JUST A MINUTE

INDIVIDUAL STUDY GUIDE
Introduction

Welcome to the Individual Study Guide for Just a Minute

Dr. Wess Stafford demonstrates powerfully in Just a Minute how every adult has opportunities to make a profound impact in a child’s life. It only takes a moment—an apt word, a gentle encouragement, or a caring gesture at a crucial time—to set a child on course for a promising future, secure in the knowledge that they are loved by God. To do this, we must become aware of the children around us and be willing to take advantage of the divine appointments God arranges between us and children in need.

Just a Minute is a collection of true stories from a range of contributors, including the author, notable Christian leaders, and children served through the ministry of Compassion International, about how caring adults shaped their lives in “just a minute.” Therefore, we recommend that you have access to a copy of the book as you work through the study guide. If one is not easily available locally, you can order it online from Compassion at www.compassion.com.

You may not read Just a Minute in order from cover to cover. You might choose to skip around, beginning with the sections that interest you most. For this reason, the study guide is designed to be used however suits you best. Regardless, we recommend you read the section of the book that corresponds to each study session before you work through the questions and action points.

Tips for Using This Guide:

1. We recommend that you journal your responses to the questions you choose to reflect on in this guide.

2. The questions are designed for open-ended responses. It’s far more important that you think about the content of the book and study guide than that you arrive at “the right answer.”

3. Feel free to focus on the questions you find most challenging or compelling and skip others that feel less relevant to you.

4. At any point in the study, visit www.compassion.com/childadvocacy for additional information or resources.

Every session has three components:

1. Scripture—Each study session is based in Scripture. Sometimes this is one or more of the Scriptures used in the corresponding chapter of Just a Minute.

2. Questions for Reflection—This section helps you think through why and/or how to apply the theme of a section into your everyday life.

3. Take Action—Every session ends with suggestions for action.
Section 1: A Moment for Rescue

“[Children] are vulnerable to everything dangerous around them. They aren’t aware of the hazards on all sides. Looking out for them should be our job. If a child is around, we should be on high alert, not just to not harm them, but to rescue them when needed and to advance them lovingly in any way we can” (Just a Minute, 3).

One way we can make a difference in the life of a child is by reaching out to him or her during a time of distress. Looking after the defenseless is not simply a kind thing to do. It is also an important biblical command.

Scripture: James 1:27 (NIV)

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

This verse comes at the end of a discussion about the nature of “true religion.” For James, the evidence of true religion is action that results in caring for the defenseless. Read the verse in its context (James 1:19-27). Then reflect on the following questions.

Reflect


2. Think about the children you encounter regularly in your church, work, or neighborhood. What kind of “distress” do they experience from which they may need to be rescued? Think broadly.

What keeps you from intervening in the life of a child who you know is in distress?

Take Action

“Deep within the spirit of all of us,” Stafford writes, “resides an amazing hero just waiting for the moment, for the curtains of life to open so we can walk out onto the stage and do the right thing that will make all the difference” (33). Here are a few ideas of ways you can begin to reach out to children in distress, to make the first steps toward being a hero in some child’s life.

1. Make a commitment to notice the children around you. Smile at a child today. Say hello at the grocery store. Develop the habit of seeing children.

2. Take the time in the next week to ask a child how you can pray for him or her. You might be surprised by their candor.

3. Make a list of children you know are in distress—financially, experiencing divorce, the loss of a parent—and commit to pray for them this week.
Section 2: A Moment to Build Self-Worth

“A child’s sense of self-worth is a foundation block upon which much of the rest of life rests. ... This is a favorite playground of Satan. ... [Satan] has been relentless in warping the self-image of children, telling them lies about who they are and what they are worth. It is up to us to set the record straight.” (Just a Minute, 62-63)

Children learn to view themselves largely in terms of how adults view them. If adults communicate to a child that she is bothersome and unimportant, she will likely believe them. If, however, she is told she is valuable and loved, she has a greater chance of recognizing her value in God’s eyes.

Scripture: Matthew 18:3-5 (NIV)

“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become 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 responds with these words when his disciples ask him, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (18:1). This is a remarkable claim. It makes clear that children are valuable in the eyes of God. In fact, it implies adults have something to learn from children regarding how to relate to God through Jesus Christ!

Reflect

1. Why do you think Jesus considers children “greatest in the kingdom of heaven”? What is it about them? Their accomplishments, talents, or behavior? Something else?

2. In what do you tend to identify the value of children? In their accomplishments, talents, or behavior? Something else?

3. How might it affect a child’s relationship with God if they feel worthless and unworthy to the adults in their life? What if they feel valuable and loved?

Take Action

1. Children are unlikely to know they are the model of faithfulness in the kingdom of God unless someone tells them! Below are a few suggestions for fostering the self-worth of the children in your life.

2. Think of a time in your life an adult took time to affirm your significance in their eyes or in the eyes of God. How did that make you feel?

3. Reflect on Matthew 18:3—What can you learn from the example of children about faith in Christ?

Take a moment to write a note to a child in your life that lifts them up. Offer praise for an accomplishment or encourage them during a difficult time.
SECTION 3: A Moment to Form Character

“If we will seize our responsibility to lovingly shape [children’s] values and character, we can still affect the future.” (Just a Minute, 68)

Children are being formed at every moment by the influences around them, whether positive or negative. Instilling Christian character and forming virtue takes intentional effort. This may be one of the more demanding ways we are called to invest in the lives of children.

SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7 (NIV)

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

When God gave His commandments to the Israelites, He made it clear how His Law was to be transmitted to the younger generations. Israelite children would learn how to follow God’s path by the instruction and example of the adults in their community. This instruction wasn’t only (or even primarily) to take place in a classroom but “when you sit at home and when you walk along the road” that is, at every opportunity in day-to-day life.

REFLECT

1. What can you learn about God “when you sit at home and when you walk along the road” that you cannot learn about Him in church or in a classroom?

2. Identify a time an adult taught you an important lesson about Christian character. What makes this experience memorable?

3. Stafford identifies several virtues in section 3 that children need us to instill in them: integrity, compassion, patience, purity, true beauty, gratitude, generosity, and kindness. What others can you identify?

TAKE ACTION

1. As the stories in this section of Just a Minute illustrate, lessons about character and virtue are often communicated most powerfully in real-life situations. The following action points will help you begin to think about how you can influence the formation of a child’s character.

2. List all the places where you have the chance to model Christian character to children (sports team, classroom, work environment, church, etc.).

3. When you see a child do the right thing—sharing a toy, helping an elderly person carry groceries—let him know you were watching and praise him for it.

4. When you see a child make a mistake, encourage her to learn from the mistake and to do better the next time rather than to give up.
**Section 4: A Moment to Discover Talent**

“Hidden talent and secret abilities...are like gemstones brought to the surface, in a minute, by sensitive, caring people who do not let the moment pass without word-and-deed heroics.” *(Just a Minute, 111)*

Many people believe they have nothing to offer—no talents or special abilities—because no one affirmed them in their pursuits as a child. Sometimes discovering a talent can lead to a career; sometimes a talent becomes a way to serve Christ in His church. Helping a child identify her talents or abilities can open doors to a new world of Christian service and fulfillment.

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NIV)**

“Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are different activities, but the same God activates each gift in each person. A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial.”

**Reflect:**
1. When do you think a person receives a spiritual gift and talent—as a child or as an adult?
2. Do you believe God gives everyone a talent, as well as a spiritual gift?
3. Why does God give different people different gifts (the rest of 1 Corinthians 12 might provide helpful information)?

**Take Action**
1. It is often difficult to identify our own gifts. Friends and family, trusted adults, can help a child identify what special gift or talent he or she might have with which to serve and encourage others.
2. Write a child a special note of praise for something they do well—whether a talent (singing, writing, art, etc.) or a gift (compassion, encouragement, etc.).
3. Consider enlisting a child with an appropriate gift or talent to help you in a project for which they might be specially suited.
4. Write about a childhood experience in which an adult praised you for a gift or talent. How did that make you feel? What have been the consequences of that encouragement?
Section 5: A Moment to Awaken the Spirit

“The idea that kids are too young or too distracted to ‘get it’ is a religious falsehood. The Master made time for children. He took their spiritual hunger seriously. So must we.” (Becky in Just a Minute, 119)

It is easy to underestimate the spiritual capacity of children. The opportunity to awaken a child’s spirit is one we don’t want to miss.

Scripture: Luke 18:15-17 (NIV)

“People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘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.’”

Reflect:

1. What do you think Jesus means when He says “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”?
2. How “spiritual” do you believe children can be? Does age limit a child’s ability to understand, embrace, and live out spiritual truth?
3. Do you agree with Wess Stafford that “children have a built-in desire” to seek Jesus? Why or why not?

Take Action

No doubt wisdom comes with age and experience. But Jesus is clear that children have something important to offer the Christian community. Below are a few suggestions for nurturing the spirit of a child in your life.

1. Invite a child to serve with you—visiting a shut-in, volunteering at a relief ministry, or participating in a service project.
2. Do you know a young person who is involved in harmful behavior? Send them a note to let them know you are praying for them.
3. Ask a child what she thought of the pastor’s sermon (or of the Sunday school lesson). You might be surprised by the depth of her observation. If so, tell her.
**Section 6: A Moment to Stretch the Mind**

“The cultivation of young minds is central to history, for good or evil. While the overall process is long, the power to influence a child’s intelligence can bear fruit in just a minute.” *(Just a Minute, 143)*

Cultivating the mind of a child is a lot like instilling self-esteem or encouraging a talent. It is a matter, first and foremost, of giving a child the confidence to believe he has something to contribute to the world around him. Although Scripture does not speak directly to encouraging the intellectual life of children, the Bible is clear that God gives people special knowledge and skills. If we are sensitive to the children around us, we can help them identify these special gifts and encourage them to develop them.

**Scripture: Exodus 31:2-5 (NIV)**

“See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills...”

**Reflect:**

1. Can we infer from the gifting of Bezalel that God equips all people with special abilities for His service? Why or why not?

2. Bezalel had a most significant job: his expertise was used for building the tabernacle in which God dwelt among His people (see Exodus 30 and 31). How does God use people’s knowledge and talents today for His purposes?

3. Can you remember a time when an adult made you feel unintelligent? How did that feel? Can you remember a time when an adult encouraged you intellectually? How did that feel?

**Take Action:**

1. It can only take a moment to stretch a child’s mind—a moment when curiosity is encouraged, insight is praised, or hard work is affirmed.

2. Consider working with an after-school or tutoring program in a local elementary school.

3. Do you know a child who shares an interest in something you are particularly knowledgeable about (animals or airplanes or history, for example). Gift them a book as a gift and make a date to discuss it.

4. Reflect on a time when an adult encouraged your intellect as a child. What did that experience do for you? What have been the consequences? How might you replicate that experience with a child in your life?
SECTION 7: A Moment to Realize One’s Calling

“A life vocation can be crystallized by a moment of kindness, love, and encouragement.”
(Just a Minute, 168)

Very often, a child’s vision of what “I’m going to be when I grow up” will change many times during her life. Other times, though, an apt word or a timely encouragement can help clarify a child’s vocational calling. If we are sensitive to the opportunities around us, we are sure to find times when we can help a child recognize what makes her unique and what kind of work she might be uniquely suited for.

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 139:13 (NIV)

“For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb.”

REFLECT:
1. What does Psalm 139:13 say to you about the relationship between God and His children?
2. If God specially creates every child, then He can create them each with a special calling and purpose. How early in life do you think this special calling can be evident?
3. Did you receive confirmation in your calling or vocation as a child? What did that confirmation mean to you?

TAKE ACTION:
For Wess Stafford, his sense of calling came from his father’s confirmation that Wess had a tender and compassionate heart from a very young age. It may be that we can shape a child’s calling by identifying important character or personality traits.

1. This week, take the time to praise a child for a personal quality or character trait.
2. Reflect on your own vocation. How did the adults in your life help shape your sense of calling? Would you have liked more direction than you received?
3. Pray for the opportunity to encourage a child in his or her vocational pursuits.