

Understanding The Children's World

Steve Alley

*"And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude
and was moved with compassion for them,
because they were like sheep not having a shepherd.
So, He began to teach them many things."*

Mark 6: 34

In order to have an effective impact on the lives of today's children, you need to know as much as you can about their "world." Once you understand what they like, dislike, feel, or experience, you can begin to use the right words or phrases. When you do this, they will identify you as someone who understands them, and they will be more apt to listen to you.



This process is not something that you do once. The process of "staying current" with the children in your ministry should be done on a regular basis.

Their World Today

1. Electronically-connected
2. Noisy
3. Fast-paced with no space between events
4. Bathed in terror threats and hatred
5. Shallow - focused on "looks," possessions
6. "Trendy"
7. Increasing number of "broken heroes"
8. "Home," and "family" are gray qualities
9. Financial stress
10. Spiritual / moral depravity

Two Conflicting Views About "The World"

1. The world is evil – don't engage it.
2. The world is evil – engage it carefully in order to reach the lost.



Jesus' Interaction With His World

1. **He "hung out" in the marketplaces** – "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." (Matthew 9: 35)
2. **He watched people** – "Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury." (Mark 12: 41)
3. **He went to feasts and celebrations** – "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding." (John 2: 1; 5: 1)
4. **He spent time with "controversial" people** – "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples." (Matthew 9: 10)
5. **He went fishing with fishermen** – "He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore...he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." (Luke 5: 3, 4)
6. **He talked with women** – "When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"...Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4: 7-29)



7. **He took trips with them** – “That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat...” (Mark 4: 35, 36)
8. **He interacted with the homeless, disabled, and poor** – “Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool...Here a great number of disabled people used to lie...One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there...he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5: 2-6)
9. **He interacted with Roman officials** – “When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.’...But just say the word, and my servant will be healed...’I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.” (Matthew 8: 5-10)



Understanding The World of Children Today

1. Watch it!

Search online for “Popular Children’s Shows.” Once you get a list of the most popular shows, you can watch samples of them. When you view the programs, ask God to help you understand what makes them laugh or interests them. Interview the kids in your ministry about the shows or movies they like.



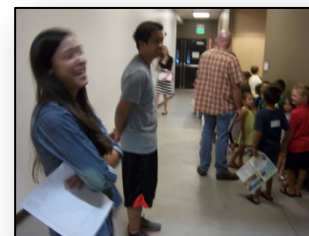
2. Listen to it!

Listen to their conversations to other children. Listen to the songs they enjoy. Listen to their responses to your questions. You are not necessarily listening to just their words, you are listening to their fears, interests, dreams and concerns. You are also listening to comments that would reflect their values.

Listen to the music that they say they like. Remember that most children won’t pay much attention to the words of songs; they will usually enjoy a song because it sounds good or because they like the artist.

Conversations outside of the “ministry” setting are always more “rich” in content because the children aren’t trying to say the right thing.

Conversations in the parking lot, or at a store if you bump into them are always very memorable.



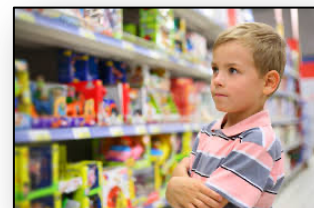
3. Read it!

Find out what the children are reading and read those things. Typically, younger children don’t read “recreationally.” Older children may read recreationally. They may talk about the books they read. Since printed magazines are not as popular as before, you may have difficulty in reading what they read.

4. Interact with it!

Interacting with children via social media is risky! Today’s parents are very cautious about adults interacting with their children on social media. If your church uses social media platforms to interact with families, you might be able to use those “approved” or “safe” avenues.

If your city still has a physical toy store, you can go there to see what toys are interesting to children. Be careful “lurking” around children in the store, though. You don’t want to be ushered out of the store by security.



Using Their World To Minister To Them

1. In Your Words

Use words that reflect their world in your conversations, questions and comments. “Season” everything you saw with words that they “get.” Use their world in your humor or lesson-related “shocking” comments.

2. In Your Lessons

“Inject” what you’ve learned about their world into the lessons. The curriculum you use will be pretty “sterile” and not include much “kid” stuff. Add comments, questions and examples from their world into the lesson. The more you do this, the more they will be interested and the greater the application will be!

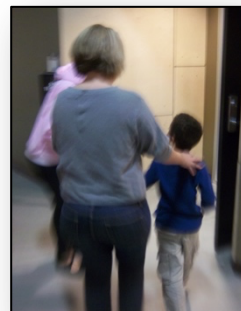
The “Ageless Methods” Needed More Than Ever

As society changes, the “tools” we use to lead children to the Lord may also change. We must view the changing “tools” as just that: tools. The Gospel message has always been most effective when spread by human contact. It is the personal connection of relationships that leads people to a transforming connection with God, not a post on a blog!

Studies show that today’s electronically-connected children are apt to be the most relationally disconnected of any generation! The “friendships” or “network” they build on social networking sites are shallow. The lack of human connection (eye contact, touching, talking, or listening) may produce a need for “real” relationships.

What we can provide in children’s ministry is something they can’t get online!

“Relationship issues stand at the heart of postmodern culture...The more impersonal the transactions, the deeper the hunger for relationships and community...The more connected we become electronically, the more disconnected we can become personally.” (Leonard Sweet, *Post Modern Pilgrims*, (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, TN)



The “Ageless Methods” of Ministry

1. Eye contact
2. Conversations about life
3. Touching (appropriately)
4. Laughing together
5. Walking together
6. Eating together
7. Playing together
8. Praying together
9. Working / serving together

Studies have proven that significant relationships “seal in” a child’s relationship with Jesus. To understand and use a child’s world will greatly increase your relationships with the children. The “ageless methods” were used by Jesus effectively to build relationships with His disciples.

Some of these methods can occur during ministry sessions, but some of them can only occur outside the ministry area.

“...in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. ...Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all.”

2 Timothy 4: 12-15