

## ***Valuing Children***

Dear Bruce,

As I have written previously, I want to admonish you again not to neglect the children who are under your pastoral care. In fact, your success in ministry might well be measured by the loving care and insightful instruction you provide for the children of your flock. Yes, I understand that most of your weekly activities will be spent with adults. But in your attitude and in your heart, and even in your *Daytimer*, I would admonish you to increasingly value children.

The status of children in some churches is alarmingly diminished. In some places, the children are largely ignored and treated with little honor. I have known of churches, for example, where the children meet in marginally acceptable classrooms, while their parents enjoy facilities far more appealing. This is an inequity you should not tolerate.

Not only that, but sometimes the least capable and poorly trained people are assigned to teach the children, while the more gifted and qualified teachers are asked to work with the adults. I would strongly urge you to reverse this procedure, and instead be sure that the children under your care are given the very best, both in facility and in quality of instruction.

You may wonder why I speak so strongly about the status of the children in your church. Let me explain.

Most present followers of Jesus began their journey with Him early on in life. In fact, if you will check it out, you will discover that very few of the people you serve have come to Christ later in life. Children have an openness to the gospel that is God-given and should be capitalized on. It is a shame to miss this wonderful window of opportunity.

Perhaps I could be openhearted to you about my own experience in this regard. Blessed by godly parents and a church that loved children, I, too, was introduced to Christ at a very early age and very conscious of His presence. While I know there would have been a point where I passed from *death to life*, the process of salvation for me flowed quite *naturally* out of the affirming, loving and biblically instructive environment in which I grew up.

Growing up I still recall my early musings about God, His Son Jesus, the coming of Christ, the work of the church and many other significant biblical truths as I walked through pasture paths and wooded hills of that early childhood place.

As I look back, I wonder if my thoughts now are any more significant than my thoughts then. I am amazed how really good and profound those early musings were. Sure, I needed more information and training: but the germ truths were well-focused and were fit beginning points for more mature reflection later in life.

That is just my point: Children must have the right start. They may not know a lot, but what they know must be right. They must have a good foundation upon which to build their spiritual house. And that cannot happen with shoddy and haphazard programs.

There is another point I want to make with you, Bruce. Life in our day has become hard on some children. For example, some kids in your church come home from school to an empty house. Some wonder what it would be like to have both parents present as a daily part of life. And, tragically, some are victims of abuse and violence.

Your church can touch these children by drawing them into a caring network of women and men who love and affirm them. Those particularly disadvantaged call for even more attention from the people of the church. Yes, you will need to step forth as advocates for victimized children. So do it with courage, Bruce. God has placed you in the protective center of these children's lives.

And I can assure you, friend, that the benefits of this care-giving won't be unidirectional. These children will add spice to your life. Like the little boy who inquired of me, on a busy Sunday morning, about the location of a children's activity. I answered, *Sorry, I'm not sure where that is being held.* To which he replied, *That's okay . . . I'll find someone who works here.* He unknowingly put me in my place—but I loved it.

Or how about this letter: *Dear Pastor . . . I want to ask you a question. I want to know, can I get baptized? I've been waiting to be baptized for the longest time. If it's all right, send me a letter and tell me about it. It seems like the Lord has spoken to me and has said: 'Jennifer, I think the time has come for you to be baptized.'*

So, Bruce, the challenge is almost frighteningly demanding, but the work is filled with joyful surprises and incredible reward.

Don't forget—make it big with the children, and you'll make it big in God's kingdom . . . and your church will love you, too!

Grace and Peace,

Richard Dresselhaus

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*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,  
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*

*Matthew 19:13*