

# THE 4/14 WINDOW: AGE OF OPPORTUNITY

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## Introduction

The future of individuals and nations are shaped in a crucial 10-year period between the ages of 4 and 14. Dr. Luis Bush and others are calling this the 4/14 Window – Age of Opportunity. Healthy physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual growth is either established or stunted during that crucial decade. Up to 85% of people in all cultures who make decisions to follow Christ will do during that 4/14 Window of opportunity.

There is a new movement across the world to reach and transform this important age group, and mobilize them to themselves can be agents of transformation throughout the world. The vision is to maximize their transformational impact while they are young, and mobilize them for continuing impact for the rest of their lives. Such a vision requires strategic global thinking and action to creatively deploy this generation.

Christian Institutions of all types, including churches, mission agencies, seminaries and theological institutions around the world are embracing this vision. There is a movement to create a new mindset in the future church leadership of the importance of the 4/14ers. And, there is a new effort to raise awareness and provide high-level training programs to holistically care for this group, and train and equip them to use their energy and gifts to transform the world.

Equipping Christian workers to care holistically for the 4/14ers and to view and challenge them as a potent force for transformation may be the single greatest challenge and opportunity for the Church in the coming decade. Christians must approach this, not as a new fad or diversion from other worthwhile training, but as the best way to achieve what they have already set out to do – equip the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.

## I. Why should we care about the “4/14ers?”

### A. For Real-World Practical Reasons:

- ◆ **Because they are so many.** Almost one-fourth of the world’s population – nearly 1.2 billion people – is under the age of fifteen. People under the age of 15 make up over 1/3 of the population in some countries.
- ◆ **Because the 4/14ers are suffering.** Over 27,000 children under the age of five will die today, and die every day – mostly from easily preventable causes. Untold millions more suffer from poverty, malnutrition, war and conflict, and other miseries.
- ◆ **Because the 4/14ers are unwanted.** At least 100,000,000 children and youths live on the streets. Each one of those children represents a failure on the part of some adult to provide care, nurture and a safe haven.

- ◆ **Because the 4/14ers are neglected and exploited.** Perhaps as many as 10,000,000 children and young people are caught up in the sex industry worldwide.
- ◆ **Because A//Children are at Risk** The telling statistics of need and abuse are familiar to most of us. But the fact is that it is not just poor and exploited children who are at risk. In fact all children are at risk. Indeed millions are at risk from poverty. But millions more are at risk from prosperity! Many young people today have everything to live with, but nothing to live for.

## B. For Real-World Biblical and Theological Reasons

- ◆ **Christians should be concerned about the 4/14ers because God surely is!** Many people in seminaries today have a misconception that the Bible says very little about children. However, more and more people are now reading Scriptures with the 'child in the midst,<sup>1</sup> and finding not only that children are in fact very prominent in Scripture, but also very significant. There are in fact more than 1600 references to children, sons, daughters, parental relationships or otherwise alluding to children, many with profound theological import.
- ◆ **The Bible has high regard for the capacity of children to understand the faith.** The 4/14ers have great capacity to understand the faith, and great courage and effectiveness as they share their faith. Adults will fail the 4/14ers if they fail to equip them with the vision and opportunity to do something beyond themselves.
- ◆ **Children are both agents and resources in God's kingdom.** God often used children to accomplish His special tasks. Whether it is the young boy who parted with his lunch of 5 barley loaves and 2 small fishes (John 6:9) or Naaman's servant girl who pointed his master to the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 5:1-3) or Josiah who at the age of 8 became king and restored faith and righteousness in God's people (2 Kings 22:1-2), God uses children to accomplish His divine purposes in significant ways.
- ◆ **Children are signs of the kingdom.** Indeed, not only are children present and visible - they are at the very heart of what the Scriptures have to say about the Kingdom, about the Church and about Mission. God used a tiny baby as of "sign" of His incarnation and "a little child will lead" in the Messianic kingdom (Isaiah 11:6). Moreover, God has chosen the "foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:27). Should it surprise us all then that God should instruct adults to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves" (Proverbs 31:8)? The burden now is on adults to "lift up [our] hands to him" on behalf of suffering children (Lamentations 2:19)
- ◆ **Perhaps nothing upset Jesus more than "hindering" the children** (Matthew 18:5, 6). Genesis 21: 17 – 20 says that God heard the boy Ishmael crying, and we can be sure that He is still hearing the children crying today.

## C. For Real-World Strategic Reasons.

- ◆ **Because of the reality of the "4/14 Window"** As noted above, most people who will make a decision to follow Christ, will do so before the age of 18. Surveys in many countries and amongst many groups all over the world have consistently shown that most people who will ever come to Christ, will do so before their 18th birthday. Children and young people are receptive because "the clay is still soft." The truth is that a very small percentage of people in any culture or background will decide to follow Christ after the "clay of their lives" has become dry and hardened.

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<sup>1</sup> The "child in the midst" is also the inspiration and focal point of the emerging Child Theology Movement, headed by Dr. Keith White.

- ◆ **4/14ers are agents for Mission.** The ministry challenge is about encouraging and equipping the children and youth of the 4/14 Window to use their gifts and potential as agents for mission and for transforming the world. They represent an enormous untapped pool of influencers with sensitivity to the voice of God and willingness to do His bidding. We need to understand again that God can and does use children and young people – their prayers, their insights, their hands and their feet – in changing the hearts of mankind.
- ◆ **The 4/14ers thrive on challenges.** Children and young people love opportunities to gain skills and to prove themselves. Generally they respond with energy and enthusiasm when provided opportunities to test their abilities. When denied such challenges, they may become insecure and apathetic.<sup>i</sup> And what more exciting and life changing challenge could there be to learning about the world, sharing God’s love for the peoples of the world and transforming a generation?

Our prayer for the next ten years is to see a vast army of Christians will arise as leaders of organizations, child advocates and spokespersons and grassroots practitioners in every area of the world to transform and mobilize the 4/14 window.

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<sup>i</sup> William Damon, 128.