your choice. She uses a language that is very spiritual, but like much that is deemed spiritual in this generation, it is still based on self and relative truth.

Whereas just a decade ago younger people were saying no to church but yes to Jesus, increasing numbers are now in search of a transcendent spirituality in which Jesus no longer occupies a central place - Eddie Gibbs & Ian Coffey

Even Barbie is into it. Mattel has finally taken Barbie into the spiritual world of witchcraft with its Secret Spell Line. There are three dolls that come with an assortment of spell books, magic powders and an assortment of potions. *Children's Ministry Magazine* made this comment about it: "One of the most telling responses from the world of witchcraft was posted at triplemoon.com by someone named Crow Wing. "Have we become this mainstream?" There is actually a Barbie doll that only practices 'white magic'? I guess it's a product of all the teen witch shows. Now I've heard it all".⁹

I was reading our local paper recently and there was a four-page spread all about the 'Mind, Body and Soul'. It had articles addressing

⁸ Eddie Gibbs & Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry*, 2001, p. 11

⁹ *Children's Ministry Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2004, p. 15

questions such as “Is the Bible relevant?”, then surrounding this article were ads for ‘The Reiki Relaxation Centre’, ‘Psychic Connections’, ‘Spectrum Healing’, Yoga and an article that talked about how Eastern Art satisfies the body and the spirit.¹⁰ These were all lumped in together and presented as acceptable choices. That’s where the deception lies.

THE NEED FOR STABILITY

In a world that is constantly changing, our kids need a place where something is stable. The family was traditionally this place and still can be for many, but increasingly, even the family is a place where things can be very unstable. For many of our kids, consistency is a real issue.

When I was growing up, my family all had an evening meal together. Dinner time was a family time, and it was something consistent and stable that I just took for granted. I am amazed at how many families very rarely have a meal sitting all together. There is reassurance in traditions and things that become regular experiences for a family. They can be simple and seem insignificant at the time, but they are actually very important to a child’s sense of security.

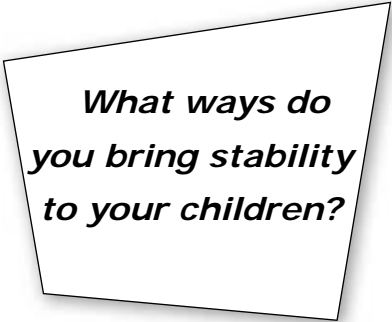
Now when my own family sits down together for a meal each night, we have created a tradition called ‘Best Part Of Our Day’. As we finish saying grace, the kids nominate who is going to be last to talk about the best part of their day. Over the meal time, we all take turns to listen to each other share. It has become a great time for stopping and listening to each other, important for the kids in learning to reflect on their day, and also fantastic to hear what everyone has been doing. It is such an important part of the meal for our children that even when visitors come over or if we are at a restaurant, they still demand that we share the best parts of our day, and everyone around the table must be involved.

Our little ritual has proven a great a way to hear what is important to our children. Each of us feels encouraged, as it turns out that often the best part of our days is being together and having a meal after a

¹⁰ *Illawarra Mercury*, March 17, 2004, pp. 38-39

long day at school and work. It has been a great chance to say to the kids that being together now is what is important to us all.

What ways do you bring stability to your children? I am fortunate that my childhood memories are full of experiences that promoted stability for me. I am convinced they are a strength upon which I live my life today. Experiences like always eating together at the table at night , holidays, Dad taking all my friends to youth group – all piled up in the car (probably illegal now), - special shopping outings with Mum, and many others.



What ways do you bring stability to your children?

We would spend the weekends at Physical Culture competitions, and knowing that my Mum was there, waiting all day for me to do my routine, was very special to me. My parents were, and still are, always people I could count on. They were always there supporting me whenever I did something - always that stabilizing force. It sent me out into the world with confidence.

In Luke 3:22b, God says to Jesus, “You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” We all need a sense of security and sense of significance. Even Jesus did. There is so much evidence to prove that it is a basic human need. When our children don’t get it, it makes it harder for them to succeed in life. I am very aware that as children’s workers we can add to the stability of their world, or be another place where children experience constant change. In a world that is crying out for stability, we are not helping the problem when we work on roster systems and see a constant turnover in ministry roles in our children’s programs.

There is a reason why teachers in the school system have a class for one year. It takes that long to establish relationship and stability in a classroom in order to be able to do something significant with the children. When they go to church or children’s ministry they are lucky to see the same person three weeks in a row, and then we wonder why they don’t feel like Sunday ministry is a stabilizing force for them. We

need to reassess how and why we structure our ministries if we really want to make a lasting impact on a child's life. We will look further at practical ways to connect with kids in later chapters.

SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS FOR THE FUTURE

In one of Oprah's magazines, an article captured my attention. It was entitled 'Ten Good Reasons to Have Faith in the Future.'¹¹ I was shocked as I read through it. The article began: "Today's world is a terrifying place. Every day we wake up facing the frightening realities of our age: terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, pollution, domestic violence, psychotic criminals who steal children right from their own beds". It then continued to say that a simple act of hopeful thinking can get you out of the fear zone and can replace anxiety with happy anticipation. The article proceeded to outline the ten reasons we can feel good about the future.

The first was feminism: "The fact that the weaker sex is growing stronger just may save the world." Second on the list was Starbucks. The article used the New Testament to back this up: "I love the New Testament image of Jesus napping on a boat during a storm. Peaceful revolutionaries change the world by great efforts and small comforts: one hot bath, one morning walk, one quiet act of self-care at a time. Today, a mocha malt frappuccino is my favorite splurge, what's yours?" The third reason to feel good was "the freedom to live in sin". I couldn't believe what I was reading! It stated: "That people can clash at the level of basic values but tolerate one another's differences gives me enormous hope for the future".

I won't give you the next seven. It just got worse. If this is what we have to look forward to, no wonder we are so messed up as a generation. Our children need more hope than this and a sense of what's to come. We need to give them a purpose for living now and a sense that our future is to live forever with God.

Just recently, we received the news that my husband's uncle had died. He was old and in pain, so in many ways it was a good thing. But

¹¹ O, *The Oprah Magazine*, March 2004, pp. 79-81

the sad reality is that he died from alcoholism and didn't know Jesus at the time of his death.

When we told the children that Grandma was sad because her brother had died, my son's response was, "I am sorry that Grandma is sad, but isn't it a good thing, because now he is with Jesus in heaven." My husband and I smiled at each other. We didn't tell him that he may not be there, it is not our place to judge, but we were happy that he saw death as a pathway to be closer to God. We hope that we can continue to foster that with our children. It is a hope that no other form of spirituality can promise.

Can I also add that when this sense of hopelessness is coupled with the current openness to spirituality it can become dangerous. In the movie *The Never Ending Story*, the character known as 'The Nothing' says, "People who have no hope are easy to control. Whoever has control has the power".¹² We are living in a time when a witch can talk openly about being a witch in the boardroom of companies on Channel Nine's *Today Show*¹³ and everyone feels this is totally acceptable conversation for a morning chat show. She (the witch) and a business man were talking about casting spells on people and how he uses this to advance himself in the workplace.

There is power in 'spiritual' things being seen as acceptable. These days even the ABC is something I feel my children cannot watch without major screening because of the continual theme of witchcraft and sorcery in the shows they play between 3.00pm and 6.00pm. This is a power that is not accidental, because for children who have no hope, the thought of power to fly and to cast spells is very attractive. When this concept is presented as simply fantasy, they are captured.

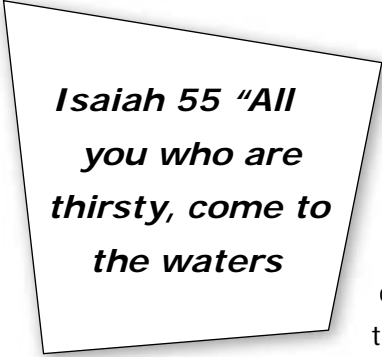
***People who
have no hope are
easy to control.
Whoever has
control has the
power***

¹² *The Never Ending Story*, Warner Bros. Entertainment, 1984

¹³ Channel 9, Friday, 22 July, 2005

This is something that needs to be a major focus for Christian parents and leaders today.

So, what do we do with a puzzling future, knowing that our children are: obsessed with how they look, want to be entertained, have everything materially, struggle to find role models to learn from, are always negative and stressed out, feel alienated and alone, have very little family experience, need to feel they belong, have been told all their life that truth is what they make it, question sexuality, and are looking for the ultimate experience? In the midst all this, I believe the postmodern generation want to know God – not know *about* God or about religion – but to *know* God and experience God as a person.



***Isaiah 55 "All
you who are
thirsty, come to
the waters***

Isaiah 55: 1 proclaims: "All you who are thirsty, come to the waters". Our children are thirsty, and because they are thirsty they will taste anything! They are looking for leadership. I love the line in the movie *The American President* when Lewis (the character played by Michael J Fox) is talking to the president about leadership. He says, "People want leadership, Mr. President, and in

the absence of genuine leadership they'll listen to anyone who steps up to the microphone. They want leadership. They're so thirsty for it they'll crawl through the desert toward a mirage and when they discover there is no water, they'll drink sand". The president replies, "People don't drink the sand because they are thirsty; they drink the sand because they don't know the difference!"¹⁴

This is what is happening to our kids. They are looking for direction; they will listen to anyone who chooses to speak to them. It is time to stop being puzzled and start to have some answers for our kids.

We have only begun to touch on the big issues for this generation. The puzzle is complex, but it is our job to make sure the picture is clear for us as leaders of these children. Our children are puzzled because children's ministries very seldom address these issues. As

¹⁴ *The American President*, Universal Pictures, 1995

leaders we are puzzled because we seem unaware that to address these issues is the *purpose* of children's ministry.



ACTION STEP

- Go and rent a movie that all the kids are watching today. Work out why they are watching it! What do you think God would have to say to this movie?

- Buy a kids magazine, or surf the net and see what kids are reading and seeing on the Internet.

- Watch TV during the kid's time slot and study what they are watching. (You will probably be shocked)
