

## **Involving Children In Missions <sup>1</sup>**

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Should children be involved in missions? Are they too young to be missionaries? Is it a waste of our time and effort in training them? I believe not.

Research studies have confirmed again the importance of the early childhood years as crucial to character development. In fact, the basic traits of a child's character are formed before age 6, and major interests in life are taking permanent shape by age 12. Hence, it is vital that we help children develop attitudes and habits of service and missions that will impact them all the way till adulthood.

In the most recent Barna research studies on the spiritual growth of children, the Barna Group found that children between the ages of 5 and 13 have a 32 percent probability of accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. That likelihood drops to 4 percent for teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18. In the area of missions George Barna says:

“Children are most likely to hear God's call to full-time Christian ministry (missionaries, ministers, etc.) between the ages of 4-14 (*Christianity Today*). Missiologists refer to this period of time as the ‘4/14 Window.’”

Ellen White echoed a similar message that we need to encourage children to be missionaries. Notice she writes in *That I May Know Him*, p. 42: “Whole armies of children may come under Christ's banner as missionaries, even in their childhood years. Never repulse the desire of children to do something for Jesus. Never quench their ardor for working in some way for the Master.”

In the area of compassion, Ellen White writes: “The principles of heaven are to be brought into the government of the home. Every child is to be taught to be polite, compassionate, loving, pitiful, courteous, and tenderhearted” (*Child Guidance*, p. 143).

### **Why Involve Children in Missions?**

1. Children are sensitive to God. They can begin to learn about God's heart for missions at an early age. Once I told a mission story about African children whose homes were destroyed by the floods, and they had no food to eat or clothes to wear. Some raised their hands to say they would give their unused clothes and toys to these African children overseas.

2. Children can easily understand the concept of compassion when they are given an opportunity to respond to the needs of their world by participating in projects to help the less fortunate children of the world. When children watched on television how a tsunami had killed thousands of adults and children in Southeast Asia, many were moved to tears. Children in some churches helped enthusiastically to pack health kits that would be sent to help those victims. I know some children gave their allowance or savings to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kidsministryideas.com/articles/view.php?aid=72>

help those unfortunate people affected by disaster. Getting children involved in such compassionate service can help develop them into caring adults.

3. Children learn to identify the needs of others and share the love Jesus with others. Children who get involved in missions learn to empathize with others, sharing not only their material things but also the love of Jesus with them. They become more conscious of the needs of others than just their own needs. They feel they can make a difference in the world.

4. Generosity in Giving. Parents whose children have been involved in missionary projects or mission trips testify that their children became more sensitive to the needs of the less fortunate and are more generous in donating their allowances or pocket money to help out. In fact, they are more enthusiastic and passionate in fund-raising for missionary projects.

5. Appreciation of other cultures. Missionary kids such as Brad Milligan who has lived in Zimbabwe, Rachel Schupack in Kyrgyzstan, and Lisa Frist in Brazil agreed unanimously that living in a foreign land with cultures so different from their own has many benefits. Growing up among kids from other cultures has helped them to appreciate people of diverse cultures, customs, and languages. In fact, they have grown quite fond of their adopted cultures and homes. Hence, involving children in missions can deepen their appreciation of other cultures.

6. Trust in God. When children participate in mission projects at home or abroad, they may be confronted with problems in some situations in which they have to trust God to find a solution for them. Once, a group of preteens went on a mission trip to Guatemala to help build a church.

### **Children in Missions—BCD Cans for AIDS Orphans in sub-sahara Africa**

An excellent example of children getting involved in missions is the BCD Cans project of the Owino brothers. While their peers are busy with baseball, computer games and band practice, brothers Brian, Calvin, and David Owino are busily collecting empty soda pop cans. They launched the project BCD Cans for AIDS Orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa in 1999. It's an amazing feat for twins Calvin and Brian, 14, and David, 10, who live in Framingham, Massachusetts! Born in the village of Malela, Kenya, the three brothers came to the United States in 1999 with their parents as father Martin Owino was studying for a master's degree in public health at Boston University.

They have watched their parents send money to friends and relatives with HIV/AIDS in Kenya. But in 1999 when two of their cousins, ages 8 and 12, died of AIDS, Calvin and Brian were shook up. It struck them for the first time that it could happen to many more of their cousins back in Kenya.

"There must be something we can do to help," the twins echoed their thoughts out loud.

“What can we do for those children way across the ocean? We can’t work. We don’t earn a salary. We are only children!”

“Say, how about gathering trash and turning them into treasures!” suggested Brian excitedly.

After brainstorming with their parents for a few days, they came up with the idea of conducting a cans and change drive to help African AIDS orphans. So in 1999 they proudly launched the BCD Cans for AIDS Orphans in Sub-Sahara Africa. BCD stands for the initials of their names. The project was founded on the principles of “undugu” and “harambee,” which are Swahili words that mean “brotherliness” and “pulling resources together for a common good.”

“We’d like other kids to live longer and have some fun,” said Calvin.

“They need our help,” said Brian.

“We’re supposed to love everyone around us,” said David. “Jesus said they are our brothers and sisters.”

Indeed, such “brotherly love” did shine through the lives of Calvin, Brian, and David as they went about enthusiastically collecting cans. They contacted their schools, their neighbors, and the nearby grocery stores for a place to put their boxes for the cans. They collect hundreds and thousands of soda pop cans every day after school, cash in the deposits, and send money to AIDS orphans projects in Africa.

Can you imagine the impact in the lives of HIV orphans in Malela? Brian, Calvin, and David have raised \$33,000 in four years and have helped more than 400 AIDS orphans. With the money sent from Framingham where the Owino brothers live, the Malela AIDS Orphans Project has funded the construction of a brick building that houses a soup kitchen which provides at least one hot meal a day for the orphans. The project also funded school fees, clothes, and medical care for the orphans, as well as the digging of wells to provide for clean water.

In addition, income-generating skills, such as tailoring, brick making, and watch repair, are taught to the older orphans so that they can earn a living for themselves. But above all, the caregivers share the gospel with the orphans at the orphanage, helping them to find true meaning in Jesus.

The Owino brothers have responded to missions in their own small way—a child’s way. But little is big with love and faith. In the summer of 2004, Calvin, Brian, and David were given recognition by the Massachusetts House of Representatives and the state senate, each receiving a citation of recognition for their humanitarian spirit. They were again honored through the Boston Celtics’ “Heroes Among Us” program for their work helping AIDS orphans in Kenya.

Indeed, Brian, Calvin, and David have learned to practice “undugu,” for Jesus said: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

### **Jesus’ Commission**

Jesus’ commission for us to preach the gospel throughout the world includes the children. We must sow seeds of mission interest at an early age if we expect to reap missionary recruits and strong mission supporters in the years ahead. It’s not too early to involve them now. Tomorrow’s missionaries begin with today’s children!