

# INTRODUCTION

Liam was seven years old. It was his first time at 'Tuesday Club', the weekly Christian club run by local churches at his school, where he was asked a question about God. 'I don't know anything about God,' said Liam, 'except my Dad says he made the world.'

Liam is not unusual; you probably know a lot of similar children. Like most children today he has no experience of church, no relative who reads the Bible and no knowledge of God except the barest of facts.

So where do we begin and how do we talk about Jesus with children like Liam who know so little? And where do we start with those who have never even been told that God made the world? In this book we will look at some of the problems and the Biblical principles behind talking about Jesus with those who know nothing about him. We shall consider some practical possibilities for helping children who are unconnected with a church community to catch sight of Jesus.

When I am decorating my house, I can never wait for the moment when I load the brush with paint and put the new colour on the wall. I am so eager that I often rush the preparation stages in my haste to get into the paint tin! Parts 1 and 2 of this book may seem like the work that has to be done before painting can begin, but thinking through these things will make your work with children so much more effective.

As you read, keep in mind the children with whom God brings you into contact, their lives, the things that take up their time and interest and where all that fits with what you read. Ask God to make you more effective in helping them to know Jesus. And ask yourself this question: If nobody had ever told you about Jesus, what would you miss the most? It is part of your motivation for helping children to know Jesus.

# SOME OF THE CHALLENGES

## 1 Contact

When, where and how do we meet children today? Gone are the days when large numbers of children were sent to church by their parents every week. The majority of children in church on a Sunday are there with their parents, so the number of children connected with church is relatively small. Back in 1991, it was less than one in seven and it has been declining ever since. Liam has never gone to church on a Sunday. If we are to help other children to know about Jesus and to come to know him, we will have to go outside church to meet them. We will have to think beyond Sunday as the best time to work with children.

### When?

For people who do not go to church, Sunday is often prime time for

- leisure
- shopping
- sport
- visiting relatives who live a distance away
- travel
- access to children by parents who do not live with them

Sunday is a busy day for many families. We will have more chance of attracting children to activities on a different day. Instead of bemoaning falling numbers in churches, find new times to run children's work and new ways to make what we do more attractive to those with no church background. Increasing numbers of churches are running midweek clubs. These are proving successful in helping them to meet children with no ties to a church. We shall look at these in more detail in Part 3.

## Where?

Liam is in school Mondays to Fridays. He is familiar with it and although it is primarily a place of learning for him, it is a short walk from home and it is a place where he feels comfortable. We may have more success running activities on what children see as their territory – perhaps in their local school or some other community building. They may be more likely to come to our event if they are familiar with the place where it is held. In Part 3 we shall look at potential opportunities in schools, both formally as part of the school day and informally as a venue for an after-school club.

Do we need an indoor venue for children's work? Not always! It may be that we can run a club outside, where we can be seen by anyone. The possibilities will be limited by the weather, but a club held on a village green, in a local park or on waste ground in a city suburb may be very effective. We cannot just walk up to children and start talking to them in the street. If we are making friendships in more informal settings then we ought to be sure that we introduce ourselves to parents or carers too, so that they know who we are and what we are doing. We need the backing of a local church for what we do, so that there are accountability structures and so that adults working with

### In reality...

Scripture Union in French-speaking Switzerland runs clubs that they call 'Bar-Jack' – the name is a colloquialism for 'bar chat' and reflects the informal nature of the club. They set up a 'bar' (covered table!) in a prominent place in the community and the club meets there every week for chat, games and Bible-based activities.

children are properly checked, in line with current legislation. There are problems to be overcome, but don't let a lack of venue put you off!

### **Who?**

Although it is highly probable that you are reading this book alone, you should not be working alone with children. However deep our concern for children to hear about Jesus, we do need to work to the standards that current legislation demands. It is for everyone's safety – the children's and yours, for the peace of mind of parents, for the reputation of our work and ultimately of Jesus himself. In purely practical terms it is vital in case of an accident, but it is a measure of our care for children that we work to recognised standards. So as you read on, keep thinking in terms of what 'you' (plural) – a church or team of children's workers – can do.

Make sure that you carry out thorough checks to the required standards on everyone who works with children, or who is using the building at the same time as any children's groups meet. For more information check with either your denominational children's work department or contact The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) at PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ (0845 120 550) or [www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)

## **2 Spirituality**

After the birth of his first son, Brooklyn, David Beckham said, 'I definitely want Brooklyn to be christened, but I don't know into what religion yet.' That comment suggests that a) he has failed to realise that 'christening' relates only to Christianity and b) he has no clear religious beliefs. That is not a criticism, just an example of the way that many people think today. They appear to be graduates from the 'Heinz

School of Theology'. Although they may not have the full 57 varieties of beliefs, what they believe will probably come from a wide range of sources, a variety of religions and folklore. Traditional Christian thinking may not feature.

At the same time, however, people are much more open to spiritual things. 'Spirituality' is a buzzword in school and children are encouraged to be reflective. Rather than seeing it as a threat we need to make the most of this opportunity. In Part 2 we'll look at how the apostle Paul coped with the mix of beliefs that he found among the people of Athens.

Of course in multicultural Britain, we are likely to meet children from strong, but not Christian, faith backgrounds. We need to understand something of their culture and faith so that we can welcome them and share the love of Jesus without pressure to change their beliefs. A person from another faith who converts to Christianity could face opposition from their family, and we must be aware of this. Someone experienced in working with children from other faith backgrounds says, 'We can give them the opportunity to explore in a simple way what the Bible says. The challenge then comes from the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives through what is studied, and not from the leaders.'



### 3 Assumptions

In today's spiritual climate, there may be no common understanding of what we mean when we talk about God or Jesus. So we can make no assumptions about the knowledge children have. We need to think about things from their perspective, to explain basic truths and to tell basic Bible stories, rather than expecting them to have heard them before. In a school staff-room I once saw a list on the wall