

DISCIPLE CHILDREN TODAY FOR TOMORROW (*ROB HOSKINS)

God sees children as incredibly important. For better or worse, so does the rest of the world.

A few years ago, I attended a Fortune 500 conference. The theme insisted that to make your brand successful, you have to make sure it's ingrained in children by the time they are eight years old. The brand didn't matter; it could be Apple or Nike or Cinnamon Toast Crunch. Any brand that you want to sell to adults 15 years from now must be instilled in children growing up right now. The bottom line: branding a product in the mind of a child equals gaining a consumer for life.

The same principle applies in the spiritual world. For years, the American Church has anecdotally accepted the statistic that 80% of adult Christians had made their decision for Christ prior to age 18. This motivated American believers to present the Gospel to what appeared to be the most fertile mission field — children and teens.

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What we understand today is that the window for reaching children and youth with the Gospel has narrowed considerably. [The 4/14 Movement has concluded](#) that some 71% of America's believers chose Christ between the ages of four and fourteen. Some put that figure even lower.

Researcher George Barna found that a child's moral development is set by the age of 9. Barna wrote that ***“habits related to the practice of one's faith develop when one is young and change surprisingly little over time”*** and ***“the older a child gets, the more distracted and vulnerable he or she becomes to non-family influences”*** (*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions, 2003*).

The Fortune 500 marketers were right: ***young people make their choices early and become set in their ways once their worldview is established.***

Not only do we need to reach children and youth with the Gospel at the right age, but we also need to ensure there are avenues available to them for discipleship. We strive to give kids the best in helping them grow into well-rounded individuals: nutritious foods, access to good education, and exposure to diverse experiences. We need to be as meticulous and intentional about our children's spiritual growth and development. Spiritual discipleship of our children is not an option—it's a command.

Three main influencers in growing a child's faith: family, faith community and the Bible.

OneHope's research has uncovered a formula for successfully raising spiritually strong children. Our global [Attitudes and Behaviors of Youth](#) (ABY) survey clearly indicated three main influencers in growing a child's faith: **Family, Faith community (church) and the Bible (religious texts).**

THE MOST IMPORTANT ENTITY IN A CHILD'S LIFE IS A PARENT. A church has about forty hours on Sunday mornings in a given year to directly influence a child. A parent — biological or spiritual — averages closer to 3,000 hours in the same year. We must be sure to help resource and equip adults who to spiritually disciple the children in their care.

We must be sure that children are invited to not just attend but be involved in their faith community. This allows them to grow in their gifts and exercise a robust and active faith.

The only way a life can be transformed is through believing and accepting the truth found in the Bible. God's Word is more than enough for any situation we face. It is beyond what each of us deserves (Romans 6:23). God's Word is powerful and alive (Hebrews 4:12).

I am confident that this trifecta of influences (*family, church, and the Bible*) is **WHAT THE NEXT GENERATION NEEDS AND CRAVES IN ORDER TO GROW UP SPIRITUALLY VIBRANT AND PREPARED FOR THE STORMS LIFE HOLDS FOR THEM. Let's invest the thought, intention and resources needed into discipling our children so they can grow and flourish in their faith.**

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SOURCE: GACX LIBRARY, AUGUST 2016