

## In Focus

**A**t the start of a new year, children in crisis workers should pause to evaluate the effectiveness of their ministries and to plan for the uncharted year ahead. A major goal of every program should be to see children healed from the deep emotional wounding that has occurred through abuse, exploitation and abandonment.

Workers, however, need to recognize that abuse can lead to the arrest of not only children's psychological/emotional development but also their spiritual development. Spiritual healing for wounded children always goes hand-in-hand with emotional, psychological and sometimes physical healing.

Spiritual healing must include the healing of the mind, the emotions and the painful memories. Healing must also include forgiveness and reconciliation. Spiritual healing can be defined as the process whereby a child is set free from guilt, resentment, bitterness, depression, self-pity, inferiority, self condemnation and a sense of worthlessness. As with emotional healing, the spiritual healing process can begin as soon as the abuse ends but may extend into adulthood.

In God's plan, parents were given the responsibility of modeling God's unconditional

love, trust, belonging, respect, self-worth and acceptance within family life. Such imaging lays vital building blocks for a child's spirituality. In this loving, safe environment children could form value systems that would facilitate their moral development. Through everyday experiences, parents have opportunities to make nurturing their children's spiritual health a priority as well as relevant.

Children in crisis, however, have been robbed of this initial source of spiritual nurturing. A primary obstacle resulting from this robbery is the loss of trust and the consequential inability to develop trusting relationships. Young children form their view of God (an authority figure) based on their experiences with human fathers and other

Charles Kraft (Deep Wounds, Deep Healing, 1993) states that spiritual healing "seeks to bring the power of Christ to bear on the roots from which damage springs."

authority figures that were involved in their abuse.

The shattering of a child's basic spiritual building blocks, as mentioned above, results in a child having questions and conflicts regarding their spirituality. *If God really loves me, why*

*did this happen? How can I trust God when I can't trust those He has given to care for me? I am so dirty; why would God want to be my friend? I am so angry with God; is He angry with me, too? How can I ever forgive the perpetrator who has stolen my childhood and caused me so much pain? Does God know how much I am hurting? Does He even care?*

In her thought-provoking article "Experiencing God in Childhood," Dr. Catherine Stonehouse responds to these questions, drawing from her book *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith*. She assures us that children, even in the most traumatic circumstances, have the potential to truly meet God and find comfort and hope through stories of Scripture, such as that of the Good Shepherd. She also explores our partnership role with God in facilitating the process.

In the *Caregiver's Corner* Barbara Marks, the other half of WEC's USA member care team, provides some practical and effective suggestions for preventing what perhaps is a caregiver's most devastating problem—burnout. Only as caregivers care for themselves can they be empowered to give their best to the children they serve. Barbara's sharing comes out of both personal and ministry experience.

May God bless the children, the caregivers and the programs within your projects this year and help you discover new ways to bring healing and hope to wounded children.



# Experiencing God in Childhood

Dr. Catherine Stonehouse

**W**hile teaching in Kenya several years ago, my students and I visited an orphanage that cared for children who were HIV positive. One of the students asked our host, “How do you prepare children to face death: their death and the death of their friends?” Without hesitation he responded, “We introduce them to the Good Shepherd, and when they come to the point of death, they are not afraid. They know that the Good Shepherd walks with them.” I had watched North American children meet the Good Shepherd in the biblical story and gain comfort as they struggled with grief over a sibling’s death, divorce, or the experiences of moving to a new country. This experience in Kenya confirmed for me the universal importance of this parable and the potential for children to truly meet God in the stories of Scripture.

As caregivers, working with abused and vulnerable children, the best gift you have to offer is your partnership with God in opening the way for them to meet God and to know the presence of the Good Shepherd. How does the child come to experience God and what part can we play in that process?

Created in the image of God, every human being, from the beginning of life, has the potential to experience God. We see evidence of this truth in the child’s curiosity about God and ability to believe in the reality of the great unseen One. Walter Wangerin Jr. describes beautifully our earliest encounters with God.

Who can say when, in any child, the dance with God begins? No one. Not even the child can later look back and remember the beginning of it, because it is as natural an experience (as early and as universally received) as the child’s relationship with the sun or with his bedroom. And in the beginning, specifically, cannot be remembered because in the beginning there are no words for it. The language to name, contain, and to explain the experience comes afterward. The dance, then, the relationship with God, (what Wangerin calls)

faithing ... is at least initiated in all. It is a universal human experience. We all dance one round with God. But we dance it in the mists.<sup>1</sup>

**F**or that experience with God to move out of the mists, to grow and become a sustaining relationship, more is needed.

Unless there is given them... a language at the right time (this is *kairos!*) and a means whereby to make experience also intellectual; unless words, stories, ritual, and doctrine are available to make space in the rational mind for the heart’s conviction of God; unless religion occurs to sustain the personal “religious” conviction, why, then that conviction is lost with their childhood.<sup>2</sup>

In Wangerin’s words I see two crucial affirmations for those who walk with children. First, God is always there before we arrive on the scene, taking initiative in establishing a relationship with the children for whom we care so deeply. And secondly, God has a role for us to play; we are called into partnership with God. One of our most important privileges and responsibilities is giving children the language to “name, contain, and explain” their experiences with God so that they can know the Almighty who has come to them and enter into a forming, transforming relationship with God. But how do we do our part most effectively?

**W**e give children language for God through our relationships with them. Children pick up the words we use and, over time, build meaning into those words. In Deuteronomy 6:7 Moses instructs parents to talk with their children about God’s words in the flow of everyday life. When we speak of or to God naturally, as we go about our normal activities with children, they hear God’s name. As we freely express our praise for God’s faithfulness and speak of our trust in the fact that God is with us at all times, children hear

and begin to understand what this God is like.

When we love God with our whole being and God's laws are on our hearts (Deut. 6:5-6), God's love flows through us to the children. In their experience of our love, our faithfulness, patience and forgiveness, they gain meaning for those words. Then, when the words are attributed to God, children understand them and begin to grasp the character of our Lord.

Children also gain the language to know

God when they enter the stories of Scripture to meet God there. In narrative children intuitively and affectively grasp realities that do not have meaning to them when we try to verbally explain theological concepts, even if we use simple words. But as children are gripped by a story, enter it, live into and reflect on it, they can get in touch with deep theological realities—even if they cannot put them into words—and receive comfort and insight.

In the past some religious educators have said, "Don't tell urban children the parable of the Good Shepherd. It makes no sense to them because they have never seen a shepherd." But when we base our telling of that story on Psalm 23 and John 10, we introduce children to the Shepherd who says, "I know everyone of my sheep by name. I always walk in front of my sheep to show them the way. And when there are places of danger, I show my sheep the way to pass through, so that they can come safely back to the fold again."<sup>3</sup> The story builds biblical and theological truths into the word "shepherd" and draws children into the story to meet and be comforted by the Shepherd. And children, particularly those going through difficult experiences, love to spend time in the story with the Good Shepherd.

As you prepare to tell Bible stories, ask yourself, what is God doing? What of the character of God could children discover in this event? And then prepare to tell the story so that the children meet God, not just the human biblical characters. Also, give children opportunity to reflect on the story. Instead of telling them what you think the story should mean to them, wonder about it with them.

I wonder...

*How the sheep feel when the Good Shepherd calls them by name?*

*If you have ever had to go through dark places of danger?*

*How it feels to have the Shepherd so close?*

Remember, you are in partnership. Trust the Holy Spirit to be the master teacher, opening to the child the understandings he or she most needs to experience. And know that God is giving you a significant role in opening the way for children to experience a growing relationship with God.<sup>4</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> Walter Wangerin Jr. *The Orphean Passages* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1986), 20–22

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 47

<sup>3</sup> Drawn from *Young Children and Worship*, by Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989)

<sup>4</sup> The ideas in this article are more fully developed in *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith*, by Catherine Stonehouse (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1998)

Catherine Stonehouse, Ph.D., holds the Dean of the School of Practical Theology and the Orlean Bullard Beeson Professor of Christian Discipleship positions at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Ky. She has extensive experience in the area of Christian Education and has authored *Patterns in Moral Development* (1980) and *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey* (1998).

## RESOURCE

*Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith*, by Catherine Stonehouse

Understanding how a child's faith forms is crucial to knowing how adults can most significantly enhance the child's spiritual development. *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey* provides parents, teachers and Christian education leaders with valuable insights into spiritual formation during childhood. With a biblical perspective as a starting point and a recognition of the crucial role of both the family and the faith community, Stonehouse reviews important contributions from noted child development experts. By carefully "setting the stage" through liturgy, sacred stories, parables and quiet times of "godly play," religious educators can help children meet with God.

Baker Book House 1998 237 pp. Paper

# Dearly Loved by The Creator

Marjorie McDermid

**R**aped by her stepfather at the age of 11, Susannah ran away, spurred by the abuse in her home. On the streets in Cape Town, South Africa, a street gang run by an organized-crime syndicate recruited her. Initiation included rape and being prostituted by the boys. By the time Susannah turned 12, she had been betrayed by her family, raped at home and on the street, and was addicted to drugs.

Later, in a drug treatment program, Susannah was introduced to Satanism. The rituals included being tattooed while renouncing the person of Jesus. Among her 13 tattoos, one on her stomach depicted an upside-down cross.

After six years of exploitation by both men and women, Sarah was rescued by a Christian couple who opened the doors of their own home and took her in. There she found safety and hope. A year after rescue, Susannah surprisingly and boldly stated "I am a person!" In that magnificent moment she celebrated the recognition of her dignity and of her personhood.

Jennifer Goodson, whose account in *Sojourners Magazine* is the basis of this story, said:

*Human dignity cannot be reduced to a language of self-actualization, discovery, and esteem. Human dignity is rooted in our relationship to our Creator. Oppression is not only the marring and exploitation of the person but the suppression of the divine image intended to be reflected in that person.*

Susannah had met her Maker. She finally knew who she was—a person. She had begun to understand who God is and how much He loved her. Her rescuers had not only taken her to a safe place, provided food and clothing, given her protection and hope for the future, they had also taught her about her heavenly Father and how much He values and loves her. She was no longer a THING but a PERSON, dearly loved by her Creator. Her identity with Christ—her relationship to her Father—now became her spiritual DNA.

## God Values Children

Satan has always hated and sought to destroy babies and children because they are God's creation and He sees them as precious, sees their potential for His glory.

Examples of Satan's evil initiatives are easily noted:

Baby boys when Moses was born ( Exodus 1)

King Joash ( 2 Kings 11)

Jesus (Matthew, Luke)

God has always loved and valued babies and chil-

dren. He calls them His "best gifts" to us (Psalm 127:3 The Message). Remember how He—

- blessed the Hebrew midwives who risked their own lives when they allowed Hebrew boys to live at birth. Satan stepped up his program as the Pharaoh decreed every male Hebrew child must be thrown into the Nile. Moses family "threw" him into the Nile in a waterproofed basket, and Jehovah rescued him (Exodus 1, 2).

- intervened for Hagar and Ishmael—Hagar a single and exploited young mother and her son NOT the child of promise (Genesis 16).

- preserved Joash, the young king ( 2 Kings 11) under sentence of death by his grandmother, saved by his aunt who "just happened" to be the high priest's wife.

- protected Jesus as Joseph and Mary closed their business and became refugees in Egypt (Matthew 2).

As you work with children, who sometimes are so humanly unlovable, dirty, deceitful, ungrateful, do you think that Jesus would have died if only for this one child? We cherish that thought for ourselves. Oh, be reminded of this truth if ever you are tempted to think of these children as less than precious.

The same Word of God that comforts and strengthens us also holds exactly what the children need. Read Psalm 19:7-11 and think of its application to "your" children:

## Perfect...reviving the soul

Exploited, abused children have little connection with their souls. The perfect word of God can revive them and give meaning to their spiritual being.

## Trustworthy...giving wisdom to the simple

These children, all of them street-wise for survival, have need of the true wisdom that produces a happy and productive life with hope from God for a future.

## Right...bringing joy to the heart

To children who know little of happiness and nothing of true joy, having experienced heartbreak, abandonment and being only wrong and wronged, God's word can be their source of joy. Of course, they must hear it to believe it.

## Radiant...gives light to the eyes

Light that enables sight and insight into life, both eternal and temporal, comes from the word of God. Glorious change can come to deprived and depraved children as they experience the outworking of God's word in their lives.

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# NEWS & EVENTS



## Street Kids Working Group

Twenty-five people, including facilitators, participated in working-group meetings for the Global Strategy with Street Children Coalition, held September 29–October 1, 2005 in the UK. Attendees represented 16 organizations from across the globe. A steering committee was endorsed to coordinate the new working groups. Named to the committee were Andy Sexton (Chairperson), Sarah de Carvalho, Patrick McDonald, Jeff and Mary Ann Anderson and Andy Stockbridge. Chariman Andy Sexton reminded the gathering of street-children workers, “We are here because we share the vision that, with God’s help, we can create a world with no street children. We are here because we believe that we can significantly multiply our impact, by working together.”

Dialog in three key areas guided the discussions: resource development, citywide strategy and regional hubs.

### Resource Development

The group noted the current need to develop a list of recommended resources and distribute them to people who work with street children. They also discussed what further resources need to be developed.

### Citywide Strategies

Seeing a trend toward too much competition rather than cooperation among organizations working with street children, the group questioned: Why couldn’t we get citywide strategies happening, draw together organizations working in a city and look at the whole picture? What are they doing? How can we work together? How can we bring together within one city all the resources available globally? How can we bring models with which governments can work?

### Regional Hubs

The group envisioned 14 teams in global regions working to do four things:

1. Improve quality of service delivery of projects through training, mentoring, resourcing and providing answers for grassroots projects.
2. Motivate new work by identifying gaps in service provision and mobilize churches and others to work with street children. Provide strategic opportunities for city networks to meet and discuss the creation of national links.

3. Teams would provide an interface between research and actual work projects.

4. The profile of street children’s issues to be brought again to the fore. Government, society and churches needs to be informed of these issues.

The next meeting of the Global Strategy with Street Children Coalition is slated for the first week of October 2006 in Capetown South Africa.

## Children’s Spirituality Conference

Children’s Spirituality Conference: Christian Perspectives will hold its second triennial conference June 4-7, 2006 at Concordia University, River Forest IL (Chicago).

The conference aims to provide a forum for Christian workers doing research and writing; examine children’s spiritual development and formation; provide a forum for integration of biblical, theological and social science perspectives on children’s spiritual experiences, development, and formation; explore innovative approaches in children’s ministry and provide encouragement to those in this important area of ministry.

Further information may be obtained on their Website <[www.Childspirituality.org](http://www.Childspirituality.org)> or by calling Holly Allen at 479-524-7298.

## Street Children Seminar

Crisis Care Training International’s *Ministering Healing and Hope to Children in Crisis* seminar this year will focus on ministry to street children. The four-day event will take place at the Plaza Hotel in Fort Mill, South Carolina, May 17–20, 2006.

Speakers and trainers for the event are Andy Sexton, Oasis International Director for Children at Risk; Alison Johnson, B.S. (Nursing), SIM missionary ministering in an HIV / AIDS project, Ethiopia; Phyllis Kilbourn, Ph.D., Founder / director of Crisis Care Training International; Rev. Aubrey D. Smith, pastor, devotional leader.

For further information contact Phyllis at <[crisis-care@comporium.net](mailto:crisis-care@comporium.net)> or at 803-548-2811.

# Caregiver's Time Out



## Release that Stress!

Barbara Marks

While I was writing this article, a friend phoned wondering if I'd like to go out for lunch. Believe it or not, I almost said no; I had to finish this assignment. Taking that short break, however, helped clear my mind and gave me the pleasure of a friend's company as well.

As caregivers we must learn to take time out. We, the under-shepherds tending the flock, need to remember that we're also lambs who need to receive that which we give so freely to others—encouragement, nurture, and refreshing.

Four key areas can help us get refocused and revitalized. The first is the spiritual nourishment we require. In Psalm 119 the phrase "Renew my life according to your word" appears in several verses. The Psalmist realized the source for his renewal was the Word. May our heart's desire be the same!

Maintaining healthy relationships is the second area we need to develop for our wellbeing. In times of our greatest need, it's important to be with people. How blessed to be surrounded with those who encourage and affirm us and at the same time hold us accountable! If we are open and vulnerable, as others are with us as their caregivers, and share what the Lord does for us in our difficulties, we become more sensitive to what others are going through and can be of greater help.

Sometimes a visit to or from a friend over a cup of tea, or a phone call or e-mail is all we need to keep our equilibrium. That thought brings me to the third area we need

to cultivate, our emotional nurturing. When was the last time you laughed so hard you couldn't catch your breath and you had to hold your hand to your stomach because it hurt from laughing? What a great stress releaser!

Music is another resource for renewal as it satisfies any and every mood. Sometimes we want to be inspired, other times soothed and, again, just entertained. God's Word includes many examples of the importance of music and its effect on our minds and hearts.

Beauty is a wonderful mood changer. Several years ago we were on a long trip with our daughters. Rachel frantically called out from the back seat, "Dad. Stop!" She was the one who usually got car sick, so he pulled over to the shoulder of the road immediately. Once the car was at a stop, she sweetly requested, "Dad, will you take a picture of the sunset"? We slowed down long enough to enjoy God's creation for a few minutes. We need to do that more often.

The last area I want to mention is that of physical refreshment. A brisk walk awakens the whole body, soul and spirit. At other times a leisurely stroll is appropriate. One of my favorite outings takes me on a walk with my three-year-old grandson. He investigates everything along the way—a leaf, a feather, a stone, a bird singing in a tree, a jet zooming overhead. Our walks take a long time and we enjoy our time together. Do you have someone with whom you can walk?

Perhaps one of the children or a co-worker who would enjoy just being with you and you with him or her.

If we don't take time out to be renewed, we ultimately become exhausted and are ineffective in the lives of those we are attempting to help. We need to know our limits—when to let things go and when to take time to enjoy God and the special people He has put in our lives.

### Dearly Loved by The Creator

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### Fear (reverence) for the Lord is pure...enduring forever

Enduring purity—what a gift—especially for one like Susannah. Someone has suggested that Jesus' words "go in peace" spoken to the woman taken in adultery (Luke 7) restored the woman's purity. To be pure again and to have perfect peace of heart and mind—who but the Lord Himself, through His word, can give such a gift?

### Sure...altogether righteous

These words speak of justice. Can you imagine how these children—totally exploited and given no rights—feel to be seen as righteous? Faith in God's word will make them altogether righteous.

Jesus sees children as worthy of His touch and time. He blessed them and made them an example to His disciples—examples of innocence, humility, honesty and trust. And He says to us, as to the disciples, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."



Crisis Care Training International is a ministry of WEC International.

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