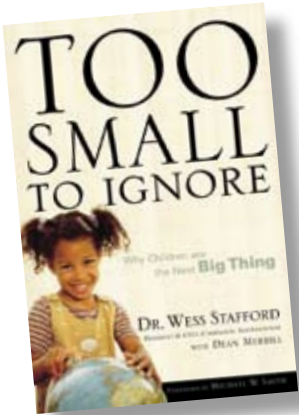


GROUP STUDY GUIDE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Group Study Guide for *Too Small to Ignore*.



Dr. Wess Stafford offers a truly unique look at children and their value in his book. It's a viewpoint worth thinking over — and talking about. This study guide was developed to offer groups of almost any size, in almost any setting, a way to carefully consider the importance of children in our world, and in God's sight.

Combined with Scriptures it references, *Too Small to Ignore* provides the basis for this 16-session group study and discussion guide. Therefore, we recommend that every group member have access to a copy of the book. If one is not easily available locally, you can order it online from at www.toosmalltoignore.com.

Each session in the guide covers the content of one chapter in *Too Small to Ignore*. You'll find that there are more than enough questions to fill up a one-hour session — or if your group is talkative, perhaps even a full evening.

Tips on Using This Guide

1. Although the sections from *Too Small to Ignore* for each session are covered again in the session itself, it will help the group enormously if each member reads the session's chapter before the group meets.
2. The questions are designed for open-ended discussion. It's more important that everyone think and talk about the content of the session than that the group members agree on every answer.
3. The group leader is not so much a teacher as a discussion facilitator. That means two things:
 - a. It's important for the leader to encourage every group member to participate in the discussion but not dominate it either.
 - b. It's important for the leader to watch the clock and keep the session moving along.
4. It's a good idea to pick out questions from every segment in the session you really want to discuss — and OK to skip some of the other questions in order to get to your selected questions in the time allotted for your sessions.
5. At any point in the study, you can visit www.compassion.com/childadvocacy for more information and resources.

Every session engages four key segments:

1. ***Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus** — Each session in this study guide highlights a theme from a chapter of Wess Stafford's book *Too Small to Ignore*. The study guide begins with the book's Introduction and continues in sequence, one chapter per session, for 16 sessions.
 2. **Session Scripture** — Each session's theme is based in Scripture — usually one or more of the same Scriptures used in the relevant chapter of *Too Small to Ignore*.
 3. **Making it Apply** — Participants engage in activity and discussion that will help them think through why and/or how to more fully integrate compassion and action into their everyday lives.
 4. **Take Action** — Every session ends with options for action in response to the session's information. Each session offers at least one idea for group members who want to journal in response to *Too Small to Ignore*.
- Before the first session, ask the group members to read the Introduction ("The Great Omission") of *Too Small to Ignore*.

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SESSION ONE: THE GREAT OMISSION

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: The Great Omission

“Every major movement in world history has recognized the strategic importance of mobilizing children. The Nazis had their Hitler Youth bands. The Chinese Communists had their Red Guards. The Taliban in Afghanistan had their madrasah schools instill extremism in the young. The great omission seems to be unique to Christians” (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 7).

Cultures, societies and even the Church tend to overlook children and their value. In his book’s Introduction, Wess Stafford calls this sad phenomenon “The Great Omission.” To launch the discussion of this session’s topic, open your session by reading the section of the Introduction that begins with the second paragraph on page five and goes through the third paragraph of page seven. Then spend a few moments discussing the following questions:

- a. Let’s respond first to the section we just read. What indicators (for example, church budget, specific conferences, dedicated leaders, child evangelism) among those we just read about spoke most to you about how the Church treats children?
- b. Give your church or local fellowship a grade on how they treat children. Upon what evidence did you give that grade?
- c. Overall, in your opinion, is the Church at large getting better at including children in the Great Commission or keeping children in The Great Omission?
- d. What affected or surprised you most as you read the entire Introduction this week? Why?

2. Session Scripture: Matthew 18:5

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.

This verse comes from one of the Gospel accounts when Jesus used a child to illustrate what Kingdom behavior looks like. The verse above can stand on its own but if you have time, please read Matthew 18:1-6 as a group to put the verse in context. Then talk over these questions:

- a. As best you can tell, what does it mean to “welcome” a child as the word is used by Jesus?
- b. In your own words, describe what Matthew 18:5 means.
- c. Let’s tie this passage back to *Too Small to Ignore*. In your opinion, what impact does The Great Omission of children have on our ability to really welcome them?
- d. As you see it, what happens to our impact for the Kingdom of God if we continue to practice The Great Omission?

3. Making it Apply

How do you help affirm the value of children? As Wess Stafford makes clear in the Introduction of *Too Small to Ignore*, it begins by seeing every child you encounter as a divine appointment. If you think about it, you can probably think of several adults from your childhood whose encouragement has stuck with you through the years. Keep those people in mind as you begin to talk over this set of questions.

- a. Which adults from your childhood do you remember as being especially encouraging to you? What was their relationship to you (relative, teacher, family friend, etc.)?



- b. Tell the group about one episode where the words and/or actions of an adult from your childhood made a lasting, positive impact on your life.
- c. What children and youth do you normally see in a week? What does it mean to see those young people as “divine appointments”?
- d. What can adults do to help ensure that the children they encounter do not become part of The Great Omission?

4. Take Action

The way we treat children is usually the biggest indicator of how much we value them. And, as Wess Stafford points out in the book, treating children well has more to do with investing kindness and attention in children than in showering them with material things. Talk through which of the following options are the best “fit” for you in everyday life — and please don’t hesitate to develop and share your own ideas.

- a. When you see a child do the right thing — sharing a toy, helping an elderly person carry groceries — let him or her know you saw the action and praise him or her for it.
- b. When a child demonstrates talent, say something positive to the child about it — or send a thank you note to the child for sharing that talent with others.
- c. When a child or young person makes a mistake, encourage the young person to learn from the mistake to do better the next time rather than to give up.
- d. Volunteer to coach a child’s athletic team or to teach in Sunday school.

This session’s Journal Activity: Spend some time writing about the three most positive things said to you, or done for you, by an adult when you were a child. You might also consider writing a note (either in your journal or as an actual piece to be mailed or e-mailed) to those adults, telling them the difference their encouragement made in your life.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter One (“Not Someday ... Today”) of *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION TWO: NOT SOMEDAY ... TODAY

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Recognize a Child's Present Value

“Too many of us tend to treat childhood as a preamble to actual life, a vulnerable period of time merely to be survived in order to get on with the real business of being a valid, contributing member of the human family. This is the mind-set that causes us to speak of children as “tomorrow’s world” or “the church’s future.” As noble as those phrases sound, they are all about pushing off the value of children to the Realm of Someday. Someday they will add value. Someday they will make a difference. Not today” (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 15).

Chapter 1 of *Too Small to Ignore* is all about the importance of recognizing a child’s *present* value, not just a child’s “someday” value. Read the above paragraph to the group, then read the section entitled “Baboons, Beware” as a group. Talk through the following questions:

- a. What do you think would have happened to village life in Nielle, the African village where Wess Stafford spent his childhood, had the children been treated as though they had nothing of importance to contribute?
- b. How did the adults in Nielle reinforce the value of children and youth in the life of the village?
- c. What lessons do you think adults in the West could learn from the adults of Nielle about the role of children in community life?
- d. How would you describe the difference between the way children in Nielle were allowed to contribute to community life and the way most children in Western nations are allowed to contribute to community life?

2. Session Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:34-36

But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by the hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.”

These verses mark a turning point in the story of David and Goliath. Until David referred to his successful experience as a shepherd, Israel itself wouldn’t let the young man face Goliath. How quickly we forget what children and youth can contribute today to make a positive difference for all of us! If time allows, the group might enjoy reviewing the whole Bible account of the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Continue the session by discussing:

- a. Imagine you’re Saul, listening to the young shepherd David go through his personal resume. At what point do you change your mind about letting David face Goliath — and why?
- b. What in this Bible story indicates that the adults around David were more concerned about keeping David in his place than in discovering what he had to contribute?
- c. In your own words, describe what David had to contribute in the fight against Goliath that the adults around him didn’t have.
- d. Using the story of David and Goliath as an example, what attitudes and actions should adults use to discover what children have to contribute?

3. Making it Apply

In the chapter for today's session, Wess Stafford describes the frustration of youth and children who feel as though they've been "placed on a shelf" by adults who don't understand how much young people want to make a difference *today*, not just "someday." Think about your own experience with this dynamic as a child, and now as an adult, as you talk through the questions that follow:

- a. Tell the group about one childhood experience where you felt as though you had something to contribute but weren't allowed to. What did you think and feel while you were in that situation?
- b. How does your local church or fellowship encourage children and youth to contribute to the life of the fellowship?
- c. What can you do to make your church more proactive in receiving the contributions children can make? Your family?
- d. Discuss one childhood experience where you were allowed or even encouraged to contribute what you could to benefit others. What did you think and feel while you were in that situation?

4. Take Action

There are a number of ways to encourage children to contribute what they can to benefit others in meaningful ways. There are also a number of ways to encourage adults to be receptive to what children have to offer. Talk through these options and consider what you can do to make children matter today, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of adults.

- a. Review how children and youth are engaged — or not — as contributors in the life of your church. Are there appropriate outlets for their contributions?
- b. Help coordinate a youth service project.
- c. Invite a child or a young person to help you with a life-skills project like preparing meals for a soup kitchen or baking cookies to take around to your elderly neighbors.
- d. Encourage adults in churches and organizations to plan ways to include youth and children in events and projects.

This session's Journal Activity: Write about the skills you had as you were growing up that you were able to contribute to enrich others. If you feel that you were denied the chance to contribute, write about that, too. Think about the children you encounter regularly. Name a few and write about what you think they can contribute today — and in the years to come. Compose a prayer that they would joyfully contribute their gifts and talents to God's glory.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Two ("Building Castles in the Clouds") of *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION THREE: BUILDING CASTLES IN THE CLOUDS

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Nurturing a Child's Dreams

"I learned in my childhood in Africa that a child may be born in poverty but poverty is never born in a child. The worst aspects of poverty are not the deplorable outward conditions but rather the erosion and eventual destruction of hope and therefore dreams. When a child gives up hope, dreams are forever shattered. With lost dreams goes the potential and ultimate impact that a child might have had.

"If we nurture the dreams of children, the world will be blessed. If we destroy them, the world is doomed" (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 36)!

It's far too easy to be condescending as children share their dreams for the future. Wess Stafford offers a practical pathway to nurture a child's dreams — and so reaffirm their hope and worth — in "Building Castles in the Clouds," the second chapter of *Too Small to Ignore*. Begin this session by reading from the fourth paragraph on page 43 through the last full paragraph on page 44. Then discuss the questions that follow:

- a. From the section we just read, normal interaction between adults and children in the African village of Nielle included the lack of age segregation, adults keeping a childlike spirit, and children being engaged in real work. Which of these factors do you think might have the greatest positive impact on Western society in nurturing the hope and dreams of children? Why?
- b. As you see it, what activities in a local church indicate that it nurtures the dreams of children?
- c. In your opinion, how can adults in our culture help youth cope with the "frustration of being physically and mentally ready for life's challenges but not legally allowed to take [their] place in society"?
- d. What affected or surprised you most as you read Chapter Two this week? Why?

2. Session Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:6-9

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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

This passage refers to the 10 Commandments and just as much to the nature of the relationship between a child and an adult. Review this passage together as a group, then consider these points of discussion:

- a. State the above passage in your own words.
- b. Describe the kind of relationship that would need to exist between an adult and a child for this passage to be fulfilled.
- c. In your opinion, how can an adult use the commandments of God to both encourage and shape a child's dreams?
- d. Describe several ways to "impress" the commandments of God on a child.

3. Making it Apply

How do you nurture the dreams of children? Wess Stafford lays out a two-step model. First, *enter the child's world*. Second, *bring the child into your world*. The connection between an adult and child grows deeper as their two “worlds” merge. Think about that connection as you talk through your responses to these questions.

- a. In your opinion, which adult(s) from your childhood really nurtured your dreams? What three words best describe their relationship with you?
- b. How did those adults enter your world — and bring you into their worlds?
- c. What are your present points of entry into a child's world? What kinds of activities do you think will help make your presence in their world positive for them, for you and for God's Kingdom?
- d. What are the present points of entry to bring a child into your world? What kinds of attitudes and activities do you think will help make their presence in your world positive for them, for you and for God's Kingdom?

4. Take Action

It's not always easy to develop the kind of relationship with a child where you have the privilege of nurturing dreams. But making it a point to “merge the two worlds” as Wess Stafford suggests in his book can, over time, bring about that sort of relationship. Consider these options for merging your world with that of a child's. Think about the points that fit you best — and if you can, think of your own action points to become a better “dream nurturer” for the children around you.

- a. When a child invites you into his or her world of play and imagination, take him up on the invitation.
- b. When you can tell a story to a child that illustrates something positive about your world of work or play, tell it.
- c. When a child or youth asks for a chance to talk to you, make the time to make it happen.
- d. Ask the children and youth in your life about their hopes and dreams. Listen to their responses and encourage them to “dream big.”

This session's Journal Activity: Record some of the important dreams you had as a child for your own future. How did the adults in your life at that time affect those dreams? What can you bring from your own experience to nurture the dreams of the children in your sphere of influence?

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Three (“It Really Does Take a Village”) of *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION FOUR: IT REALLY DOES TAKE A VILLAGE

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: The Impact of the Community on the Child

“I’ve noticed that people in the individualistic West sometimes have trouble appreciating the Old Testament because its worldview is so keyed to *the group* ... We are fiercely independent and nothing riles us faster than getting lumped into a group of some kind.

“I have become convinced that the more wealth a country accumulates, the more isolated and lonely its people become. The loneliest are usually the children and the elderly. Children learn what they live, and isolation in the ‘village’ is one of the most destructive messages we daily write on the tablets of their hearts” (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 55).

Chapter three of *Too Small to Ignore* addresses just how important the positive presence of community is in the development of a child. Review the above paragraph with the group then read the section titled “In the Lap of Community” from its beginning on page 57 through the paragraph that begins “Yet the scolding was tempered ...” on page 59. Take a few moments to talk through the following questions:

- a. As you see it, what about the evening gathering described here showed the value the community of Nielle placed on its children?
- b. How did the children in Nielle show that they valued being a part of the community? What made their activity in and around the evening gathering significant for the community?
- c. Describe how you think the dynamics of the evening gathering would have changed had the children of Nielle been isolated for a gathering of their own.
- d. As you remember the entire chapter, what were the most important points you learned about community in the life of a child?

2. Session Scripture: Luke 2:43, 44

After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

You’ll want to bring the full story to the attention of the group, so take the time to read these verses in their fuller context (Luke 2:41-51). This story of a near-adolescent Jesus offers several insights of the kind of community that surrounded him as he grew up. Search for those insights as you discuss the following questions.

- a. What does this story indicate about whether or not Jesus had an isolated childhood? Explain your response.
- b. What does this Bible passage indicate about the community of people who traveled with Mary, Joseph and Jesus to Jerusalem?
- c. Using this story of Jesus and the community around him as an example, describe the appropriate degree of involvement of a local fellowship in the life of a child.
- d. In your opinion, does this story demonstrate that the community around Jesus failed him somehow? Explain your response.

3. Making it Apply

As he concludes the chapter for today's session, Wess Stafford reminds us that "community" is a "God term." The challenge of community is to surround children with love, attention and support. Consider your own experience in communities of faith and communities defined by other boundaries as you talk through the following questions:

- a. Let's start by talking about the community where you grew up that was defined more by your neighborhood or village limits. How did that community shape your life?
- b. As you look back on that community, how would you rate its overall impact on the lives of its children? Explain your answer.
- c. Let's turn our attention to the community of faith that you most closely identify with your childhood. How did that community shape your life?
- d. Consider your present community of faith. What is it doing well in contributing to the lives of its children? Where could it use improvement as it relates to the children God has entrusted to it?

4. Take Action

There are a number of ways for a community to contribute the kind of love, attention and support every child needs. Consider the options below — or develop some of your own — to make the communities you influence more supportive of the children who are a part of them.

- a. Organize more informal activities (volleyball games, block parties, talent shows) that allow children and adults opportunities to get to know more about each other.
- b. Lead a multigenerational service project or Sunday school class.
- c. Attend school open houses, concerts and athletic activities of children and youth outside your immediate family — and let the children or youth know that you saw them in action.
- d. Care enough to gently correct the children in your community when they need it.

This session's Journal Activity: Reflect and write about the kind of support you felt from the communities you were a part of as you left home. Describe some specific acts of support or nurture from those communities that helped you prepare to launch out on your own. Then record a few ways your present communities can help prepare children and youth for a productive life as an adult.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Four ("Getting the Full Picture – Body and Soul") in *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION FIVE: GETTING THE FULL PICTURE – BODY AND SOUL

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Treating a Child as a Whole Person

“If we are to meet the needs of children, who are the weakest and in some ways the most precious members of society, we have to pay attention to a wide variety of issues. We are not raising a crop of potatoes here. We are not assembling a bunk bed. We are shaping *human lives*, with all their wondrous complexity. If ever there was a project that required a multifaceted, holistic view, this is it” (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 67).

These days, almost everyone would agree that God cares about every area of a child’s life — spiritual, social, physical, economic, environmental and more. But translating that intellectual agreement into genuinely helpful action can be a real challenge. Start today’s session by reading the paragraph above to the group. Then read the Chapter Four section titled “A New Kind of Love” (pages 70 through 73) together before you discuss the following questions.

- How would you describe Ken Stafford’s act of redigging and fortifying a well in the context of missionary work — as an interruption, a strategic move or a necessary part of the job? Explain your response.
- Suppose Ken Stafford had chosen not to address the problem of the Kashongo well. How do you think that decision would have impacted the effect of his sharing the Gospel in that village?
- As you see it, what could the Western Church learn from this story of the Staffords and Kashongo?
- What are the indicators that your local fellowship or church is concerned about the whole lives of the children within its reach?

2. Session Scripture: Luke 2:52

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

In Luke’s Gospel, this simple verse is the transition between Jesus’ childhood and the beginning of his public ministry as an adult. The verse is so simple, it’s easy to gloss over. Today, read the verse several times as a group. (Sometimes using a variety of Bible versions and translations is helpful in this process.) Then cover the discussion points that follow:

- This verse is a straightforward description of Jesus’ development from childhood into adulthood. Do you think it could be used as a goal statement for the development of any child? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, is the verse a description of holistic development or fragmented development? Explain your response.
- As you reflect on your own reading of the Gospels, do you think Jesus believed his ministry needed to engage the whole person (body, soul and spirit alike) or not? Give examples.
- As you see it, what elements (for example, nutrition, education, etc.) would need to be introduced into a child’s life to bring about the results cited for Jesus’ development in Luke 2:52?



3. Making it Apply

How can adults apply a holistic approach to the development of the children around them? Keeping “the big picture” of a child’s life in mind is a good starting point, as Wess Stafford explains in the chapter for today’s session. He makes the point that ministry to children isn’t an “either the physical or the spiritual” issue. Think about the goal of helping children become whole as you discuss these questions.

- a. Tell the group about a time in your youth or childhood when an adult surprised you with their positive interest or concern for an area of your life beyond their “normal” contact with you. (For example, when your dentist really seemed to take an interest in your career plans or a next-door neighbor took a positive interest in your guitar lessons.)
- b. How did you feel as a child or youth when you realized an adult really cared about “the big picture” for your life?
- c. Let’s return to today’s Scripture verse for a moment. As you were growing up, what things and which adults contributed to your growing in wisdom? Stature? In favor with God? In favor with people?
- d. As you see it, what are one or two vital elements the children around you still need to complete their “big picture” that will help them develop in a holistic way? What can you do to help them gain access to those things?

4. Take Action

Clearly, Jesus Christ came to save the whole person. In this chapter, Wess Stafford encourages an integrated approach to ministry that will meet needs of the body, soul and spirit alike. Think about making that approach a reality as you consider the following options for action.

- a. Consider becoming a volunteer tutor to help a child gain the tools for learning well.
- b. Help organize an after-school program at your church or workplace to give children a safe place to study or socialize.
- c. Learn about local day camp or athletic camps, including scholarship opportunities. Be able to recommend options to children and parents who might be interested.
- d. Organize a Career Fair for the children and youth in your church and their friends. Have people from a variety of careers talk about — and better yet, demonstrate — their jobs at “learning stations” set up for interaction.

This session’s Journal Activity: Write about your personal development against the standards of Jesus’ development as written in Luke 2:52. Did your childhood and youth prepare you to develop holistically?

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- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Five (“Time: A River Runs Through It”) of *Too Small to Ignore*.

SESSION SIX: TIME: A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Children and the Pace of Life

“Having packed their own lives full, many parents proceed to do the same with their children. The week becomes a blur of school, sports practices, music lessons, and — soon enough — part-time jobs. Kids have scarce opportunity to lean back and stare at the sky or notice a flower; they have to get to the next activity. ...

“Young people simply were not made to be the fulfillment machines of adult wishes. They need time to breathe, to imagine, to wonder and simply to relax. This is not to condone laziness or inactivity in front of a television for hours on end. But a key part of growing up needs to be living at a reasonable pace” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 80, 81).

Chapter five of *Too Small to Ignore* examines the impact of time on a child’s development and how a hectic pace can rob both children and those around them of the richness of today — the place where children live. Read the passage above to the group then together read the chapter section titled “Trial by Clarinet” that begins on page 81. After that, consider the following questions:

- a. Using this section as just one source of examples, describe how adult obsession with time and activity can impact the children around them.
- b. How does the way you manage time affect the children in your own life?
- c. As you see it, what might have been a better option for Pascal and his interest in the clarinet rather than putting him on a high-pressured, time-demanding lesson schedule?
- d. In your opinion, how full should a child’s schedule be? Explain your answer.

2. Session Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, 6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Wess Stafford unpacks these verses in a few paragraphs on page 89 of *Too Small to Ignore*. It’s worth reading from the first full paragraph on that page through the paragraph that begins, “I happen to think this four-line proverb is almost a contract ...” on the same page. That will set up these discussion points for the group:

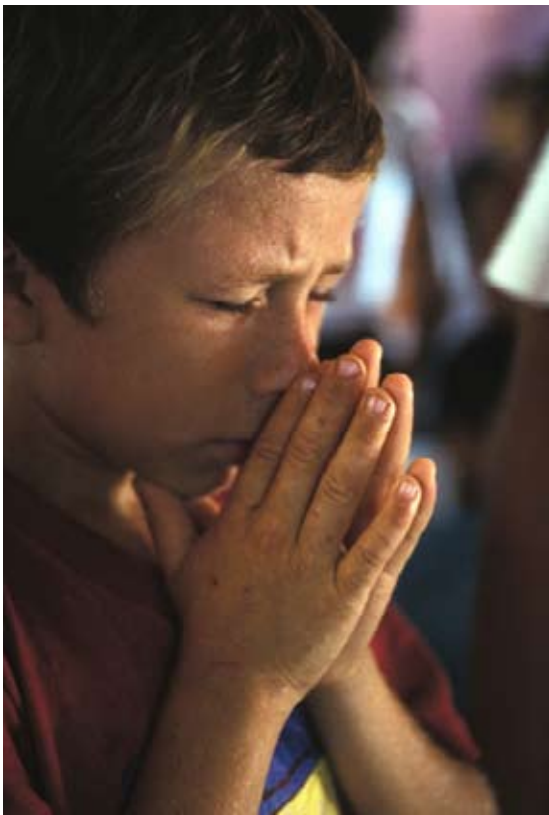
- a. As you see it, what would be the indicators that someone is trusting God with their time?
- b. What behaviors would show that someone is not leaning on his or her own understanding, as this passage directs? That someone is honestly trying to acknowledge God in all ways?
- c. In your opinion, what in an adult’s behavior would best demonstrate to a child the impact of trusting God with your time?
- d. How would you explain the meaning of “trusting God” to the children in your life?



3. Making it Apply

Wess Stafford concludes today's chapter with the encouragement to relax, knowing that God is in ultimate charge of our life and time, and pace life appropriately. His challenge to readers is to help children discover a God-honoring pace for life. Think about those in your life, past and present, who seemed to live out that pace as you go through the following discussion points.

- a. Whom do you remember from your childhood who seemed to have really figured out a sane, God-honoring pace of life? As a child, how did you feel when you were around that person?
- b. In a few words, describe the schedules of the children you're familiar with today.
- c. As best you can tell, does the schedule of your local church or fellowship encourage a sane pace for children and their families? Explain your response.
- d. What would you do to help children discover the value of being still and knowing God is God? Of relaxing one's schedule to truly enjoy the life that God has given us?



4. Take Action

Deprogramming someone from the tyranny of a schedule isn't easy. Yet there are some practical options that can help children (and in some cases, the adults in their lives) to live today completely and to trust tomorrow to God. Think about putting one or more of these options into practice toward that end.

- a. Take one or more children on a hike. Teach them ways to appreciate nature and to “listen” to the quiet.
- b. Lead a youth group through a time of Scripture meditation and quiet reflection. (Be sure you explain what's going on before the event itself.)
- c. Encourage families in your church to pick and choose activities on the calendar (church, work, school) that are most important to their lives today and to let the others go.
- d. Do what you can to be an example of a well-paced life.

This session's Journal Activity: Try to reconstruct your schedule as a child, then as a teenager. Write about the impact of those schedules on your life today. What would you change in those schedules? What would you leave alone? What single piece of advice would you offer a young person about the use of time and schedules?

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Six (“When is Enough ... Enough?”) in *Too Small to Ignore*.

SESSION SEVEN: WHEN IS ENOUGH ... ENOUGH?

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: What Does a Child Truly Need?

“What does a child truly need? How much stuff is enough? What makes for a healthy, well-balanced, contented person? What, in fact, works in the opposite direction?’ We ask ourselves these questions a lot where I work since our calling is to nurture the poor children of the world. After all, we can throw money at problems and, if we’re not careful, end up creating more trouble than solutions. ... How many of us have lavished toys and clothes and entertainment on our kids to the point of extreme, only to produce selfish, bored, demanding, irritable teenagers? This can happen in any country of the world” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 92, 93).

Wess Stafford explores the effect of materialism on children and the cultures that surround them in Chapter 6 of *Too Small to Ignore*. The chapter offers a number of examples that demonstrate the mere acquisition of “stuff” is never enough to develop a child into a whole person. Start today’s session by reading the above passage. Then, as a group, read from the second full paragraph on page 93 through the paragraph on page 95 that begins, “We believe this little girl ... ” then discuss the following:

- a. In your opinion, what are the results from too much emphasis on accumulating “stuff” on the life of a child? A child’s family?
- b. Review the partial list of things provided to impoverished children by Compassion International (p. 95). In your opinion, is the list too extensive? Is it incomplete? What would you add or take away from this list?
- c. As you see it, what are some good ways to teach children to be dependent upon God rather than being consumed by comfort, pleasure or entertainment?
- d. What are the indicators that your local fellowship or church is helping children and youth deal biblically with materialism and its effects?

2. Session Scripture: Matthew 19:23, 24

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

There’s no question that the love of money can consume one’s soul. These verses come immediately after Matthew’s account of the rich young man who chose his possessions over the possibility of following Jesus. Sometimes those of us in wealthy cultures face a similar choice. And if those choices are difficult for us, how will we teach our children to handle the resources God may shower upon us? Review the above verses with the group, then talk through the following points:

- a. In your own words, explain the meaning of the verses we just read in one sentence.
- b. In your opinion, is the difficulty wealthy people face a problem of wealth itself or how they deal with wealth? Explain your response in light of Matthew 19:23, 24.
- c. What Bible principles regarding wealth do you think would be most easily understood by children? How would you explain those principles to a child?
- d. As best you can tell, what does the general counsel of Scripture teach in response to the question, “When is enough ... enough?”

3. Making it Apply

What does a child truly need? Wess Stafford offers very specific ideas on the subject, including this: if we hope to influence children to take a healthy approach to materialism, we need to make sure our own approach to “stuff” makes sense. How much is enough for us? How much should be enough for the children we encounter? Consider those issues as you continue the discussion.

- a. Think back to your childhood or youth. What adult seemed to handle the issues that surround materialism better than others? What specific things led you to name that person?
- b. In your life today, which of your friends, relatives or associates seem to have the most healthy approach to “how much is enough”? What are the signs of health in their approach?
- c. “When is enough ... enough” for you? Share one thing with the group that you’d like to change about your own approach to materialism.
- d. In your opinion, what’s the most valuable piece of advice you could offer to a child or youth to help him or her sort out how much is enough?

4. Take Action

We need to ensure that the children within our reach have enough of life’s basics to thrive. We also need to teach the values our children need to manage material things, rather than be managed by the materialism that permeates our generation. Here are a few ideas that could help children have enough and understand when enough is enough. Discuss which options make sense for you and feel free to suggest your own to the group.

- a. Encourage your church or workplace to start or support a food bank that actively seeks to provide families with adequate nutrition.
- b. Help organize a school or church program that teaches children the basics of budgeting.
- c. Teach children or youth about helping others have enough by helping them raise funds to benefit a specific health- or hunger-related ministry of their choice.
- d. Discuss some of the statistics from the first two pages of Chapter 6 in *Too Small to Ignore* with a youth group. Then ask them to answer the question, “How much is enough for you?” (Remember to listen more than you talk.)

This session’s Journal Activity: Write your response to the question, “When is enough ... enough?” Then record some thoughts about how your definition of “enough” might affect the children around you. Use the Bible, along with this chapter of *Too Small to Ignore*, to help you develop ideas for your response.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Seven (“When Triumph Is Disaster”) of *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION EIGHT: WHEN TRIUMPH IS DISASTER

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Children and Corrosive Competition

While striving to do our best is indeed an admirable trait, certain aspects of competition have the ability to undermine and eat away at a child's well-being — a fact not always remembered by some parents, teachers, Little League coaches and other youth workers. To fully explain what I mean, let me once again employ a global perspective.

In most of the developing world, the concept of winning at the expense of someone else is considered not only strange but unacceptable. You are free to achieve whatever you can — so long as you don't hurt, embarrass or demean the other person (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 110).

The chapter for today's session highlights the effects of competition on children. Wess Stafford makes it a point to differentiate between the kind of competition that spurs us on to excellence and the kind that promotes winning at any cost. Read the passage above to the group, then together read from the first full paragraph on page 119 through the second paragraph on page 120. Then discuss the following:

- a. In your own words, describe the differences between what Wess Stafford calls “corrosive competition” and the kind of competition that can lead one to excellence and faithfulness.
- b. As you see it, what are some practical ways that adults can show children the benefits of competition that promotes excellence?
- c. In your opinion, what character traits mark someone who is consumed by corrosive competition? What traits mark someone who uses competition as a motivation to excellence?
- d. How does your local church or fellowship tend to approach competition? (If they participate in a church athletic league, your answer lies there.) What impact does the approach have on the children of the church?

2. Session Scripture: 2 Timothy 4: 7, 8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

This short passage is full of sound counsel on how to approach competition. Remember that Paul wrote these verses toward the end of his life — a life that could have been a source of pride and comparison against others. But Paul didn't see competition that way, according to Wess Stafford. See if you agree with Wess as you consider these questions:

- a. Why do you think Paul used examples of athletic competition to describe his own faith journey?
- b. One remarkable detail about these verses is that as Paul uses the language of athletic competition, the idea of winning against someone else is nowhere to be found. In your opinion, what does that say about the nature of competition as Paul saw it?
- c. As you see it, what character traits of Paul are suggested in these verses?
- d. How would you explain these verses to children in a way that could help them understand competition that leads to excellence?

3. Making it Apply

What are we teaching our children about competition? Wess Stafford challenges the value of “win at any cost” competition, instead suggesting that we teach (and demonstrate) that competition is not an end in itself but a tool to encourage excellence. Who taught you about competition when you were growing up — and what did you learn from them? Think about it as you consider the following questions with the group.

- a. Among the adults you encountered as a child or youth, who seemed to best use competition as a tool for excellence? What did you learn about winning and losing from those adults?
- b. Among the adults you encountered as a child or youth, who seemed to look at competition as a reason to win at any cost? What did you learn about winning and losing from those adults?
- c. Briefly describe your own ideas about competition to the group.
- d. How do you think your own approach to competition affects the children you influence? What do you want them to learn from your example?

4. Take Action

Now more than ever, children need healthy role models who know how to deal with competition. Here are just a few ideas of how you can have a positive impact on how children and youth handle competition. Talk them over as a group and don't hesitate to come up with your own options for action.

- a. Coach an athletic or academic team. Set the standard that competition is about the pursuit of excellence, not the conquest of an opponent.
- b. Organize a service project for youth that demands a team approach to be successful.
- c. Encourage the youth workers in your church to use team-building activities as part of the group's development. Better yet, volunteer to lead those activities.
- d. Make sure no child or youth is left on the fringe in any activity. Champion the cause of “everyone participates” in your spheres of influence.

This session's Journal Activity: Jot down some thoughts on the kind(s) of competition that have helped you as a child, a teenager and now as an adult. Then write and reflect on some examples of “corrosive competition” that had a negative impact on your life. Finally, record your philosophy of competition in a way that a young person or child could understand it.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Eight (“The Silence of the Lambs”) in *Too Small to Ignore*.

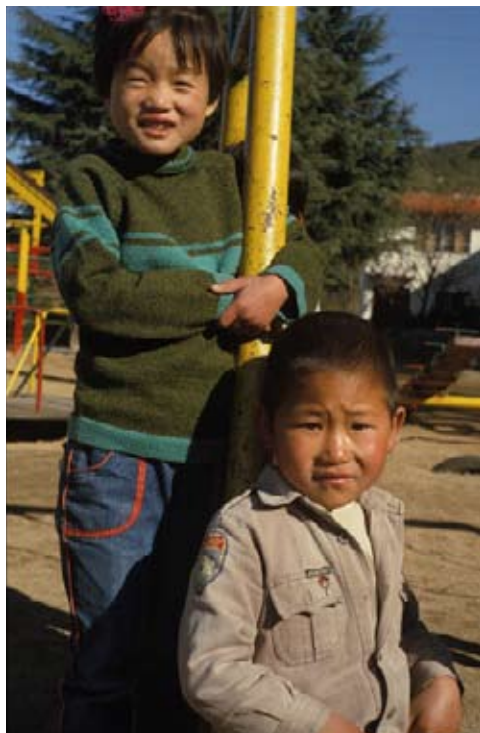


SESSION NINE: THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: When Children Endure Abuse

“If you tell your parents that you are unhappy here, you will be Satan’s tool to destroy their ministry in Africa. They will become discouraged and may have to leave the field. If that happens, there will be Africans in hell because of you!” What a diabolical trap we were in. Our love for our parents and our love for God were used to conceal the horrors that were heaped upon us. ... Talk about the ‘silence of the lambs.’ I never even told my own father, whom I loved dearly. His ministry in Africa for the Lord I knew he loved was too precious. I would be the willing sacrifice.

“Child psychologists study this phenomenon with great amazement, as it has occurred throughout history. They have found that children can keep awful, awful secrets to protect the ones they love. And so it was with us, the children of Bandulo” (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 141).



Perhaps the reason Wess Stafford is such an effective leader of a ministry to suffering children is that he knows firsthand what it is to be a child in pain. Chapter 8 of *Too Small to Ignore* introduces us to the school for missionaries’ children at “Bandulo,” where humiliation, savage beatings and sexual abuse awaited many of the children who attended there — including Wess. Read the brief passage above to the group then, as a group, read the chapter section titled “Reign of Terror” that begins on page 135. After that, talk through the discussion points that follow:

- a. In your own words, describe the impact that widespread child abuse had on the atmosphere of the Bandulo boarding school.
- b. Using the section we just read as a basis for your response, describe the feelings and attitudes that seem to have developed in Wess Stafford as a child in an abusive situation.
- c. In your opinion, what might have led the abusive adults at Bandulo to treat the children there as they did?
- d. What are the indicators that your local fellowship or church is actively working to prevent the potential for child abuse in your church activities? In your church families?

2. Session Scripture: Matthew 18:6

But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea (NASB).

In Matthew’s Gospel, this verse immediately follows the account of Jesus calling a child to Himself to remind the disciples that they needed to become like a child to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Causing such a child to stumble, to separate himself from God somehow, obviously has dire results. Explore this verse with your group by discussing the following questions:

- a. In your own words, explain the meaning of the verse we just read in one sentence.
- b. As you see it, what are some ways people can cause children to stumble?
- c. In your opinion, what is the impact on a child who is “caused to stumble” by an adult or someone else in a position of trust?
- d. As best you can tell, what does this Scripture verse suggest about the damage done to a victimized child’s relationship with God?

3. Making it Apply

In the chapter for today’s session, Wess Stafford brings a painful memory to light so others can learn from it. Please make it clear, then, that no one in the group who may have been abused has to reveal anything further as you discuss these questions.

- a. Think back to your childhood or youth. Without using names, can you think of a peer who was being abused? Did that child show any evident signs of abuse? As you look back, what difference do you think it might have made for that child to have grown up without being abused?
- b. From what you’ve read, heard or experienced, what are some of the signs that a child might be a victim of abuse?
- c. Why do you think many abused children are silent about their abuse?
- d. In your opinion, what’s the most valuable piece of advice you could offer to a child or youth who you discover is being abused?

4. Take Action

Child abuse is a difficult subject to talk about but it’s a far more difficult reality to face. Wess Stafford did both in bringing today’s chapter to print. You can play an important part in preventing child abuse and helping those who are victims of it. Start by talking through which options below might be reasonable action items for you and, as always, develop your own if you like.

- a. Encourage your church to conduct background checks on anyone working with children or youth, including both volunteers and paid staff.
- b. Organize an event that teaches people how to recognize and report child abuse.
- c. If you work with children or youth, be aware of the laws in your state and/or community regarding your responsibility to report suspected child abuse.
- d. If you are an adult who was abused as a child and have kept it a secret, prayerfully consider finding a counselor who can help you with your healing process.
- e. For more resources on child abuse prevention and healing, visit www.compassion.com/childadvocacy/silencingthelambs.

This session’s Journal Activity: Reflect on the impact of abuse on a child. Write about the possible physical, social and spiritual effects of such abuse. Then compose a prayer that asks for healing of the specific effects you wrote about and offer it on behalf of the children.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter Nine (“Breaking the Silence”) of *Too Small to Ignore*.

SESSION 10: BREAKING THE SILENCE

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Speaking Up for Children in Need

“Why did God let me suffer the agonies of the boarding school? ... I’m not saying it was God’s plan for the abuse to occur. But I do believe He can redeem anything and bring good out of evil. He was shaping me for an epic fight on behalf of abused children. When I address that issue these days, it is not just an academic topic for me, the subject of a doctoral dissertation. I’ve *lived* it. I have experienced firsthand that when children are not deemed important in our world, some very ugly things can happen.

“But when adults speak up for the vulnerable and the weak, working and demanding that safety and respect prevail, God’s little lambs are protected and nourished. They know they are not abandoned; they are loved” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 158, 159).

This session’s chapter demonstrates not only the *benefit* of adults speaking up on behalf of children in need but also the *necessity* of it. Read the above passage to the group and then together read the Chapter nine section titled “A Father’s Love” that begins on page 156. When you’ve finished reading, talk through the questions that follow.



- From what you can piece together in reading this chapter, what were the likely steps that Ken Stafford went through as he prepared to confront the Bandulo situation on behalf of the children there?
- In your own words, describe the impact on the Stafford family that resulted from Ken Stafford’s speaking up for the Bandulo children.
- What lessons about speaking up for children in need can we learn from the section we just read?
- As you see it, how can a local church or fellowship become a voice speaking up for children in need? What indicators would demonstrate that kind of “speaking up”?

2. Session Scripture: Proverbs 31:8

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

This verse spans the doorway as you leave the headquarters building of Compassion International. As you can tell from Wess Stafford’s story, the impact of the verse put into action can change the course of life itself for children in need. Use the discussion points that follow to help the group explore how the verse might relate to them.

- In our world, who are among the people who cannot speak for themselves? Who are among the destitute?
- Do you think that “speaking up” in this verse only refers to talking about an issue, or does it mean something more? Explain your response.
- This verse specifically directs that we speak up for the rights of those in need. As you see it, what are the biblically grounded rights we should defend for children in need?
- If a child or young person asked you what he or she could do to fulfill this verse, what would you suggest?

3. Making it Apply

What does it mean to “speak up” for those who have no voice? Specifically, what does it mean to speak up for children in need so it makes a difference? Wess Stafford suggests that, in part, it means confronting the evil that threatens children and being ready to provide better alternatives for them. Think about it as you explore the following discussion points with the group.

- a. In your own words, describe what it means to you to “speak up” for children in need.
- b. Among the adults you knew as a child or youth, who seemed to really be a champion for children? What attitudes and character traits marked that individual?
- c. As you see it, what are some ways people can “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves”?
- d. Share with the group one personal experience, positive or negative, that has encouraged you to speak up for children in need.

4. Take Action

There’s always room for one more advocate to take up the cause of children. Here are just a few ideas of how you can develop a voice for children in need. Talk them over as a group and pursue one or more of them that make sense to you.

- a. Write or e-mail leaders to take action (legislation, funding, volunteer mobilization) that will benefit at-risk children.
- b. Examine the Bible to discover more about God’s concern and love for those who are on the lower rungs of the social ladder, including children.
- c. Choose one issue (for example, hunger, HIV/AIDS or education) that affects children and become a “resident expert” on that issue. volunteer to lead those activities.
- d. Discover the needs of children in your church or neighborhood and be their voice locally to encourage that those needs are met.
- e. For more information on child advocacy, visit www.compassion.com/childadvocacy.

This session’s Journal Activity: Conduct a private brainstorm. Write down all the possible ways you could “speak up” for children in need. Then edit your list to two or three items you can take action on this week. Set a completion date for each item and go to it!

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter 10 (“Back to ‘Civilization’”) in *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION II: BACK TO “CIVILIZATION”

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Pearls of Poverty

“... I often say that everything good I really need to lead a worldwide child-development ministry I learned from the poor themselves, in the fields and around the campfires. ... These most precious values I have come to call the ‘pearls of poverty,’ given to me by the peasants of West Africa. The pearl is a jewel, like the ruby, the diamond and the sapphire. But unlike the others, a pearl comes originally from suffering. The oyster gets a grain of sand inside its shell. This is uncomfortable; it hurts the oyster. Over time, the oyster begins to protect itself from that irritant by coating it with a secretion, layer upon layer, until it becomes a smooth, brilliant, shining treasure — a pearl! ...

“The lessons my village gave me were just such treasures. Many of them came from the suffering, hunger, sickness and vulnerability of the peasant eking out a living for himself and his family in the harsh, rural African environment” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 164, 165).



Wess Stafford has taken many of the lessons he has learned from the poor and applied them to benefit both his own life and the lives of children around the world. Chapter 10 brings some of those lessons to light, in contrast with the values of the “civilization” Wess encountered upon returning from rural Africa to the United States. Read the above selection to the group, then read the chapter as a group from the second full paragraph on page 165 through the paragraph on page 167 that begins, “An even greater challenge. ...” After that, discuss the following questions:

- a. In your own words, describe how the “pearls of poverty” Wess learned in Nielle defined their community life.
- b. As you see it, what marks the difference between how we experience joy in Western nations and how joy is experienced by the poor?
- c. Which of the “pearls of poverty,” if taken to heart, would have the most positive impact on your church or local fellowship? Explain your response.
- d. Which of the “pearls of poverty” we just reviewed had the biggest impact on you? Why?

2. Session Scripture: Proverbs 8:10, 11

Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Chapter 10 of *Too Small to Ignore* clearly shows that it would be a mistake to assume that, due to their economic condition, the poor have nothing to teach us. Wess Stafford showed that exercising wisdom is a choice many of the poor make in everyday life. Consider the nature of that choice as you talk through the following questions:

- a. As best you can tell, what attitude(s) and action(s) are being encouraged in this verse?
- b. Describe “wisdom.”
- c. What do you think the differences would be between a culture that values wisdom more than material wealth and a culture that values material wealth more than wisdom?
- d. In your opinion, what are the children in your church or community being encouraged to pursue more: wealth or wisdom? Explain your answer.

3. Making it Apply

In the chapter for today's session, Wess Stafford recounts his experience of hearing an assault in progress outside the Staffords' New York City apartment — and his frustration that he was not allowed to help the victim, nor did anyone else go out to help her. The situation put the values of “civilization” in the West in stark contrast to the values that had shaped Wess in Nielle. Keep that contrast in mind as you discuss the following:

- a. As you see it, what would have been different about the assault that took place had it been in Nielle rather than New York?
- b. In your opinion, what are the challenges of applying the values represented in the “pearls of poverty” in a materialistic culture?
- c. What's the greatest challenge you face in applying the “pearls of poverty” to your everyday life?
- d. In your opinion, which of the “pearls of poverty” would have the most positive impact on the children you influence? How would you explain it to them?

4. Take Action

Throughout *Too Small to Ignore*, Wess Stafford has brought to light the conflict between the core values of Western society and the African village of Nielle. As this chapter unfolded, it became clear that there was much more in Nielle than New York that resonated with the values of God's Kingdom. So, after you discuss them with the group, consider putting one or more of these “pearl-based” ideas into action.

- a. Take the lead in organizing a “mercy team” that involves several generations to help those who have recently lost a loved one. Cover everything from providing company to providing meals, lawn care and even housekeeping for six to eight weeks.
- b. Show that people are more important than things by selling something you truly value (but don't really need) and give the proceeds anonymously to someone in need.
- c. The next time you need help, let your church or circle of friends know about it — and exercise gratitude when you receive from them.
- d. Bring some joy to people in difficult circumstances by taking the time to visit the elderly and the hospitalized from your church or local fellowship. Don't forget to bring a smile and your ability to listen.

This session's Journal Activity: Review the “Pearls of Poverty” from today's chapter. Write a few ideas on how you could put each “pearl” into action. Then pick one of your ideas to act upon sometime this week.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter 11 (“Why Doesn't Poverty Just Go Away?”) of *Too Small to Ignore*.

SESSION 12: WHY DOESN'T POVERTY JUST GO AWAY?

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Defeating Poverty by Changing Children

“One changed child eventually changes a family. A changed family will influence change in its church. Enough changed churches will transform the community. Changed communities change regions. Changed regions will in time change an entire nation.

“This, my friends, is the path out of poverty! And it happens one child at a time. I know that has become a cliché but it is absolutely true if you understand that poverty, an overwhelming global tragedy, occurs one life at a time. It destroys lives one at a time. And it is defeated one life at a time.

“Curiously enough, the poor seem to know this instinctively. All over the world I’ve found that if you ask a poor man or woman, ‘What can I do to help you?’ the answer is the same. ... Whatever the circumstance, the poor do *not* request money or personal things. They invariably look back at you with hopeful eyes and say, ‘If you want to help me, help my children’” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 191, 192).

In this session’s chapter Wess Stafford further unpacks the complexity of poverty and also builds the case for defeating poverty through changing children now in poverty. Read the above passage to the group and then together read from the third full paragraph on page 192 through the end of the chapter. After you’ve finished reading, discuss the questions that follow.

- a. Do you agree with Wess Stafford’s assertion that an effective fight against poverty must somehow address a change in the people trapped in poverty as well as a change in their circumstances? Explain your response.
- b. Do you really think a “crock-pot” approach to the issue of poverty is necessary to achieve lasting results? Why or why not?
- c. What lessons about the nature and complexity of poverty as it affects children struck you most in today’s chapter?
- d. As you see it, what can a local church or fellowship do to prevent fatalism from working into the fabric of the community that surrounds it?

2. Session Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:7-10

Do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. ... Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

These verses comprise one of God’s mandates to his people of faith regarding the poor. It is one of many such directives that emphasize that those who can give to the poor should give to the poor. It’s that simple in the Bible. But how should we deal with this mandate in a world that seems to isolate those in need? Think it over as you talk through these points:

- a. As you see it, what elements play into the tendency of people in affluent societies to be cynical about giving to the poor?
- b. In your opinion, what can people do to lose their cynicism or hesitancy about giving to the poor?

- c. Do you think it's easier to open your hand to a poor individual or to an organization that deals with the poor? Explain your response.
- d. In your opinion, what are the best ways for people of faith to fulfill this mandate? To what or to whom should they give? How should they determine where they give?

3. Making it Apply

Wess Stafford champions the idea of investing in individuals who need release from the trap of poverty. The Compassion International model of child sponsorship resonates well with that kind of investment. Use these questions to help the group consider the value of “people investment” — as well as giving that addresses more immediate physical needs of a community or family.

- a. Wess Stafford makes it clear that both giving to change people and giving to change circumstances are crucial in fighting poverty. As you see it, what are the similarities between both kinds of giving? The differences?
- b. No matter what your present age, think about your parents' generation. What was their attitude toward giving to the poor, as best you can tell? What, if anything, has changed in that attitude between their generation and yours?
- c. What might be some advantages for you if you decide to give to an individual in need (a sponsored child, a local person who has come to your church for assistance)? Some disadvantages?
- d. Thinking back to Wess Stafford's explanation of poverty as a wheel: How can you invest in children or youth locally in a way that will help their lives come into balance?

4. Take Action

The chapter for today's session makes a compelling argument for giving to the poor in ways that will change people as well as change their circumstances or environment. Here are a few ideas for action to talk through with the group.

- a. If such a program is available in your area, volunteer to tutor an at-risk child. Get to know that child well enough that your encouragement means something to him.
- b. Consider going on a short-term missions project that allows you to work alongside the people who benefit from the project.
- c. Check into a sponsorship program (like Compassion's) that gives you the opportunity to exchange correspondence with the individual you sponsor — and, if you follow through, take full advantage of every opportunity to encourage that individual.
- d. Find a child or youth in your church who needs help in some area of life (perhaps not so much economically as socially or educationally). With a few of your friends, make the kind of investment in that young person that makes him or her feel valued in God's sight as well as your own.
- e. For more information on poverty, please visit www.compassion.com/childadvocacy.

This session's Journal Activity: Review the Poverty Wheel in this chapter. Consider your neighborhood or community in light of the spokes of the wheel. What areas may put children at risk in your community? What can you do on behalf of the children to keep their lives “in balance?”

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter 12 (“The Children's Champion: A Righteous Rage”) in *Too Small to Ignore*.

SESSION 13: THE CHILDREN'S CHAMPION: A RIGHTEOUS RAGE

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Jesus, the Champion of Children

“In Matthew 18:6, Jesus seems stricken with the potential for harm that awaits this little boy before him. He speaks in a somber tone: ‘But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ...’ Jesus certainly had their attention now! Seeing their blanched faces, he might have added, ‘Have you got that? Can I make it any clearer to you that children matter to me? ...’

“The sins that would break the heart of God didn’t have to be sins of commission. ... Children could simply be looked at as unimportant, second-rate. ... Jesus was not willing to allow for that loophole. He pressed on in verse 10, ‘See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven’” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 204-206).

Wess Stafford takes another look at the Gospel passages of Jesus’ encounters with children in Chapter 12 of *Too Small to Ignore*. The conclusion of the review is inescapable: Jesus was a champion of children, to the point of being outraged when they were considered second-class citizens. Read the passage above to the group, then together read from the chapter section titled “Distracted?” (p. 208) through the end of the chapter. After that, talk through the following discussion points:

- a. As best you can tell from your reading of the Gospels and this chapter of *Too Small to Ignore*, describe the perceived value of children in the culture of the day.
- b. How would you have felt if you’d have been a Pharisee whose conversation with Jesus had just been interrupted by the presence of children? If you’d been a disciple? If you’d been a child who had been encouraged by Jesus to walk through the adults to get to him?
- c. In your own words, describe why children are important to Jesus.
- d. What are the indicators in your church or local fellowship that you value children as Jesus does? Explain your response.

2. Session Scripture: Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.



How highly does Jesus value children? Every gospel shows that Jesus was always ready to take up their cause, even to the point of telling adults that he wanted them to be more like the children they left on the fringes. Continue the discussion with the questions that follow:

- a. Wess Stafford points out that pastors, artists and theologians usually miss the fact that Jesus was actually angry during this event. How do you think Jesus expressed his indignation in the presence of children?
- b. What phrase in Jesus' response to his disciples is most startling to you? Why?
- c. In your own words, describe what you think Jesus meant when he said people must receive the kingdom of God like a little child.
- d. What do you think it means to receive the Kingdom like a little child?

3. Making it Apply

The reality check for today's session is how we treat children in everyday encounters. Do we welcome them or do we marginalize them? Keep that contrast in your thoughts as you talk through these items for discussion:

- a. In your opinion, does a "childlike faith" mean an immature faith? Explain your response.
- b. As you see it, what can adults do to encourage the kind of childlike faith in each other that Jesus desires?
- c. What's the greatest challenge you face in keeping a childlike faith alive in your everyday life?
- d. In your opinion, what is the greatest enemy of childlike faith in your church or local fellowship? What can you do to counteract it?

4. Take Action

What can someone do to even begin to become the kind of champion for children that Jesus is? We can start by acting toward children — and attempts to marginalize them — in ways similar to those of Jesus. Think about acting on one of these options then discuss them with the group.

- a. Volunteer to serve in some part of the children's ministry at your church or fellowship (Sunday school, children's church, vacation Bible school).
- b. Take part in a church committee that affects ministry to children. Be their voice on that committee.
- c. Whenever it's appropriate, be sure to encourage adults to allow children and youth to participate in activities at your church, in your community and in your home.
- d. When a church, community or family issue is on the table, be the first to ask, "How will this affect the children?" Then do your best to respond as Jesus would to the answer.

This session's Journal Activity: Reflect on this question: "Is my approach to Jesus more like that of a disciple trying to wedge his way into a position of power or more like a child who just wants to be close to Jesus?"

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter 13 ("When 'Follow the Leader' Isn't Child's Play") of *Too Small to Ignore*.

SESSION 14: WHEN “FOLLOW THE LEADER” ISN’T CHILD’S PLAY

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Children Are God’s Instruments Today

“I consider it a partial victory when I hear Christian leaders speak about children as ‘the church of tomorrow.’ It’s not the most enlightened viewpoint but at least it’s a step in the right direction. Maybe in time these leaders will come to see children as part of *the church of today*, too. In more powerful and dramatic ways than most of us can imagine, God delights in using children to build his kingdom precisely because they *are* children, unsoiled vessels in his hand.

“Along the way to becoming adults, children pass through stages that at various points make them exactly what God can use. In fact, a walk through the Scriptures shows several times where the perfect tool needed in the hands of almighty God was a child — precisely *because* he or she was a child. The task could not be entrusted to adults. They think too much. They know too much. Or at least they think they know! For sure they doubt too much, fear too much, are too selfish, too eager for glory, too ... well, adult” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 211, 212)!

Are children “the church of tomorrow” or God’s instruments today? In Chapter 13 of *Too Small to Ignore*, Wess Stafford offers examples from the Bible and recent church history to make the argument that children, as children, are able and ready instruments in God’s hands. Read the above passage to the group, then continue as a group by reading the section titled “Needed: An Evangelist in the Village (Ecuador 2004)” that begins on page 226. When you finish reading, discuss the following:

- a. What strikes you most from this story of the little Ecuadorian evangelist? Why?
- b. Why do you suppose the local adults in this story were so surprised by the number of children this little evangelist had led to Christ?
- c. Describe what you believe to be the typical expectations of children in the Western Church. Based on the contents of this chapter, what do you believe those expectations should be?
- d. Do you believe your local church or fellowship actually anticipates that God can effectively use children and youth today? Explain your response.

2. Session Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Wess Stafford explains that children are often considered foolish, weak, lowly and despised — and that is probably exactly why God chooses to use them, often in mighty ways, for His purposes. Consider the implications of that fact as you talk through these points:

- a. Describe how God uses children to shame the wise and strong, as you see it.
- b. In your opinion, what makes children and youth so effective as God’s agents?
- c. How might God use children to “nullify the things that are?”
- d. Based on this verse and the accounts you read of God using children as His agents, describe how we can best encourage children to be His agents.

3. Making it Apply

Wess Stafford concludes this session's chapter with a call to respect the children around us, because they are often more choice and willing servants of God than adults. Use these discussion points to help the group explore what we can learn from them.

- a. Think about the examples of children as God's agents in this chapter. Describe the common character traits you see in them.
- b. Tell the group about a child or youth in your life (past or present) who really fits the role of being an agent of God. Explain your choice of that person.
- c. What's the best piece of advice you could offer a child or youth who wants to be God's agent today? Explain your response.
- d. What can you do to help the children and youth around you recognize and accept God's call to be an agent for Him in their spheres of influence?

4. Take Action

The chapter for today's session gave a sound rationale for keeping children in mind as we look for signs of God's activity in our world. Here are a few options you can consider to help children and youth better understand and act on their roles as God's agents today.

- a. See to it that every child and youth in your church has access to a Bible they can understand.
- b. Organize or encourage prayer groups among the children and youth. Encourage them to pray for their challenges, their friends and some "big picture" issues — and to keep a prayer journal so they can record God's answers to their prayers.
- c. Sometimes youth have significant spiritual encounters in events they attend with their peers. Take a few youth to a Christian concert or youth conference to provide a "special event" where that kind of encounter might happen.
- d. Share some of the examples from this chapter of *Too Small to Ignore* with the children and youth in your life.

This session's Journal Activity: Write about the children and youth you can influence. Who among them seems to desire to live as an agent of God today? What can you do to help each of those specific young people in their desire to make a difference for Jesus Christ?

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter 14 ("Imagine ...") in *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION 15: IMAGINE ...

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: Change That Values Children

“Will you join me in imagining what our world could be like if it valued children? Let your assumptions go. How could our nation, our cities, our churches and our families be different if we truly believed that children matter? What new things would we start doing? What old things would we stop? How would you and I think and act if we were truly mindful of the precious little ones God has given us” (*Too Small to Ignore*, p. 230)?

Chapter 14 of *Too Small to Ignore* lays out a vision for what could be if children were properly valued in our world. Wess Stafford brings the vision to the international, national, community, church and family levels by the end of the chapter. Read the passage above to the group, then together read through the chapter section titled “God’s Part, Our Part” that begins on page 238. After that, talk through the following discussion points:

- a. In your own words, describe the lessons from the story of Wess’ encounter with the wild tulip as they apply to children.
- b. Do the ideas for action Wess presents in this chapter seem utopian to you? Why or why not?
- c. As you see it, what are the crucial elements that make up an environment where children can grow and thrive? Explain your response.
- d. What can a local church or fellowship contribute to an environment where children can grow and thrive? How does that contribution interact with the rest of a child’s life?

2. Session Scripture: Proverbs 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

This verse may be too familiar to the Church. Perhaps it’s the kind of verse that we can recite so easily from memory that we forget its impact. Yet this short verse is loaded with implications on our part in the lives of children. Explore that aspect of this proverb with the following:

- a. Based on your own experience, exposure to the Scriptures and information in *Too Small to Ignore*, what things combine to make up the training of a child?
- b. The proverb indicates that training should direct a child “in the way he should go.” Describe what that means to you.
- c. As you see it, who and what help determine the way a child will go? What do you think are the most significant factors in determining the way a child will go? Explain your responses.
- d. Describe what you think it must be like for a child in today’s world to sort out which way he or she should go.

3. Making it Apply

Many adults today look back at their childhood and marvel at the miracle it is that they made it through childhood and adolescence. As you’ve probably discovered, growing up can be a pretty complex process. Just as Wess Stafford states in today’s session chapter, a child needs an environment that supports his or her growth. The questions that follow examine that dynamic of the world of children:

- a. As you see it, does working toward an environment that supports the growth of children mean that we try to remove every challenge that faces them? Explain your response.

- b. In your opinion, what are the top two “cement blocks” in the world of children that need to be removed? Explain your choices.
- c. What were the greatest challenges that faced you as you grew up? Which one(s) do you most wish had been removed and why?
- d. What one thing can you do this week to make the environment of the children you influence more conducive to their growth?

4. Take Action

Wess Stafford offered a list of action items for child advocacy on several fronts in today’s chapter. The options that follow could help you respond to a few of those items. Talk them over with the group:

- a. Write your legislators about the need to support funding for pediatric HIV/AIDS interventions.
- b. E-mail an entertainment executive and an advertiser to encourage them to produce child-friendly, family-positive programming.
- c. Sign up for just one year as an adult assistant in a community youth service club like 4-H or a scouting program.
- d. Speak up for a more generous allocation for children’s and youth ministry in your church budget.

This session’s Journal Activity: Review Chapter 14 of *Too Small to Ignore*. Choose the one item that’s most important to you from each of the bullet point lists regarding positive child action at the world, national, community, church and family levels. Write down why those specific items are important to you and what action you can take in response to each item.

- Before the next session, ask the group members to read Chapter 15 (“Just’ Children: A Call to Arms”) of *Too Small to Ignore*.



SESSION 16: “JUST” CHILDREN: A CALL TO ARMS

1. *Too Small to Ignore* Session Focus: The Move into Child Advocacy

“What a wonderful world it would be if every child was loved, protected, and nourished by the adults in his or her life. ... The whole concept can be overwhelming, because there are so many children, so many needs. It is easy to get paralyzed by the magnitude of the task and wind up doing nothing because we can’t do everything. One of the most intelligent men who ever lived, Albert Einstein, said, ‘The world is a dangerous place to live. Not because of the people who are evil but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.’ What is needed is an army of us who understand this and commit to action. ...

“I don’t know what kind of reminder system will work for you but I challenge you to find something that will regularly make you aware of the children around you and across the world” (*Too Small to Ignore*, pp. 243, 244).

As *Too Small to Ignore* concludes, Wess Stafford encourages us to take action to become child advocates: those who will speak up for the children. Child advocacy may not look exactly the same from person to person but there are sound reasons for making it a part of our lives. Read the above passage to the group and then read together from the paragraph on page 246 that begins, “I remember a poignant moment ...” through the paragraph on page 248 that begins, “One of the great professors. ...” After that, discuss the following questions.

- a. Were you surprised at the statistics that showed childhood to be the “prime time” for Americans to become Christians? Why or why not?
- b. Discuss your reaction to the statement, “A church begins to die when it says, “They were just children.”
- c. Now that you’ve discussed *Too Small to Ignore* for some time, do you believe that effective change in families, communities, churches and even nations can begin with children? Explain your response.
- d. In your opinion, what makes it worth the effort to become an advocate for children? Again, explain your response.

2. Session Scripture: Luke 12:48 b

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Wess Stafford points out that child advocates have to deal with this biblical principle as they determine what course of action to take on behalf of the children. Explore this verse, using these discussion points to consider a few of its implications:

- a. Do you feel like you’ve been “given” or “entrusted with much”? Explain your response.
- b. Look at the picture of your whole life: education, experience, wealth, talents, relationships. What have you been entrusted with that might be beneficial to invest in a child’s life or on behalf of children?
- c. In your opinion, were you “given much” as a child from adults? In what ways?
- d. Given your social, intellectual, financial and spiritual resources, what might be the most significant thing you can bring to the table as a child advocate?

3. Making it Apply

The role of child advocate is not always appreciated, much less welcome. Yet the benefits that one advocate can bring to a child or a number of children are too significant to ignore the possibilities of a move into advocacy, as Wess Stafford encourages in today's session chapter. Use these discussion points to help the group talk through what it might mean to be a child advocate:

- a. As you grew up, who were the adults who stood out as people who were truly advocates for children in your community? What can you learn from their example as you seek to become an advocate for children?
- b. In your own words, describe what it means to be a child advocate.
- c. As you see it, what are some of the challenges waiting for someone who decides to become a child advocate?
- d. In one sentence, summarize what you've gained from reading *Too Small to Ignore* and being a part of this study group.

4. Take Action

The chapter for today's session is a call to action. If you've implemented just a few of the action items listed in this group study guide over the last 15 sessions, you've already acted as a child advocate. Consider how you can continue in that role as you discuss these items with the group:

- a. As Wess Stafford suggested in this chapter, list the children God has placed in your life on a regular basis. Next to their names, write something you could say or do to encourage them the next time you see them.
- b. Encourage the parents and youth workers you know to let them know you appreciate their investment in the lives of children and youth.
- c. Talk with your pastor or Bible study leader about doing a series of messages or studies on the strategic importance of children in God's Kingdom.
- d. Seek God's counsel through prayer and study to discover what kind of child advocacy activities you're built for.
- e. For more information and resources on child advocacy, visit www.compassion.com/childadvocacy.

This session's Journal Activity: Write about the possible benefits and challenges of becoming, or continuing in your role as, a child advocate. Develop a few specific goals regarding the impact you hope to achieve in the next year.

For more information about child advocacy and the world of children, please visit www.compassion.com.

CONCLUSION: A NOTE FROM WESS STAFFORD, AUTHOR OF *TOO SMALL TO IGNORE*

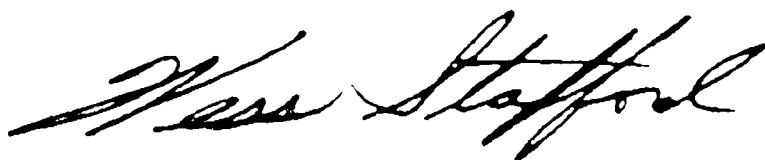
My fellow child advocates,

For the last 16 weeks you have witnessed my greatest heartbreak — our world’s insistence on ignoring the reality of children in need. For too long we’ve discounted the world’s children. We’ve overlooked their needs. We’ve forgotten their voices and we’ve disregarded their immense potential. But we will not be able to change this world — to right generational wrongs of poverty, injustice and exploitation — without nurturing, advocating for and loving God’s precious children. More important than our commitment to this world is our commitment to building God’s kingdom. Children are at the heart of this biblical mandate -- and they should be the heart of the Church’s ministry.

Now that you have learned about the “Great Omission” of God’s children, I ask you to join me and speak up for those our world has chosen to ignore. Commit to be your church’s child advocate. Agree to engage your church leadership in broader and deeper discussions about the needs of children in your community and around the world. In short, dedicate yourself as your church’s Child Advocacy Leader, a position of prestige if I’ve ever heard one. Here are some simple ways you can engage your church and your family in helping children in need:

- Remember that all God’s children are precious — regardless of their current economic status.
- Every time you meet or encounter children in poverty, smile, look directly into their eyes, take their hands, speak their names, and greet them face-to-face (lean down to their height level — this shows them they’re important!)
- Serve — with your child — at your local homeless shelter, rescue mission outreach or local Christian organization ministering to children in need.
- Engage your local church by developing community programs for children, food donation drives or holiday programs that assist impoverished children and families. Get your family involved!
- Donate resources, time or money today to your local church’s child development programs.
- Share current world poverty statistics with your church leadership making them aware of others in need. Statistics and a constant flow of new child advocacy resources are available at www.compassion.com/childadvocacy.

Thank you for taking this spiritual journey along with me. May God richly bless you for lending your voice to the voiceless.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wess Stafford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

For more information about advocating for children, visit www.compassion.com/childadvocacy.