

Your Sons and Daughters Shall Prophecy!

Most children's ministries focus on educating kids with Bible facts. This is the wrong approach if we want to see our kids walk in the power of the Spirit.

Kids today are starved for supernatural reality. They are not just open to spiritual power; they long for it!

The church is faced with a media-savvy generation raised on action-packed superhero blockbusters such as The Hulk, X-Men and The Terminator. Kids have energy to burn, and they are looking for action, for something to do. They hunger for a sense of adventure and meaning in life.

Unfortunately, our response often is to fill our programs with games and activities that stave off boredom but rob them of real encounters with the living God.

As publisher of CharismaLife—a nondenominational, evangelical Christian publishing group that's part of Strang Communications Co., publisher of Charisma—I know that God is willing to use our kids to show His awesome power, to prophesy, to pray for and receive healing, to hear His voice, and to share His gospel. And I know that most Christian parents and children's ministry leaders agree with me.

We believe in miracles—and we want our children to expect God to perform them. But if we're honest, most of us feel fairly powerless at knowing how to introduce supernatural living to our kids.

It is for this reason that we started publishing children's Sunday school curriculum 12 years ago. We wanted to provide churches with the tools they need to help children experience the power of God.

Though the lion's share of responsibility to train our kids in the way they should go rests squarely on the shoulders of parents (see Prov. 6:22), more and more Christians are recognizing the strategic role churches play in providing Holy Spirit-led training to release children into their divine destinies.

But how do we introduce children to the life of the Spirit in a way they can relate to, a way that's compelling, without trying so hard to be relevant that we water down the gospel? In church, how do we help children develop a living faith that expects God to move instead of simply entertaining them?

Most children's church programs put the emphasis on imparting information to children—educating them with Bible facts. But kids want to know that the stuff they are taught in church really works.

We've learned that children must be taught spiritual truth in an engaging and fun way (see related article on page 56). They must be given opportunities to encounter God for themselves, both in the classroom and at home. Our answer to these truths is KIDS Church: The Next Generation, an all-new multimedia children's ministry resource developed during the last 10 years with Bill Wilson, children's ministry pioneer and founder of Metro Ministries International in Brooklyn, New York.

Karen Stefacek, a project manager with The Next Generation, shares that it's common for kids in her children's ministry to hear the Holy Spirit speaking with them.

"We regularly take time during praise and worship to quietly wait for God to speak to our hearts," she explains.

"On one occasion, a young girl named Halia came up to the platform. After whispering her message in my ear, she shared with everyone that God had told her we didn't need to be afraid because He was always with us. You could see the response in the eyes of others—her 'word' had clearly touched young hearts in a personal way."

Unquestionably, churches today must step up to the plate and provide innovative and anointed ministry for children. Here are some key principles I've learned both as a father of three sons and as a children's ministry director at two churches.

Raise your expectation level. Have you fallen into the trap of not really expecting God to work through or use your kids—or you? As a children's ministry leader I can easily become so focused on teaching kids about all "the good stuff" we read about in the Bible that I forget He might still want to do those things today.

Let's ask the Holy Spirit to renew our expectation that God can and will flow through our children in power. Let's create opportunities for them to ask and expect God to show up in a big way.

In The Next Generation, we built in specific ministry time for kids to encounter God in real and personal ways. Too often our

days and our church programs are so filled with activities that we don't allow for the Holy Spirit to speak clearly to our children's hearts. But we need to use programs that encourage kids to believe God will do awesome deeds.

During a kid's camp in Redding, Pennsylvania, a 7-year-old girl with a scratchy voice came up to Tim Carpenter, another editor with The Next Generation project, and asked for prayer. Instead of praying for her himself, Tim asked a few of the other kids to lay hands on her in the name of Jesus.

"There was no apparent change on the outside to her scratchy voice, which I had assumed was a cold," Tim says. "But the next day, the girl's grandmother came running up to me with tears in her eyes.

"Turns out, it wasn't a cold. The girl had a growth in her throat and doctors had accidentally slit her esophagus, damaging her voice permanently. When the little girl woke up the next morning after prayer, she could speak perfectly!"

Let's teach kids that signs and wonders are a normal and expected part of living as a believer.

Allow kids to minister. This idea flows from the first. If we expect God to use our kids, then we need to put them in situations in which they can be used.

Too many of us have gotten comfortable with what I call "playing church." The Bible says true religion is helping widows and orphans (see James 1:27). In other words, we need to do more than simply teach kids about the ways they can serve, the ways they can pray, the ways they can evangelize.

We need to give them opportunities to actually do it—to serve in a homeless shelter, to participate in prayer walks, to invite friends to church, to explain what being born again actually means in words their friends can understand.

While developing The Next Generation curriculum program, we worked hard at finding creative ways to explain spiritual truth in ways that would connect with today's culture. We do this with object lessons, drama presentations, videos and hands-on activities.

We also provide opportunities for kids to put into practice what they've learned. We let them experiment.

Do you remember when you were in biology class in college? You had to go to a huge auditorium for boring lectures. But you also got to go to a lab, in which you had an opportunity to dissect things and see firsthand the organ systems you heard about (assuming you were awake) in the lecture hall.

Truth without experience produces intellectualism. Experience without truth produces fanaticism. We want our kids to be both grounded in the knowledge of the truth and experienced in applying it to their lives.

Give kids mission and purpose. The Bible makes it clear that each of us was created with a divine road map already laid out for us to follow. Psalm 139:16 says that God made plans for us and wrote them in His book before we were even born. Jeremiah 1:5 says that before we were born God set us apart for special works.

And in the New Testament, Jesus gives us this challenge: If we

make it our intent to seek God's will for our lives, if we put His kingdom first, then everything else we need in life will fall into place (see Matt. 6:33).

Kids are starving for relevance, for meaning and purpose. Jesus offers them the chance to live nobly, to live their lives with a sense of destiny and purpose. Let's show them how.

Help kids fall in love with Jesus. I love being in God's presence. To me there is no greater thrill than being caught up in worship, experiencing moments during which the Spirit of God moves over me and brings new vision, direction and peace.

It's easy to assume that encountering God's presence in this way is strictly an adult thing, but it's not. I've watched kids have powerful encounters with God.

In one service, I was teaching a group about hearing God's voice. We broke the children into small groups and challenged them to spend time being quiet before God and listening to the still, small voice of the Spirit. After the meeting a little girl named Alyssa came up behind me and tugged on my pants leg.

"Mr. Dave," she said. I turned toward her to see a beaming grin. "I felt God hug me!" God's presence can do that!

Falling in love with Jesus is not something kids do because you tell them to. I'm convinced that no amount of lecture or sermonizing by parents or church workers will accomplish the task. If it were otherwise, my sons would be spiritual giants by now.

Loving God's presence comes by being in God's presence. The desire to be in God's presence comes by watching others find joy there.

Do your kids watch you dance with delight before the Lord? Do they see you get up early so you can spend time on your knees in prayer? Do they catch you coming late to the dinner table because you wanted to finish one more chapter in your Bible reading? This type of love is more caught than taught.

As a parent you hold both the responsibility and the key to training your child in the way he or she is called to go. Your church leadership needs to tag-team with you to provide programs that encourage these principles.

Let's stop lamenting the lack of faith and experience our society tends to produce. Let's rededicate ourselves instead to training this next generation to be mighty for God, to channel their energy and effort toward seeing God's kingdom established here as it is in heaven.

Reaching the Next Generation

A new ministry resource helps kids experience God's power.

Kids today want more than facts. They want encounters with a real and living God. One resource being used by churches to train kids for living and ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit is KIDS Church: The Next Generation. This new program

has been more than 10 years in the making and began with Bill Wilson of Metro Ministries International.

If you've been a reader of Charisma for a while, you likely are familiar with Wilson—the founder of Metro Ministries International in Brooklyn, New York. He left a comfortable children's pastorate more than 25 years ago to reach unwanted children in the New York borough. Those humble beginnings have given rise to Wilson and his team now ministering weekly to 20,000 kids in the city, while influencing children's ministries worldwide.

The Next Generation adapts the concepts of children's ministry Wilson has developed and applies them to the changing formats churches use today to reach kids with the gospel.

Equally important, The Next Generation is a tool by which kids experience the power of God in personal ways.

With The Next Generation, children not only are taught spiritual truth in an engaging and fun way, but they also are given opportunities to actually encounter God for themselves, in the classroom and at home.

The Next Generation was designed to be highly flexible so that churches of almost any size or format could use it effectively. And the program works—whether the children are together in worship services or divided into age-appropriate classroom services, or a combination of the two.

Keys to the success of The Next Generation include:

A highly creative format and the use of multimedia. Kids are not lectured to or forced to sit through tedious crafts that likely will not make it out of the church parking lot, much less into the home.

From start to finish, kids with short attention spans are grabbed with high-energy ministry. The Next Generation makes use of a praise and worship DVD that includes hand motions and onscreen words, object lessons that explain spiritual truth, and vibrantly illustrated sermons with full-color artwork that help Bible truth make sense within today's culture.

"I'm amazed at how well our kids have responded to this program. Our attendance is up and last week three kids got saved," says Debby Maxwell, the children's ministry coordinator at Evangel Assembly of God in Orlando, Florida.

A commitment to involving kids in ministry. The Next Generation promotes the involvement of kids in ministry, helping them to embrace the spiritual truths being taught and apply them in their own lives.

"Too often curriculum programs focus on giving kids good information rather than allowing them to experience God in a real and life-changing way," says Tim Carpenter, project editor of The Next Generation. "This is definitely not your grandma's curriculum."

To obtain a free sample lesson for your church, or to order KIDS Church: The Next Generation, call (800) 451-4598 or visit CharismaLife at on the Web.

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