



Never Underestimate A Child

By Philip Bickel

"If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria!" 2 Kings 5:3.

At church one morning, I noticed that 9-year-old Heather seated in the pew in front of me had brought along a book for companionship. It looked like some kind of game or puzzle book. When she opened it, however, I realized that the game was Russian and the puzzle used the Cyrillic alphabet.

After the service I asked Heather, "Why are you studying Russian?"

"Two girls from Russia have entered my class at school. They don't know English yet, and I want to be their friend."

What a missionary heart! What an example to us all! But—we may wonder—how much can one little girl struggling with the Russian language accomplish?

The marvelous story of Naaman the leper in 2 Kings 5, reveals we should never underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do through a child. The climax of this narrative is Naaman's healing in the Jordan River and his declaration, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (v. 15).

But this miracle would not have occurred without the initial witness of a young Hebrew slave girl, who said to Mrs. Naaman, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (v. 3). Without this unnamed, young missionary, Naaman may never have met the Lord. Childhood is often when the Holy Spirit begins to lead people into a missionary career. In fact, the majority of present missionaries say that they first considered becoming a missionary between ages eight and twelve.



Back in 1939, a missionary from New Guinea preached at a church in Fairport Harbor, Ohio. Seated in the audience, eleven-year-old Ruth-Esther Hillila sensed God urging her to become a missionary someday. Years went by. Ruth-Esther became a choir director and church organist. But had her mission interest died? Not at all. As she earned a master's and doctorate in music at Boston University, she also enrolled in one or two missions courses every semester, even studying under Dr. Pierce Beaver, one of the finest mission experts of that era.

Finally, in 1966, a position opened to teach music at Chung Chi [Glory of Christ] College in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. During Ruth-Esther's 10 years there, many students became believers in Christ, and today they serve their Lord in music ministries around the world.

Between Ruth-Esther's first missionary desire and her call to Hong Kong, 27 years intervened—but God was faithful. Never underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do through a child, either now or in the future.

Going Deeper

- Imagine the daily life and living faith of the Hebrew slave girl in 2 Kings 5.2
- What cross-cultural experiences and mission interests did the Lord give you during your childhood? How is the Spirit building on them today?
- Brainstorm ways for you to enable the children in your family or church to gain a vision for God's mission and participate in it.

Moving into action

- Talk to educational leaders in your congregation about raising mission vision among children and youth.
- Investigate and use children's mission resources available from LCMS World Mission at www.lcmsworldmission.org/resources or 1-800-254-9495.

Note: This devotion comes from God's Mission Promises, a weekly e-column by Dr. Philip Bickel. Subscribe to receive God's Mission Promises at www.lcmsworldmission.org/subscriptions.

