

12-2009

# Children and Spiritual

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## Recommended Citation

Murray, Susan E., "Children and Spiritual" (2009). *Lake Union Herald*. 509.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/509>

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## Children and Spiritual Gifts

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

**T**wo passages from the Bible show us that spiritual gifts are not age-based. In I Corinthians, Paul instructs the church about the importance of discovering and using spiritual gifts. While this speaks to abilities and opportunities of those who may be older, nowhere does he suggest an age limit. In chapter 12, verse seven, we read, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

As parents and other important adults in children’s lives, we can make the Bible come alive as we also share I Peter 4:10, which reads, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” How empowering for children to begin to understand that there is a role for them, no matter their age, in God’s army for good! They need our help to see who they are in Christ, and need to be nurtured in age-appropriate ways to identify and develop the gifts He has given to them.

So what are some ways we can accomplish this? Our children deserve to be taught specifically about God’s purposes for the church and what the Bible says about spiritual gifts. We can help them realize that they have a part to do now, not just when they are older. They deserve opportunities to serve in various types of ministry so they can begin to identify how they may be gifted. When they have opportunities to work side by side with family members as well as others, they can grow passion within their hearts.

Allow them to plan and lead in their own programs, under appropriate supervision, and the leaders and teachers will emerge among them. You will see the gift of mercy blossom as children have chances to minister to those who are in need. Volunteering in the community and church is a way that the gift of service may be discovered.

Be careful that in the process you don’t use coercion or



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a reward system to get them involved. They need to learn to serve out of love and obedience. They need to understand that serving is a worthy enough calling in itself that they do not need to be bribed in order to do it.

Provide affirmation and feedback. When Jesus sent out His disciples to ministry, He took the time to discuss how it went with them. Our children deserve no less. They also deserve appropriate training for what we are asking them to do. If they just don’t seem suited for a particular type of ministry,

help them to find something that is a better fit for them.

Sadly, many adults do not do their part by serving along with children. Sending them out to the work while you remain uninvolved sends a strong, contradictory message to them.

Prayer can be a powerful tool in this journey. We can pray that ministry and using their spiritual gifts goes beyond head knowledge but translates into a real love for the Lord and a true desire to serve Him. Pray that God will use opportunities even in small ways to grow a passion in their hearts to follow His purposes in their lives. Always, pray for their walk with the Lord!

Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.

Note: Some ideas were adapted from <http://mintools.com/children-spiritual-gifts.htm>.