



Children
Problems

PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN

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(Malachi 4:5, 6)

Children are God's blessings. How often the presence of a small child brings a smile to people's faces. Unfortunately, many children are facing difficult problems. Five to fifteen percent of all children in the United States have problems that require mental health services—between three and ten million children. The reasons for these difficulties, of course, are many. Two major categories to be discussed here are child abuse and learning problems. These categories do not cover all the reasons children have problems, but illustrate why children may need the touch of the Great Physician as well as professional intervention.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Millions of children are abused or neglected. Abused children are found at all socioeconomic levels. Abuse is a profoundly disruptive, disorienting, and destructive experience for children. Symptoms such as irritability, school truancy, behavior problems, poor classroom performance, health complaints, sexual promiscuity, running away from home, and lying are common in victimized children. Depression, panic disorders, dissociative disorders, and suicide attempts can also result from chronic abuse. Another form of abuse arises when children live in homes where domestic violence occurs. The child may not be a direct victim of beating but sees his or her mother suffer at the hands of her husband or partner. These children suffer similar consequences.

The Bible records incidents of child abuse. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, advised the Hebrew midwives to kill every Hebrew boy (Ex. 1:16, 22). Ahaz sacrificed his sons in the fire (2 Chr. 28:3). Ezekiel 16:5 refers to the pagan practice of abandoning infants and exposing them to the elements. King Herod hoped to kill the Messiah by ordering all boys under age two in and around Bethlehem to be killed (Matt. 2:16).

Treatment is crucial for abused chil-

dren. The majority will need some type of medical and/or psychological help. The first step is to stop the violence. This may involve legal procedures to remove the perpetrator, followed by social, economic, and emotional actions. Therapy and education are needed for the victim and the family.

Victims often need to help in learning how to interact socially, to express their feelings in interpersonal situations, and to be more empathetic. Many of these children have negative thought patterns, accompanied by depression and feelings of helplessness. They need new, positive, and healthy ways of thinking (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8).

The second step is treatment to break the cycle of violence. Limiting violent television and encouraging parents to avoid violent toys and games is a start. Most importantly, parents need to model and teach children non-violent ways to deal with their emotions. Abused children need parents who discipline effectively but without anger or violence. The family will need help with finding new patterns of conflict resolution.

LEARNING PROBLEMS

Learning disabilities can also present problems in childhood. Five to ten percent

the school population (almost two million students) has some type of learning disorder.

A *learning disability* is a problem of early neurological origin that affects specific areas of learning and behavior in an otherwise competent student. The areas of learning affected may include input, output, storage, retention, retrieval, or processing of information. This means a student can have difficulty in acquiring, remembering, organizing, recalling, or expressing information.

Treatment for learning disabilities falls into two categories: remediation and accommodation. Remediation includes instructional strategies and techniques to help bring up a student's deficit area to at least an average level of academic functioning. Accommodation occurs when a student's strength is used to compensate for his or her weaker area. For example, a student's strong visual skills may be used to accommodate for a weak auditory processing ability.

Other children face a difficulty called *attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder*. Some children cannot sit still. Others are highly distractible, forgetful, or inattentive. Some appear distracted by every little thing and do not seem to learn from their mistakes. Many of these children disregard rules, even when they are punished repeatedly. They tend to act without thinking, resulting in many accidents and reprimands. ADHD continues to be one of the most thoroughly researched conditions of childhood. The exact causes are still not known, but research appears to support a biological base. The data point to a genetically endowed predisposition, along with a common neurological mechanism. In other words, many ADHD children seem to arrive in the world with temperaments that leave them difficult to manage.

Treatment for ADHD consists of a va-

riety of interventions, including parent education, implementing appropriate forms of consistency and structure at home and school, medication, instruction in self-control and social skills for the child, and use of spiritual resources such as prayer. For example, adults can ask God for discernment in telling the difference between when a child "can't" perform up to expectations because of the ADHD, and when he "won't" cooperate because of willful disobedience.

As Christians, we have the hope of healing as it was evidenced in Christ's touch (Luke 22:51). That same powerful touch is experienced by children, parents, and families today. Childhood problems can certainly be overwhelming, but we should remember that there are many resources for help. Regardless of the problems children face, we can claim the healing touch of the Master's hand.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of children problems include:

- > Deuteronomy 6:6-9
- > Proverbs 13:24; 22:6
- > Mark 10:14-16
- > Ephesians 6:1-4
- > Colossians 3:20, 21

Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on children problems at James 1:27 on page 1644. See also the personality profile of Tamar on page 406.

²⁴for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶If anyone among you^a thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. ²⁷Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

BEWARE OF PERSONAL FAVORITISM

2 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with

partiality. ²For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," ⁴have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be rich* in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the

1:26 ^aNU-Text omits *among you*.

KEY PASSAGE

FOR THE CHILDREN

(1:27)



Children Problems

From politics to book titles, people regularly express their concern for children. Whatever the motives of others might be, believers should be leading the way in showing compassion toward the helpless in society. To "visit orphans and widows in their trouble," wrote James, reveals a person's "pure and undefiled religion before God." Caring for orphans, helpless children, was a high priority in the early church and a mark of true Christian discipleship.

When children face difficult problems in their homes, believers need to understand the great impact they can have in a child's life. Many solid believers trace their faith, not to their parents, but to another loving Christian adult.

In many cases, the problems may require professional intervention. Many times, however, coming alongside as a friend or supportive adult can help a child with problems to feel loved and gain self-esteem. When we direct them toward Jesus, we have given them the best gift of all. In whatever way we can, it's our duty to care for the "orphans" among us.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about children problems on pages 1222, 1223. See also the personality profile of Tamar on page 406.

SOUL NOTE



Playing Favorites (2:1-9) James warned the believers against showing prejudice. They were not to fawn over a rich person while ignoring a poor one. People often want to be associated with those who are successful, popular, and powerful. God demands impartiality, however, for all people are equally valuable in His eyes. Favoritism goes against God's command to love one's neighbor as oneself. He wants us to respect all people and treat them equally, regardless of their background or economic status. Each person is God's creation. **Topic: Prejudice**

done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing! ¹³And I, where could I take my shame? And as for you, you would be like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." ¹⁴However, he would not heed her voice; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

¹⁵Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Arise, be gone!"

¹⁶So she said to him, "No, indeed! This evil of sending me away is worse than the other that you did to me."

But he would not listen to her. ¹⁷Then he called his servant who attended him, and said, "Here! Put this woman out, away from me, and

bolt the door behind her." ¹⁸Now she had on a robe of many colors, for the king's virgin daughters wore such apparel. And his servant put her out and bolted the door behind her.

¹⁹Then Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore her robe of many colors that was on her, and laid her hand on her head and went away crying bitterly. ²⁰And Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this thing to heart." So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.

²¹But when King David heard of all these things, he was very angry. ²²And Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Children Problems/Trials

TAMAR—A LEGACY OF TRIALS

(2 SAMUEL 13)

The painful legacy of turmoil that David provoked by his sin with Bathsheba soon spread to other family members. David's children, Amnon and Tamar, were snared by the curse. Amnon acted out a sexual obsession with Tamar, his half sister, by conspiring with a friend to trick her into being alone with him. The trap worked. Tamar begged for mercy and desperately suggested an honorable solution of marriage to Amnon. Since they were half siblings, the arrangement was possible. In spite of her pleading, Amnon raped her.

Once he had abused her, Amnon shamefully rejected Tamar. She lived in disgrace as a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house. The painful loneliness of her life was a trial she faced as part of a legacy in her family. For although David was aware of the tragedy unfolding in his family and got angry, he actually did nothing. Meanwhile, Tamar's brother Absalom festered in hatred and planned vengeance on Amnon. There was more than Tamar's honor at stake. Amnon's position as the firstborn son and likely heir to the throne certainly increased Absalom's desire to see him eliminated. Years later, Absalom lured Amnon away from the palace and killed him.

These trials could have been avoided. Even though David's heart was broken by the behavior of his children, he never tried to correct the injustices. Perhaps his own guilt and shame immobilized him. His denial and delay only let matters fester and worsen. The consequences were devastating.

The trials experienced by David's children speak volumes about David's own lack of self-control and his lack of parental discipline. Parents cannot insulate their children from all trials and disappointments, nor should they. Parents must, however, provide positive examples and positive discipline to help their children avoid some kinds of trials that they shouldn't have to face.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about children problems on pages 1222, 1223. See also the key passage note on children problems at James 1:27 on page 1644. Turn to the article about trials on pages 706, 707. See also the key passage note on trials at Psalm 34:18 on page 704.