Welcome

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 he or she is loved by God.

This resource is designed for pastors who want to use Just a Minute as inspiration for a sermon. Perhaps you want to introduce a focus on ministry to children with a sermon on the subject. Perhaps you want to host something like a Compassion Sunday that introduces your congregation to the ministry of Compassion International (official resources for planning a Compassion Sunday are available online at www.compassionsunday.com). Whatever your goals, this resource is intended to help you develop the central biblical theme of Just a Minute into a sermon outline, using stories from the book as illustrations.

THE BIG IDEA

Children hold a special place in God’s redemptive plan. While it is sometimes easy to underestimate the spiritual capacity of children, Jesus reminds us the kingdom of God “belongs to such as these.”

Consider this quote from Becky in Just a Minute (pg. 119) as a way of introducing the theme: “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.”

SCRIPTURE

1. Teaching Point 1: In his teaching about the kingdom of God, Jesus holds forth children as the model of faith.
   - See Luke 18:15-17
   - 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.”

2. Teaching Point 2: There are two ways we can respond to children.
   - Like the disciples, we can hinder a child’s spiritual growth. We can do this actively, by harming a child, though this is probably less likely. More often, we can hinder a child’s spiritual growth by underestimating their hunger for Jesus.
   - Consider telling the first half of Becky’s story as an illustration of this response. It begins on page 117 (“As I grew up in the early 1960s in Southern California...); a good place to stop is with this line on page 118: “The raised hand of a little girl had gone totally unnoticed, as if I were invisible.”
   - Jesus has harsh words for those who respond to Jesus in this way.
• Matthew 18:6: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

• A better way to respond is to welcome children by inviting them to join you on the Christian journey. After all, children are the model disciples!

• Matthew 18:3-5 (c.f. Mark 9:35-37): “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.”

• At this point, consider telling the rest of Becky’s story, as an illustration of this better response. It begins on page 118 (“But as the disappointment subsided...”) and ends on page 119 (“The idea that kids are too young or to distracted...”).

3. **Teaching Point 3:** Jesus has given His church the responsibility of raising children up in the faith.

• When God gave the Israelites His commandments and blessings, He made it clear that the adults were responsible for passing on His Word to the children in their daily life.

• Deuteronomy 6:6-7: “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.”

**ILLUSTRATIONS**

Encouraging children in their spiritual formation, helping to shape them into the young men and women Jesus wants them to become, may seem like a daunting task. Fortunately, all of us can make a lasting difference in a child’s life with “just a minute.” A kind word, a gentle correction, a timely compliment, can set a child on course for a bright future.

It could be powerful to illustrate with two or three of the following. Of course any story from the book would work. Here are some suggestions of how to use them:

• It takes *just a minute* to rescue a child from danger. The child we rescue may make an enormous impact for the kingdom of God. (“Plucked from the Burning,” 25-26)

• It takes *just a minute* to give a child comfort and self-worth. (“The Wave Game,” 39-41)

• It takes *just a minute* to instill in a child Christian character. (“Owning Up to the Truth,” 70-71)

• It takes *just a minute* to help a child discover a talent they may use in Christ’s service. (“Something’s Missing,” 103-104)

• It takes *just a minute* to influence the future of a child’s faith—for good or for ill. (“A Tale of Two Blunders,” 123-124)

• It takes *just a minute* to stretch a child’s mind and give them hope. (“Nouns and Adverbs,” 147-148)

• It takes *just a minute* to help a child find his or her calling. (“The Olive Seedling,” 171-172)

While raising a child up in the faith takes a lifetime, these stories illustrate it takes “*just a minute*” to welcome a child in Jesus’ name. The most important first step is to open our eyes to the divine appointments God provides between all of us and the children in our lives.