

## “Will they or won’t they?” “Is it a lost cause?” The factors in children finding and keeping their faith

Sally Smith (Baptist Union of New South Wales Children and Families Co-ordinator) recently offered this summary of **Ken Edgecombe**, *Will They or Won't They?* (© Scripture Union 2000):

‘In the book *Will They or Won't They?* (© Scripture Union 2000), Ken Edgecombe examines the faith journeys of 14 strong Christian adults from a variety of backgrounds who came to faith as adolescents. He looked for common threads that might help leaders of children and youth in planning their ministries. He found these six features were influential:

1. Christian teaching in childhood
2. Key relationships and prayer
3. On-going group learning
4. Specific deliberate challenge to take a faith step
5. Christian camps
6. Involvement in service’

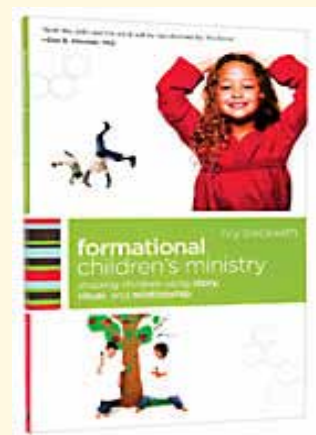
Sally’s focussed review of Edgecombe reminded me of some other resources that wrestle with discerning the positive faith-building factors for humans, and in particular young humans.



**Ivy Beckwith** in *Formational Children's Ministry* (2009) suggests a simple trio of factors as the core elements of a living faith formation:

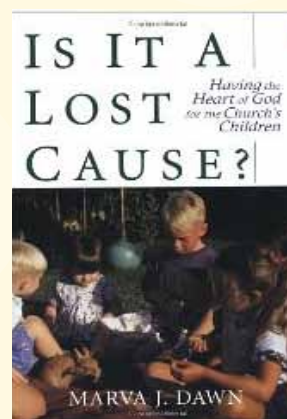
- Stories
- Ritual
- Relationship.

Beckwith locates the development within the worshipping community of the church. She encourages us to invest in these strands richly and to trust the process, rather than manipulate the outcome. Shared space with children is a key part of her method.



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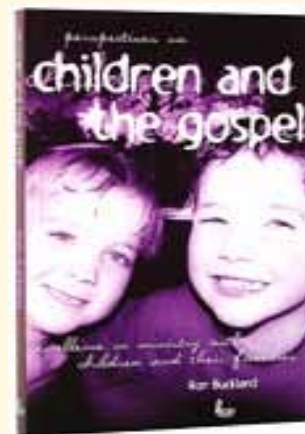
Similarly, **Marva Dawn**, in *Is it a Lost Cause?* (1997) promotes the value of children being raised in an alternative community, shaped by the (biblical) meta-narrative of the Kingdom, and – I think this is a key for Dawn – equipping our children and young people with Biblical Literacy skills to meaningfully and fruitfully access and incarnate the alternative meta-narrative of the Bible.



**Ron Buckland** has written 2 books that have rocked the children’s ministry world (particularly in Australia), named *Children and the Kingdom* and *Children and the Gospel*. I use the term ‘rocked’ in all its colloquial nuances here. In *Children and the Gospel*, Buckland’s later book, he focuses on developing in children (and in ourselves) responsiveness to God. Patterns of responding to God, especially ‘yes’ responses, need to be:

- frequent,
- meaningful,
- real and
- life-long.

By this, Buckland challenges us to shift focus from ‘extracting’ one momentary response of Christian commitment from a child to recognising that the call to discipleship is one that will involve many decisions. Buckland (with a fair amount of support from John the Baptist) defines conversion as turning towards Christ and he recognizes the full 360 degrees of orientation in that process.



No doubt you will have your own intuition, experience and convictions about faith formation. Those of us who have been around for more than 5 seconds will probably reject anything ‘formulaic’. These lists of factors and theological insights can be helpful diagnostic tools. Each of the elements that Edgecombe, Beckwith, Dawn and Buckland offer, do contribute something positive in the life of faith formation. So pondering the balance of each of these in our own cultures and contexts can illuminate areas of richness and areas that are thin.

What factors would be on your personal list for sustaining and growing faith? How are these built into your ministry life with children and families? If they are missing for you, chances are that they are missing for those you minister with.