

1. I can be a friend of Jesus. I am not too young.

DL Moody was a great Evangelist of the 19th Century. He was born in 1837 and died in 1899. He was 62 when he died. During his life time, he founded churches, publishing companies and schools for children. This little story is about him preaching a revival meeting. When he came home his wife Emma was already asleep. He crawled into bed and sleepily she rolled over and asked, "How did it go?" He said great. There were 2 ½ converts. She laid there for a while thinking and then said, "That's sweet. How old was the child?" He said, "No, no, no, there were 2 children and one adult who got saved. The children have their whole lives ahead of them but the adult's life is half over.

I know that some of you work in churches where your Pastors and maybe some other leaders, don't think of children the way God thinks of children – or the way you think of children. To many people, children are a bother in church. They are loud, they run, they don't listen, they don't appreciate you.

Some of your leaders think that a person has to be an adult in order to know Jesus or to really have a relationship with God.

That is not true. A child CAN have a relationship with God. If you didn't believe that, you would not be at this conference.

I believe that those who work with children (YOU), not only have the best job in the world, but the most influential job in the world. There is no greater ministry that anyone can have in the church than to work with children. I'm not trying to say that the worship team is not important, nor that the pastor's job is not important. I AM saying that no ministry in the church is AS important as working with the children.

I'm not just saying that because I work with children and have for 45 years. But let me share a few things that some people might not realize.

Children are like little pieces of clay or wet cement. They are impressionable and moldable. When you tell a child anything, they immediately believe you. That's why James 3:1 says that not many of you should become teachers because if you do, you will incur upon

yourself a stricter judgement from God. When you teach a child something, they believe it.

(Jesus has 3 arms)

So because they are so easily influenced, we are the influencers that have to know the Word of God and teach the Word of God so that children will know God.

I'm not the only one who thinks that way. Jesus does too.

"People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was annoyed. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them." — Mark 10:13-15

This verse in the New Testament falls in the story of Jesus leaving Galilee for a final time and heading to Jerusalem. He is met by some religious leaders who ask Him tough questions about divorce. The event that follows catches the disciples off guard (they weren't ready for it) and teaches us an important lesson: eternal life is available to everyone.

Children were brought to Jesus, perhaps by their parents, to be blessed by Him. Serving as Jesus' security team (with good intentions), the disciples rebuked them and tried to turn the people away. Don't bother Jesus with the children. (Sound familiar?)

The response from Jesus, is often read too softly and too gently. I think it went something like this; Don't you dare touch those children and try to stop them from coming to me. Don't you know who they are? They

are children, CHILDREN!! What? Do you think that only you adults can receive the Kingdom of God?? Are you kidding me? If YOU do not receive the Kingdom of God just like this child, YOU cannot even enter into Eternal life. Get your hands off of them. And then Jesus spent some time with all the children.

In an act of kindness, Jesus laid His hands on the children and blessed them. Children mean something in His kingdom. They are valuable. Jesus wants to have a relationship with every individual, regardless of age, gender, nationality or how rich or poor they are. Eternal life is available to everyone.

When Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and don't stop them, let them come unto me," He was reaching out to a segment of society that was thought to be insignificant. People thought then and now, that children didn't matter.

Children, in their weakness and innocence, have a lot to teach us as adults. As we grow, the hardness of the world often makes our hearts very hard.

Children have a humble openness to the message of Jesus and the salvation He offers. We can learn from their vulnerability (their sensitivity and innocence).

Jesus presented a gentle openness to the children. He touched them with compassion and protected them from others. We are called to follow Jesus' example. Children are not irrelevant, little beings to be discarded. They are to be valued, loved and shown compassion.

We always must understand how important children are.

If you are ever tired, or you want to quite Children's Ministry, go to the Scripture to see what Jesus says about children.

"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

A small millstone can be about 48 inches in diameter and about 2 or 3,000 lbs.

Do you hear the warning? Large millstone – thrown in the sea. That's how the mafia kill people. Well, that's what I think. I don't have any personal experience.

The question is not, CAN A CHILD HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? There is no debate. If anyone says that or tries to make you think that, that person does not know the same God that we serve. Our God not only loves children but respects children, protects children and desires to bless children.

Because children are so vulnerable and innocent, we must be their advocates. They cannot stand up for themselves, they cannot protect themselves.

- They cannot protest what's going on around the world. They're children.
- They cannot vote or get involved in politics or have a voice in the government. They're children.
- Children cannot make up think-tanks or make decisions to help children around the world
- Children cannot study the effects of poverty or the outcomes of abuse. They're children
- They have no voice

That's where we come in. We must be the loudest voice that the children hear, because children will follow the loudest voice.

If the drug dealers at their schools offer them a good time for free, they'll take it.

If the gangs look and seem really cool to the children, that's who they'll follow.

If some militia group tells the kids they can shoot guns and become powerful, well, that's what they will do.

You are so important in the life of the children. You are the ones who bring the truth, you are the ones who bring hope, you are the ones who teach them about a great and mighty God who has a plan for their lives.

So, in everything you do with children, every class you teach and every fun event you have with them, always leave room for them to know Jesus. Always ask, at the end, or in the middle, "is there anyone here that wants to ask Jesus to be their best friend?" or "Is there anyone here who wants to become part of God's family?"

(I always use those terms)

When you lead a child to Christ, you are snatching them from the road to hell and placing them on the road to heaven.

So YES, children can know God and follow Him, but only if you tell them.