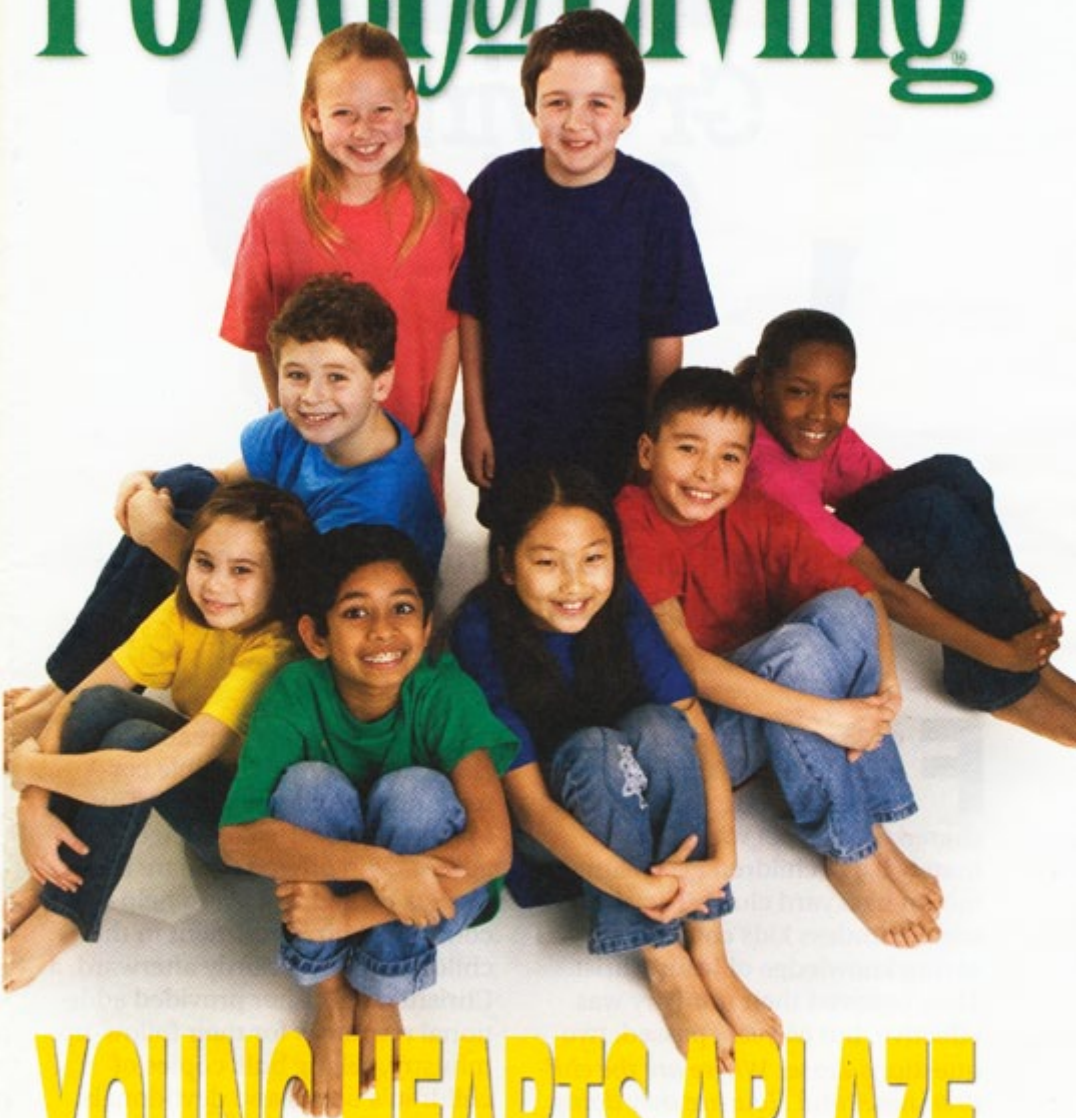


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# Power for Living



## YOUNG HEARTS ABLAZE

Vaughan and Melba Durston's quest  
to kindle kids' **SPIRITUAL PASSION**



## A Canadian couple's rousing response to a neglected childhood need.

BY GRACE FOX

**F**or 25 years, Vaughan and Melba Durston of Saskatchewan, Canada, had shared the Gospel with approximately 6,000 children every summer in backyard clubs. They had seen countless kids come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. They believed their ministry was effective, but as years passed, two questions arose: *Where are the children now?* and *How are they doing spiritually?* As they became more aware of the need for following up the children whose lives they had touched through the clubs, they asked God to show them what they could do to help the children's faith in Christ continue to mature.

One day Vaughan read a magazine that advertised a Bible correspondence course called "The Mailbox Club." He contacted the author, who offered to share the lessons he had written to help them continue their investment in the children's lives. Shortly afterward, a Christian publisher provided additional resources for their follow-up ministry, selling bulk copies of children's books and devotionals to the Durstons for pennies each. Their follow-up ministry took a new turn, though, when Vaughan read 1 Samuel 13:14. The phrase "the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart" grabbed his attention.

"These words defined our



purpose,” says Vaughan. “We didn’t want to simply offer Bible lessons and books for the sake of keeping kids busy. Our desire was to give them spiritual direction, to help them become like King David—a person after God’s own heart. We wanted boys and girls to love the things that God loves, hate the things that He hates, choose the things that He chooses, and desire the things that He desires.”

As Vaughan studied David’s life, he recognized an element that further defined the follow-up ministry’s goal. “David’s closest friend was Jonathan, a man committed to helping him become all God wanted him to be,” he says. “As Jonathan invested his life to help David become all that God had ordained him to be, our mission would be to invest in the lives of children to achieve the same result.”

The culmination of this vision was a ministry called “UB David & I’ll B Jonathan”—a free Bible correspondence course that today influences children in more than 60 countries, including Canada, the United States, the Philippines, India, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. Sent via the mail and via the Internet to children as young as age 5, more than one million lessons have been completed since the ministry launched in 1985.

Vaughan’s passion for children’s spiritual growth stems from his boyhood. He grew up on a farm in Manitoba, raised by morally upright parents who took him and his siblings to church regularly. Trouble was, neither his parents nor

the pastor spoke about Jesus Christ and the necessity of trusting Him for salvation. He recalls lying on the lawn at night, gazing at the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, and the North Star. *Does God see me? Will I go to heaven when I die? Where is heaven, anyway?* he wondered. The answer to his questions came when a man on horseback rode onto his family’s farm.

The man was Hugh Campbell, an itinerant evangelist who lived 20 miles away. He had come to ask permission from Vaughan’s father to hold Sunday School classes in the local schoolhouse. Vaughan’s dad agreed, so Campbell and his wife rode 40 miles roundtrip each week-

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end to teach Bible lessons to anyone who came to listen. Several months later, the couple moved into a cabin next to the schoolhouse and launched a second weekly meeting for those wishing to receive more Bible teaching.

Every Friday night, Vaughan, his twin, their two older brothers, and several others would hike three-quarters of a mile across the field to that cabin. The boys would sit around the kitchen table, the light from a coal oil lamp flickering on their faces as Mr. Campbell would play his harpsichord and sing songs from an old hymnbook. They would listen as he told Bible stories of the great men of faith like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David, and as



he would explain the meaning of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for their sin. When the meeting ended, Mrs. Campbell would serve cookies and hot chocolate before sending the boys home.

The following summer, Campbell invited Vaughan and his brothers to attend a week-long Christian camp. That's where Vaughan, then age 10, realized he couldn't earn salvation by being a good person. He confessed his need for Jesus as his Saviour, and chose to live for Christ. A camp counselor spent time with him, explaining several Scriptures that reassured him of salvation. Then he told him to read his Bible and pray every day. Vaughan took the counselor's advice and developed the habit of rising early to read his Bible before doing his morning chores. After high school graduation, with Campbell's encouragement, he attended a Bible college.

Vaughan credits Campbell's influence and emphasis on God's Word as a major factor in his conversion and spiritual growth. As Jonathan encouraged David to become all God had ordained him to be, so Campbell played that role in his life. He also credits his twin Conrad with having a similar impact on him.

He recalls Conrad—who, too, was involved in fulltime children's ministries—speaking honestly of lessons he was learning about humility and about the need to set self aside to serve Christ and others. When Conrad died of a brain tumor at age 38, Durston determined to honor his brother's legacy by investing in the lives of others. Today, Vaughan and Melba, 10 paid staff, and approximately 50 volunteers are "Jonathans," committed to several thousand "Davids" around the world, discipling them through the correspondence lessons. They pray for the students, donate time and finances to the ministry, provide counsel, answer questions, and grade and send lessons.

The primary textbook is the Bible, and each lesson is designed to show students how God's Word relates to their lives today. Themes for young children include God's plan for salvation, prayer, obedience, forgiveness, telling the truth, sharing, and thankfulness. The course progresses to include lessons about Bible characters such as Isaac, Jacob, Dorcas, Daniel, and Nehemiah. It explains Christ's teachings, God's character, and Satan's tactics. It also teaches about the origin of sin, Christ's resurrection and second coming, and the



role of missions in a believer's life. Participants who complete various levels receive awards.

The ministry's ultimate goal is for participants to develop godly character as seen in seven characteristics that David possessed, based on 1 Samuel 13:14 and 1 Samuel 16:18:

- A heart like God's—loving what He loves and hating what He hates.
- Cunning (skillful)—honing one's talents and using them to honor God.
- Mighty and valiant—showing courage and strength.
- Person of war—willing to stand for truth and righteousness.
- Prudent in matters—possessing discretion, sound judgment, and the ability to make wise decisions with an understanding of their influence on the future.
- Comely—outer and inner beauty resulting from godliness.
- Blessed by God's presence in their lives.

Vaughan, Melba, and their team rejoice when testimonials suggest the ministry is achieving its goal.

An 11-year-old boy writes, "Thank you for teaching me all this wonderful stuff. It has made a big difference in my life. I told a lie

and since reading one of your Bible studies, I went and told the truth. I feel so much better."

Another teenager says, "My next lesson came just in time. I'd been dating a 16-year-old guy and he was starting to pressure me to have sex with him. When I got the lesson, I read through it and realized I needed to make some changes before it was too late."

A 15-year-old girl writes, "Sometimes I feel a bit awkward because I feel like I'm the only person without a boyfriend, but these lessons are helping me. Jesus will always be my one true love, even when I find my husband."

Feedback like this reinforces Vaughan Durston's resolve to help youngsters of all ages become what God has ordained them to be.

"The world, the flesh, and the devil—these are coming onto today's kids with incredible force," he says. "The only answer is their knowing God's Word and having it in their hearts. Scripture is powerful, and the stories I learned as a boy are as practical today as they ever were. If we can zero in on that, the results are amazing. That's what will keep them from falling into temptation and from walking in the flesh." 🍃

