

SO YOUNG, SO LOST



by
Ron Hutchcraft

So Young, So Lost:

A Strategy for Impacting the Kids of Your Community

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How to Rescue Lost Children

Lifeguards are trained to drop everything to rescue those who are drowning. It's an amazing thing to see them go out with the focus of saving lives. That's exactly what Jesus Christ is summoning us to do—drop everything and do whatever it takes to help rescue children who are dying spiritually.

Matthew 18:1-5 says, "The disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me.'"

Jesus didn't say when those children become like adults then they can enter the kingdom of heaven. He said adults need to become like little children and have faith like a child.

Then Jesus says in Matthew 18:12-14, still talking about children, "If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is

happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." Many ministries today do the reverse—stay with the 99 and leave the 1 that has wandered away.

Think about some of the little ones that you drive by or are around all the time. Think about some of the children in your neighborhood, at the schools or preschools, and children playing out in the street or in the park. Put their faces in this verse. The Father in heaven is not willing that any of those little ones should be lost.

Three Mandates From the Heart of Jesus

Jesus calls us to go with the focus of sharing Christ with those who need His love. He wants us to make a difference in the young lives that are all around us. The Father in heaven is not willing that any of those little ones should be lost.

Let's discuss three mandates from the heart of Jesus that are all about children:

1. Children Really Matter

Jesus said you have to be like them to get into His Kingdom. They are VIPs to Jesus. Treat them with the value Jesus places on them.

Children instinctively know that they need someone bigger than they are, and a child knows they need answers, guidance, and someone to take care of them. Jesus said you can totally depend on a Savior who died on the cross for your sins.

According to George Barna's research, 75 percent of the people who ever come to Christ do so by the age of 18. That means when you go to a high school graduation, if a student walks across that platform without Christ in their heart, they will probably spend eternity without Him. Those little children in your neighborhood may live to be 80 years old, but their eternity may be settled before they are 18.

2. Children Are Lost

Parents don't see the monsters children see when they are little. The monsters in the closet aren't real, but children today are facing some monsters unlike any children have ever had to face in the history of this nation. There are five sentences that describe these millennial children.

Home really hurts.

Home is the place that is supposed to be safe, but for so many children it's not. They are dramatically affected by broken marriages, violence, and being left alone.

Worth is wounded.

If a child has unavailable parents, then they're not sure they are worth their parents' time. Maybe they are picked on and treated poorly at school. Another problem is that almost 40 percent of girls in junior high are on a

diet because they are obsessed with their appearance. They wonder if they're worth anything.

Childhood is short.

Many children are in a hurry to grow up. What they wear, what they watch and listen to, and what they spend their time doing isn't what a child their age should be doing. They only get to be that age once.

Innocence dies young.

Almost one third of eighth graders today have already used an illegal drug and one fourth have been drunk at least once. That doesn't just suddenly blossom in junior high. It's been coming since they were a child, and it's a destructive culture.

Hardness comes soon.

The season of a soft heart is shorter than it has ever been. At earlier and earlier ages, people put a closed sign on their heart and Jesus isn't going to get in because their heart is getting harder sooner.

3. Children Must Be Rescued

When a child gets lost, they usually don't find safety themselves; someone has to go looking for them.

Nehemiah was a man who made a difference for his generation. God took his broken heart and put in his heart a dream and a plan to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem. That picture of the city of Jerusalem is a picture of the children you live around. The walls are

down that should be used to protect them— family, faith, and hope about the future. Anything can get into their lives and everything does.

God is looking for someone who will say, "God, break my heart. Help me see what You see and feel when You look at the children in our neighborhood and in our city." Be the one on your knees in the throne room of God every day praying by name for those children. Do you see who decides this battle? It's not the general on the field; it's the prayer warrior on the hill who decides the outcome.

Eight Imperatives To Rescue Spiritually Dying Children

1. Leave the Walls of Your Church

Don't be content to reach for Christ just the children who are already there. Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." We want the ones who will come where we are, but Jesus said you can't reach the others if you don't seek them.

You've got to go where they are. You need to be at the school or at the playground where the children are. It's what our Lord did. He didn't just have rallies at the synagogue. He went out on the street, to the beach, the wedding, and the party. He went where the lost people were. Start a ministry outside the walls of your church, just as the shepherd leaves the fold and goes out to look for the lost sheep.

Rescuers, by their very nature, always leave where it's comfortable. Have you ever heard of

a fireman that rescued anybody while he sat comfortably in the firehouse? Have you ever heard of a lifeguard that rescued anybody while he sat comfortably in his chair? You can't rescue anybody unless you leave where it's safe and comfortable, and go where it might be dangerous.

Jesus left the ultimate comfort of heaven to go to a cross and die for us. Leave the walls of your church if you're going to reach the children who need you the most, because the children who need you the most aren't in those walls.

2. Build a Team

Instead of just working with the people in our churches, it's time we come together in community-wide alliances to make a difference together that we could never make separately. We're all so worried about our turf when our turf doesn't matter at all.

When the building blew up in Oklahoma City, did anybody care if the firemen, the police, or the military police did the rescue? It didn't matter, because they were all working together. Turf doesn't matter when people are dying and we're losing a generation. No one should be sitting, guarding their turf. Children are dying.

It's time we pull our separate fingers together and make a fist in the enemy's face and take back some prisoners. Build a team across church lines of people who all have the same broken heart for the spiritually dying children in your community.

3. Focus on Jesus

Don't give them a denomination, a church, a religion, or the theology. Do what Paul did. 1

Corinthians 2:2 says, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Just stick to Jesus. Don't get off into all the religious stuff and all the things that divide us. Stick to Jesus and His cross. Tell them the stories of Jesus found in the Gospels.

Who knows what they really know about Jesus. You need to start with the very basics of who He is and what He did for them. Tell them how He treats people and what happens to people who trust Him with their life. Tell them about Jesus.

Take a child by the hand and give them a walk up Skull Hill. Take them to the hill where Jesus died for them. Take them to the foot of the cross and let them stand there for once in their life with their young, still soft heart. Let them see and know how much God loves them. Take them up Skull Hill. Keep the focus on Jesus.

4. Keep It Simple

Communicate the Gospel to them in non-religious language. The words "accept Christ," "receive Christ," "saved," "believe," "sin," "repent," and "born again" are wonderful Christianese words, but the people that need us the most don't speak that language. Speak to them about Jesus in a way that they can understand because what you have to say is very important.

Will you be a missionary? Missionaries go to language school just to learn how to share the love of Christ in the language of the people they're reaching. We also need to do that in America in a post-Christian world. We've got to! Remember to keep it simple in plain, non-

religious language and use a lot of examples that children will understand.

5. Treat Them Special

You can assume that they may feel unimportant or invaluable. They need to know that God made everyone special and that they are very important to God.

There are many children who have been treated very poorly and we need to reach out and share God's love with them. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." This is true of every child in your neighborhood. They need to know they are a masterpiece creation of God.

They've been torn down enough, so build them up, compliment, and praise them. Tell them what's good about them. Children have been called stupid, they've been called lazy, and they've been called all kinds of names. Don't let them become the names that they're called. Call them some names that will build them up. Be there on their special days. Notice when they're sick. Make a big deal out of their birthday. Treat them special.

6. Make It Exciting

Today's children are the products of a powerful, media culture. They are used to an exciting package. Your goal isn't to try to match that. But always share the story of Jesus in an exciting package.

Children today are no longer linear learners; they are mosaic learners. They don't get their truth in blocks of information; they get it in bursts. To present the truth of Jesus Christ in an

exciting way, you're going to have to keep changing the pace, using videos, music, and games.

Meet in different locations when you're working with children. Move around and have interaction with them. Ask some of the children to get up in front to talk about something. Maybe even quiz them on occasion about what they've learned.

Get some help from some of those teenagers who need to get out of the stands and into the game. The younger children look up to them. They might be sitting in the youth group bored out of their minds. Say, "Come down here with these children and you won't be bored anymore." The teenagers need a mission and the children need the interaction with teenagers. Make it exciting!

7. Encourage the Children To Have a Mission

They should be encouraged to go make a difference and not think that their goal is just to survive. Say, "You may be the only one in your class who smiles at somebody today. You may be the only one who encourages somebody today. You may be the only one who gives somebody a compliment today. You may be the only one in that classroom who doesn't blow up when they're angry. You may be the only one who respects their parents. You may be the only one who tells the truth instead of a lie and thinks it's important to tell the truth. You may be the only person who treats people gently instead of harshly. Go make a difference!"

We've got to teach our children not to underestimate the power they have to make a

difference. They are the best person to reach their friends. Their maturity is even accelerating in our culture. If their maturity is accelerating, let's capture that for Christ.

Today's children are bold. They're used to music and media that tells it like it is; that's straight talk, straight shooting. Capture that for Jesus Christ. Children don't have the inhibitions about telling their friends about Jesus that we all have. So why don't we harness that for Christ?

When they're going to go someplace, many want a special friend to go with them. Why don't we say to our Christian children, "You're going to the most special place in all the universe—heaven. Do you want your friend Megan there with you? Why don't you take your friend with you to the greatest place you're going to go? Let's see what we can do to get Megan to go to heaven with you." Let's give them a mission.

8. Give Them Love

Do you have the ability to change a child's life? It all depends on whether you have the ability to make a child feel really important when they're with you. Have you ever been with a person who looked you in the eye and listened to you, and were so intense when they were with you, that they made you feel like you were the only person on the planet for those couple of minutes? Do you do that with a child?

If you have the ability to make a child feel like they're the only person in the world right now, you can be a life changer. One of the ways you give them love is to get outside your role. They don't just need to see you in your meeting with your Bible; they need to see you out in their

world somewhere. Do you know how many children are running around where you live? Whoever loves them first will have their life. Hopefully it will be a friend of Jesus. It may be you.

The Time Is Now

Jesus Christ is summoning us to drop everything and do whatever it takes to rescue children who are dying spiritually. This is not about a profession, but a passion...a life-or-death

rescue. We must ask the Lord to break our heart and give us a burden and a passion to take as many children to heaven with us as we can—whatever it takes and whatever it costs.

Begin today an all-out effort to rescue children dying spiritually around you. Help save some children who will die spiritually without your help. He's waiting for you now, and He's summoning you to join Him in this rescue effort for those who are so young and so lost.

About Ron Hutchcraft

Ron Hutchcraft is a passionate, contemporary evangelist, speaker, author, and radio host. As President of Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, Ron and his team specialize in developing, authentic, relevant, and creative tools to reach people with the message of Jesus.

Ron is committed to communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost in their language and to motivating and equipping believers to communicate Christ to the lost in their world. Mr. Hutchcraft is also involved in work with Native Americans, and is founder of the "On Eagles' Wings" Native leadership program.

Rev. Hutchcraft frequently speaks in partnership with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Ron was honored as Moody Bible Institute's Alumnus of the Year for 1997.

Ron's closest partner in life and work is his wife, Karen. They are the parents of three grown children and have nine grandchildren.

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