

LEAD WELL

in

**Children's
Ministry**

Dale Hudson

**LEAD WELL IN
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY**

DALE HUDSON

LEAD WELL in Children's Ministry

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This book is dedicated to the Pastors I've had the privilege to serve with over the years. You have invested in me, believed in me and empowered me to lead. Thank you for challenging me, mentoring me and inspiring me.

INTRODUCTION

I believe children's ministry is one of the most challenging areas to lead in the church. Think about it with me. When you lead in children's ministry, you are leading multiple generations. Babies. Preschoolers. Elementary students. Parents of children. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Middle school students who serve, High school students who serve. College students who serve. Single adults who serve. Married adults who serve. Senior adults who serve.

Besides the Lead Pastor, no one leads as diverse a group. It takes some serious skills to lead such a large mixture of personalities and generations. It can be overwhelming at times, can't it? But the good news is this - you are not alone. You are called by God to lead in children's ministry and where He guides, He provides. Where He calls, He equips. He is ready to equip you with everything you need to make a significant impact as a children's ministry leader.

When I first started out in children's ministry, I quickly discovered that children's ministry was about a lot more than just leading children. It was just as much about leading the people who served the kids. You can be the pied piper of children, but if you don't hone your ability to lead the adults and students who help you minister to the children, you will have a tough go of it.

So, I started learning everything I could about leadership. Reading books about leadership. Listening to talks about leadership. Attending leadership conferences. These were extremely helpful, but I've learned the most about leading from watching experienced pastors and staff lead well. I've had the privilege to serve with some of the best pastors and church leaders across the country and each of them has taught me valuable leadership lessons.

I've also learned about leadership by making mistakes. You know, the kind of mistakes that you look back at and say to yourself,

“What in the world was I thinking?” Thankfully people were kind enough to give me some grace and room to grow as a leader.

And I still need that grace today, because growing as a leader is a lifetime journey and you never completely arrive. But that’s what makes it an exciting adventure. There is always more you can learn about leading well.

We live in a challenging day. The kids in your ministry need you to lead well. The volunteers you serve with need you to lead well. Parents need you to lead well as you equip them to lead their children spiritually. Like never before, people need godly, Christ-honoring leaders, who are infused with God’s power, to lead well.

In this book, I’ve recorded much of what I’ve learned over the years about leading in children’s ministry. My prayer is that as you read this book, you will be encouraged, equipped and empowered to lead well in your ministry.

In 2 Chronicles 16, it says “*The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.*” God is looking for yielded, passionate, committed, faithful leaders to do His work through. You can be that person!

Ready to grow as a leader? Awesome!

Let’s go to chapter 1 and get started!

Dale Hudson
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*“Your greatest leadership challenge is
the person you look at in the mirror.”*

With my work, I travel frequently on planes. I'm sure you know the boarding drill as well. You wait patiently while the pre-boarding takes place. I'm not sure why they call it "pre-boarding." It's still boarding, isn't it? I don't think the "pre" is needed. Once the pre-boarding is done, you line up in the cattle chute and prepare to board per what zone you're in. When they finally call your zone, you walk down the temporary hallway and into the plane. Then you must walk past all the first-class passengers. Inside you're kinda' jealous, wishing you could stop there and be able to enjoy the big comfortable seats, cookies, meals and all the other benefits of flying first-class. As you look at the first-class passengers, you wonder what business they are in that would enable them to fly first-class? Their business or company or bank account or inheritance must be doing really well.

If you are reading this and fly first-class, pray for me that I will not let envy overtake me as I walk through the first-class section. I have been upgraded to fly first-class a few times and enjoyed the experience, so I'm "kinda" happy for you, if you get to fly first-class all the time.

There is something else I need to make you aware of. If you are ever seated by someone named "Jack," be careful how you greet them. Saying "Hi Jack" can get you in big trouble and get you kicked off the plane. Hopefully you got my attempt at humor. "Hi Jack" as in other people hearing it as "hijack" and freaking out and running down the aisle away from you. It can be quite embarrassing.

Here's another tip for flying. If your ears are hurting due to the pressure, gum can help. The only down side is trying to get it out of your ears afterwards. It can be very sticky. Another feeble attempt at humor. Can I at least get a chuckle? Thanks.

Okay, let me get back on track here. After everyone is seated... first class passengers with lots of spacious leg room and us back in coach...sitting with our knees under our chins, the stewardess goes over the safety procedures. Unless it's your first time flying, you

probably do what I do. While the stewardess is going through the safety procedures, I am checking my e-mail or text one last time before we take off. I mean, I already know how to fasten the seat belt and how to walk to the exit door if needed.

But there is one part of the safety procedures that always catches my attention and causes me to think. It's when they say, *"In the event of a decompression, an oxygen mask will automatically drop down for you. To start the flow of oxygen, pull the masks towards you. Place it firmly over your nose and mouth, secure the elastic band behind your head, and breathe normally.* (here's the part that catches my attention) *If you are traveling with a child or someone who requires assistance, secure your mask on first, then assist the other person."*

Why do they say you should put your own mask on first? Because, you can't help the child sitting beside you, if you pass out from a lack of oxygen. You must have the oxygen flowing into you before you can give it to someone else. When the stewardess says that, it causes me to think about a verse in 1 Timothy 4:16¹ Look what it says.



**Keep a close watch on
yourself and on the teaching.
Persist in this, for by so doing
you will save both yourself
and your hearers.
1 Timothy 4:16**

Notice what it says. We must first care for ourselves spiritually. As we keep our own spiritual tank full, we will be able to help those we are leading.

If we are going to lead well, if we are going to pour ourselves out to help others grow spiritually, if we are going to invest in others, if we are going to equip others, then we must first lead ourselves well. This will enable us to then fill others.



“We must first lead ourselves well if we are going to effectively lead others well.”

I have found that the hardest person to lead is the person that looks back at me in the mirror. Do you feel the same way at times? I believe we all do. Even the apostle Paul said in Romans 7, *“I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.”*² Can you identify? I think we all can.

That’s why I put this chapter first. If we can learn to lead ourselves well, then we will be able to lead others effectively. You see, ultimately your leadership and usefulness in God’s kingdom comes from the person you spend the most time with...yourself.

*“If I had 6 hours to chop down a tree,
I would spend the first 4 sharpening my axe.”*³
Abraham Lincoln

What was Lincoln saying? He was saying the time spent investing in the person in the mirror is never wasted. Here’s the deal. If you will continue to personally grow as a leader, then God will expand your leadership to heights beyond what you’ve been dreaming about. Look what Rick Warren said about this.

“Years ago I stopped worrying about how to grow our church and instead focused on growing me. As I grew me, our church grew.”
-Rick Warren ⁴

In this chapter, we’re going to talk about growing ourselves as leaders. As you’re reading this chapter, search your heart and listen to the gentle whispers of the Holy Spirit. I believe He will infuse you with a renewed passion for ministry to the children and families He has called you to serve. God anoints people, not programs, and He wants to anoint you with a fresh touch of His power.

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY KNOWING WHAT YOUR #1 JOB IS

Here are some humorous job descriptions:

Show people innovative ways to burn money in the spirit of patriotism: (Fireworks Stand Manager)

Go to strange people’s houses and take their money:
(Pizza Delivery Person)

Take pictures of the unlucky and the stupid:
(X-ray Technician)

Copy and paste the internet: (Student)

Spend most of the day looking out the window: (Pilot)

Runaway and call the police: (Security Guard)

You probably have a job description as well (if you don’t, ask for one). It helps clarify what the expectations are for your role, what

success looks like, who you will be reporting to and who you will be overseeing.

A job description is very important for you to have as a leader. But think about this with me. Your number one job as a leader is probably not on the job description you were given.

So, let's talk about what your number one job is as a leader. It's found in Proverbs. Here's what it says.

*“Guard your heart above all else,
for it determines the course of your life.”
Proverbs 4:23⁵*

Your #1 job as a leader is to guard your heart. That's it. Other things on your job description are important, but the #1 thing you must do is guard your heart. Everything else flows out of the spiritual condition of your heart.

What are some things we should guard our hearts against? Let's look at a few of the biggies that you will face in ministry.

Guard your heart against bitterness. Let's get real about this. As a leader, you will be burned by people. It comes with the job. Paul experienced this. He said in 2 Timothy 4:10 that *“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.”*⁶ And in verse 16, Paul said, *“The first time I was brought before the judge, no one came with me. Everyone abandoned me. May it not be counted against them.”*⁶

Even Jesus faced this, when one of His disciples, Judas, betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver. And then Peter denied even knowing Him 3 times. But Jesus set a great example for us to follow as leaders. He guarded His heart and forgave those who had betrayed Him. It's going to happen to you as well. You will invest major time and energy into a volunteer and they'll quit, just when you needed them the most. Guard your heart against bitterness. People in the church who you thought were your friends, will gossip about you behind your back and question your motives. **Guard your heart against resentment.**

A deacon will go to the Pastor and lie about you. **Guard your heart against anger.**

Parents will complain to the Pastor about you with no just cause. **Guard your heart against frustration.**

People will argue against the much-needed changes you are trying to implement. **Guard your heart against disappointment.**

Families in the church that you love and have built a relationship with, will turn their back on you and leave the church. **Guard your heart against discouragement.**

You can't afford to let bitterness, frustration and disappointments creep into your life when these type of things happen. The longer you carry them, the heavier they get. You must lead yourself well. It's more about what happens in you than what happens to you.

You can react or you can act. I look back and see there were times when I reacted out of immaturity, anger and frustration.

I think back to when I first started in ministry and how I made the mistake of not guarding my heart. As a result, I did something really stupid. It was in my 4th year serving in a local church. I had been out of town for a few days and got back into town in the evening. I lived close to the church, so I decided to swing by the office. There was no one there. I opened the door of my office and flipped on the light. To my surprise, my office was crammed full of wagon wheels, barrels and other western decorations. Some of the items had been pushed against the wall and had chipped some of the paint off the wall.

Instead of acting, I reacted. I took all the items and stacked them in the main lobby of the church. And I didn't stop there. I made a big sign that said, "Dale's office is not a storage room!" Can you believe I did that? I definitely wasn't leading myself well. The

next morning one of the precious ladies in the church came and found the objects of my wrath in the church lobby. And yes, the sign was still there. She came to me and was obviously upset. The items were for a special dinner that was happening that evening. When she got to the church, the only place she could think to store them overnight was in my office. She didn't think I would mind. What she didn't realize is that I was a young leader who didn't always lead himself well.

I became defensive and even more angry. My emotions ramped up and because of poor self-leadership on my part, I told her I didn't appreciate her filling up my office with all that stuff without first asking me! It was my office...not a storage closet! Boy, did I tell her off. She left with tears in her eyes. A few days later, I came to my senses and apologized to her and made it right. It took several years for me to learn this important lesson of self-leadership. If I'm going to lead myself well, then I've got to learn to...

ACT
DON'T
REACT

Guard your heart against the seven deadly sins found in God's Word.

Any of them can have deadly effects on your ministry.

Envy - wanting someone else's position, possessions or praise. We'll talk more about this later in this chapter.

Gluttony - excessive desire for food. Eating when you're not hungry. Gluttony is trying to use food to find comfort for an underlying issue.

Lust - uncontrolled sexual desire and sinful longing. This sin can be especially deadly in the life of a Christian leader. It has been heartbreaking this year to see many people in leadership positions having to step aside from ministry, because they didn't guard their heart against lust. You can spend years, and even decades, building your testimony, only to see it quickly come crashing down because of this sin.

Lead yourself well in this area. If you're married, never have lunch alone with someone from the opposite sex, other than your spouse. The same principle applies to riding alone in a car. Guard your heart against lustful desires outside of marriage. It is astounding how many ministers are addicted to pornography. Place boundaries in your life that will help you guard your heart. Have people who ask you the hard questions and hold you accountable. Yield yourself to the Holy Spirit and let Him guide you in every area of your life. Sex is a good thing inside marriage, but outside of marriage, it can destroy your testimony and ministry.

Pride - an elevated self-opinion, boasting and bragging about achievements or possessions. When good things happen, give God the glory for it. Stay humble and teachable. Remember God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Have you heard the story of the turtle that was sitting on top of a fence post. He was thankful to be up there, but he quickly reminded his turtle friends



that he didn't get up there without some help. Always keep in mind that God is the giver of all good things. Everything you have is a blessing that God has given you. Without Him, we can do nothing.

Slothfulness - laziness, being apathetic, not working, no plan or purpose. God deserves our best. The Bible tells us to work unto the Lord. How are you known in the ministry you help lead? As a lazy person? Someone that does enough to just get by? Or as a hard worker? A person that is willing to go the second mile.

Wrath - anger, fury, irritation, displeasure. Someone with a short fuse. They could go into a rage at any moment. Guard your heart against this. Be a person of peace that responds with gentleness, even when you are provoked.

Greed - excessive desire for wealth, fame or power.

“Be in the ministry for the outcome rather than the income.”

As you seek to lead yourself well by guarding your heart, I want to encourage you to do two things. First and foremost,

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY KEEPING

YOUR EYES ON THE PERFECT PERSON.

If you have your eyes on people, you will be let down. If you are serving for someone other than Jesus, sooner or later you will be disappointed. There are no perfect people. As I mentioned, my

heart has been broken this year, as I've watched several prominent Christian leaders have to drop out of ministry because of moral or ethical failures. People that I looked up to, that I learned from, that I followed. It hurts when people you look up to take a fall, doesn't it?

The world is full of people who used to go to church. Who used to serve others. Who used to give sacrificially. Who used to be in a small group. Who used to lift their voices and sing the worship songs wholeheartedly. But not anymore. Why? Because someone whom they looked up to in the church let them down. Their Pastor had a moral failure. They saw people in church on Sunday who didn't live out their faith during the week. They got tired of gossip in the hallways. They saw the church snub people who didn't dress or act a certain way. Eventually, bitterness and frustration and anger overtook them. They walked out the back door of the church for the last time. What happened? Yes, the people who perpetuated the disunity and hypocrisy are partially to blame. But first and foremost, the person who walked away, got so distracted by the problems, that it caused them to take their eyes off Jesus.

If you want to guard your heart against these things, then you've got to keep your eyes on Jesus. We are urged to do this in Hebrews 12. *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* (vs.1-2)⁷ To lead yourself well, you've got to be cross-eyed. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He told us to follow Him...not people. He will never fail you. He will always be there for you. He is always trustworthy. He is the perfect example for you to follow. People will let you down. There will be people you admire that will ruin their testimony. But not Jesus. In the valleys, He will be with you. On the mountain top, He will be by our side.

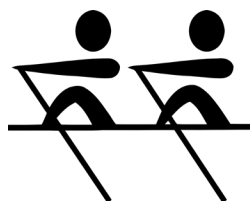
When you get hurt, disappointed, tired of people letting you

down and feeling like quitting, pause and remember why you are leading. You are leading because your best friend, Jesus, came calling one day. He came asking you to take up your cross and follow Him and help reach the world with the Gospel. And you said “Yes.” No matter what circumstances you find yourself in, Jesus’ call is still upon your life. Remember it wasn’t someone else who called you, it was Jesus. Keep your eyes on the One who called you.

What a wonderful Savior we are serving. Jesus is the Alpha. The Bearer of our sins. The Conqueror of death. He is Deity. He is Exalted. He is Faithful. He is Good. He is Holy. Invincible. Just. Kind. Loving. Magnificent. He is Never-ending. He is Omnipresent. He is Powerful. He is the Quieter of our soul. He is Righteous. He is Salvation. He is Truth. He is Upright. He is Victorious. He is Wise. He is Your best friend.

Have you ever watched the boat rowing competition during the summer Olympics? The team members can’t see the finish line because they are looking at the back of the boat. At the back of the boat is the captain. He/she is the one who helps them stay in cadence. He/She is the one who urges them on. He/she is the one who can see what is ahead. Keeping their eyes on the captain enables them to win the race.

You are on Captain Jesus’ team. He can see the finish line. Keep your eyes on Him. Don’t let distractions, issues and people break your gaze upon Him. Listen to Him. Obey Him. He will guide you to victory!



Go all out in your relationship with Jesus. For when you walk with Him, He will enable you to rise above the “stuff” that comes your way and help you keep your heart in tune with His.

**Lead yourself well by keeping your eyes on the
PERFECT
PURPOSE.**

Many years ago, there was a man named Noah. I'm sure you've heard his story. God told Noah He had a special mission for him. He was to build a giant ark. Why? God was going to send a great flood to wipe out all life on the earth. Except for Noah, his family and two of every kind of animal. They would survive the flood in the ark and replenish the earth afterwards.

So, for the next 100 to 120 years, Noah and his family worked to build the ark. Talk about a major building project! Finally, the ark was completed and they boarded. The rains and floods came and for the next 40 days Noah and his family lived on the giant boat they had constructed.

Have you ever thought about how it must have been on the ark...traveling with that many animals? I'm sure it wasn't like being on a first-class cruise today. Animals smell and they poop...a lot. Elephant poop. Hippopotamus poop. Lion poop. Cow poop. You get the point. There was a lot of poop on the ark. And I'm sure it wasn't a perfectly smooth ride. Riding out a flood of that magnitude would involve some rough seas with waves and lots of motion. Some of his family may have gotten sick and puked. Some of the animals may have even gotten seasick and puked as well. Imagine what it smelled like in there! On top of that, I imagine there were probably a few leaks here and there that Noah had to repair once they got afloat. Bottom line...the ark wasn't a perfect place. But what was perfect was the purpose that Noah and his family were there for.

They had a calling from God to survive the flood and replenish the earth. The purpose was worth every board they cut and put in place. The purpose was worth every back-breaking day of work they put into it. The purpose was worth every gopher tree they had to cut down to build the ark. The purpose was worth laboring for over 100 years. The purpose was worth being laughed at and mocked by the crowds. The purpose was worth spending 40 days on a smelly boat. The purpose was worth leaving behind their homes and past way of life. Fast forward to today and think about the similarities. The church is like the ark. It's not a perfect place. It has its weak spots.

where disunity, hypocrisy, scandal, sin and church politics seep in at times. And it's messy. Just like the ark, there is poop in the church. Some of it's mine and some of it's yours, because we are all still trying to overcome our sinful nature and sometimes it ends up overcoming us.

Let's be honest and real as we think about this. The church stinks at times. That's because it's made up of fallen, broken, hurt and sinful people, like you and I.

But...the purpose of the church is perfect. The purpose of sharing the Gospel with boys, girls, students, moms, dads, grandparents and great grandparents is perfect. The purpose of discipling people and helping them grow in their faith is perfect. The purpose of seeing marriages restored is perfect. The purpose of bringing hope to the hopeless is perfect. The purpose of helping broken people get healthy again is perfect. The purpose of helping those in need is perfect. The purpose of gathering to worship Jesus and hear His Word taught is perfect. The purpose of the church is worth giving your life to. The purpose of the church is worth sacrificing for. The purpose of the church is worth your time. So, remember those two things that will help you guard your heart:

**“It is absurd that a man
should rule others, who
cannot rule himself.”
-Latin Proverb ⁸**

**Keep your eyes on the perfect
person - who is Jesus.**

**Keep your eyes on the perfect
purpose - which is redeeming
mankind.**

**When you do those two
things, you will have a
strong foundation for
leading yourself well.**



LEAD YOURSELF WELL BEHIND THE CURTAIN

We put our best face on when we are leading in front of everyone. Times like sharing a lesson, leading worship, facilitating a class, presenting a message to the church, leading a staff meeting, etc. We make sure we present a positive spirit. We pray lofty prayers, so people will think we are full of faith. We abstain from even the appearance of evil, guarding our testimony closely. We want people to believe that we have it all together. And we should do our best to live out our faith before others.

But there's another dimension of your spiritual life. It's what happens behind the curtain. It's who you are when no one is watching. It's who you are behind the curtain before you come on "stage." Here's what I've learned. If you will lead yourself well behind the scenes, God will expand your influence in front of people.

*"Who you are is more important than what you do.
If you will be who you are supposed to be,
you will do what you are supposed to do."*

Behind the curtain is where you re-charge your spiritual battery. Batteries. Batteries. Batteries. They are a great invention, but when they get low it can be frustrating, can't it? Especially your cell phone battery. Cell phone batteries seem to get low at the worst time possible. You're in the middle of an important call and your phone battery dies. Or you're right in the middle of a game on your

tablet. You're about to set a new all-time high record, when suddenly your tablet dies. Or you're in the middle of an important text message exchange and your battery dies. In the movies, doesn't it always seem like the person who's in danger, either can't get a signal or their battery dies at the wrong time.

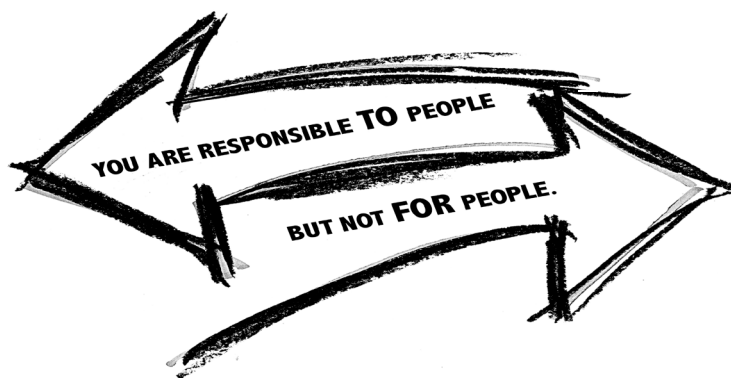
Most of the time when we get in a situation like mentioned above, it's because we forgot to re-charge our phone the night before. Without a re-charge, the battery drains down to 0% and stops working. Sometimes we know we need to re-charge our battery. We know the battery is draining and may not last for the day, but we tell ourselves we are too busy to stop and re-charge. We convince ourselves that the battery drain will slow down and it will make it through the day. Later that day, the battery dies and we realize we should have made time to recharge it.

What drains your battery? Perhaps it's **PEOPLE** who drain your personal battery. People are why we lead in ministry. But you must also place boundaries around yourself and your family, so that people don't deplete you down to the point where you have nothing left to give. Needy people will drain you. Some faces are probably popping into your mind as you read this.

You've probably seen the movie "What About Bob?" Bob, the doctor's patient, crosses every boundary the doctor puts in place. He even shows up during the doctor's vacation and interrupts his whole family. Help people, but also place some boundaries around yourself and your family. Watch out for people who ignore the Biblical counsel you give them and would rather just use you as an emotional crutch to lean on.

Many ministry leaders are people pleasers. They are wired to help people. They have the heart of a shepherd. That's a good thing, but it can also have a negative impact if it's not balanced with discernment. Help people, but set up some boundaries in your life, so you don't get it drained to the point where you have nothing left to give. You don't have to answer your phone on your day(s)

off. You don't have to work 18 hours a day. You don't have to say "yes" to attending every birthday party. You don't have to go to the hospital to pray with every single request that comes in. It's okay to train other leaders to help with hospital visits. Remember this...



Another personal battery drainer is **PROBLEMS**. In ministry, there are always problems that arise. You can probably think of 3-4 right now that you're dealing with. And dealing with problems can drain the life out of you. But if you have a strategy, you can be a problem-solver without it leaving you on empty. Here's some tips to remember when working through problems.

Realize problems are part of forward motion. The only way to not have any problems is to not do anything.

Deal directly and quickly with problems instead of avoiding them. Ignoring them won't make them go away.

Don't try to solve big problems by yourself. Have a small circle of wise friends that you consult with about big decisions. If you have problems weighing heavily on you at bedtime, write them down with some possible solutions before you go to sleep.

See problems as opportunities to grow.

Another personal battery drainer is **PRESSURE**. In 2 Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul, shares about some of the hardships he has faced. He says he's endured whippings, beatings, shipwreck, hunger, prison, being stoned, freezing in the cold and more. But after listing all the hard trials and tribulations he had faced; he singles out something that was at a whole other level. Here's what it was...

*“Besides everything else, I face daily the **PRESSURE** of my concern for all the church.”⁹*

It's like he is saying the toughest, most draining part of ministry is the pressure. I'm sure you can identify. The weight of the ministry is always on your shoulders. For starters, there's the fact that Sunday always returns and you've got to be ready. I like to call it the relentless return of the Sabbath. There's always another lesson to prepare, another volunteer to recruit, a craft to assemble, a snack to hand out, a prayer to lead, a diaper to change, a budget to approve, a family to walk to their room, etc. Realize that the pressures you face can have a big impact on your spiritual and physical health if you're not prepared for it.

But, let's be honest. **Most of the pressure we feel is self-imposed.** We want to reach kids and parents. We are driven for the cause. We constantly try to get more done and make a bigger impact for Christ. Even if it means burning out. Later in another chapter, I'll share with you how my drive to reach the world caused me to crash to the point, where I thought I'd never be able to minister again. And it wasn't others putting the pressure on me. It was my own doing. In fact, my family, friends, co-workers and my pastor were all telling me to slow down and pace myself. But I wouldn't listen. I had to reach the world. I had to prove I was valuable

to the staff team. I had to prove I was worth the investment they were making in me. My self-esteem was tied to how well the ministry was doing. Sound familiar? Out of this, I learned some valuable tips for leading yourself well when you're facing ministry pressure.

Have hobbies and other outlets that can take your mind off the ministry on a regular basis.

Understand that your self-worth isn't based on what you do for Christ. Rather, it is based on who you are in Christ.

Another big pressure we face is **personal sin**. Paul talks about the pressure we all face as we strive to follow Jesus, while still living with a sinful nature that wars against the Spirit.

“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”
*Romans 7:21-24*¹⁰

Sin will drain the joy, anointing and power out of your ministry. And most often, it's the secret sins that impact our ability to lead ourselves well. Sins like unforgiveness, lust, pride, anger, bitterness, jealousy and other personal sins will eventually take you down, if it is not dealt with. You might be able to hide them for a while, but eventually they will be made known publicly. What's behind the curtain will eventually come forward to expose you. As a leader, your spiritual, emotional and physical battery must continuously be re-charged. When you give and give and give, your personal battery gets depleted. Some of you reading this right now,

know your personal battery is very, very low. So low, that you're not sure if you can go on. But wait, don't give up. Keep reading. I'm going to share how you can keep your battery re-charged. Here are some tips for keeping your personal battery at a healthy level.

Identify your personal battery drainers. Every output drains your battery to some extent. Every conversation, every meeting, every conflict, every counseling session, drains your battery. It's normal to have some battery drain. If you don't, it means you're not doing anything!

Adjust major drains on your personal battery as needed. Just like there are certain apps on your phone that can drain it quickly, there are things that can quickly drain your personal battery. If you're going to get back to a healthy battery level and maintain it, you've got to do this. Perhaps you need to adjust the frequency of it. Perhaps you need to stop doing it completely. Perhaps you need to put someone else in charge of it.

Know when your battery is getting low. It's easy to know when your phone is depleted, isn't it? You see it and know to plug it in. But we're not as quick to know when our personal battery is getting low, are we? We ignore the signs of fatigue, frustration and discouragement. But to lead well, we must know when we are tired, restless and over-extended. Enlist other people to help you watch your personal battery level. Give them permission to speak into your life when they see you are running low.

Keep your personal battery at a consistent, healthy level. The most productive way to operate is to find a battery level that you can consistently maintain. Pace yourself so you never get down to single digits. This will allow you to stay the course and finish strong.

Yield yourself to God every morning. Ask Him to guide you.

Have close friends that hold you accountable and ask you the hard questions.

Spend time with Jesus. The discipline of spending time with Jesus is not always easy. If you're like me, it's easier to drive a car than it is to wait patiently by the gas pump while it's filling up. I don't have time to sit and wait for the car to fill up...I've got places to go...things to do...people to connect with. But remember, you can only skip the gas pump for so long before you run out and get stranded on the side of the road. It's the same spiritually. You have to slow down and get filled up by Jesus if you're going to keep going spiritually.

I want you to notice something very interesting in Mark 3.

*“And He appointed twelve that they might be with Him,
and that He might send them out to preach”
Mark 3:14¹¹*

What does it say the disciples' priority was? It was to spend time with Jesus. To be with Him. And then out of that relationship, they would go and share the Gospel. It's easy to fall into the pattern of being so committed to working for Jesus that it overshadows your commitment to be with Jesus. When this happens, your passion can gradually wane and serving will turn into a job you find yourself grudgingly performing.

You have to be intentional about spending time with Jesus. Set a time and place each day when you met up with Him. For me, it's in the morning, sitting in my living room chair. But what if mornings don't work for you? Maybe it's during lunch in your office. Or walking around your neighborhood after dinner. Keeping this appointment is critical if you're going to lead yourself well.

Yes, I know you're busy. Probably crazy busy. It feels like you have a thousand different things pulling at you. Texts hit your phone in rapid succession.

TIME SPENT WITH JESUS IS NEVER TIME WASTED.

Gotta' get groceries. Gotta' pick up the kids from school. Soccer practice. Homework. Laundry. Lessons to prepare. Phone calls to make. Events to plan. It never ends.

Jesus knew a lot about people and tasks vying for your time and attention. Everywhere He went, he was surrounded by people wanting something from Him. People wanting Him to teach. People asking to be healed. People with questions. People trying to take him down. Simon summed it up well when he said in Mark 1.

“Simon and his companions went to look for Him, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for You!’”
Mark 1:36-37¹²

Everyone was looking for Jesus. But He knew that spending time alone, in prayer with His Father was crucial. He made it a top priority. He made spending time in prayer more important than ministering to people.

Guess what? There's always going to be someone looking for you as well. Emails from co-workers that pile up in your inbox. Text messages from friends. Phone calls asking for you. A parent who wants to talk with you about his child. A staff meeting with your boss that you're expected to attend. A person who is asking for counseling. On and on and on it goes.

But if you're going to lead yourself well, even in the busiest of times, you've got to find a place and time where you can get alone with Jesus. Even when everyone is looking for you. When you spend

time with Jesus behind the curtain, He will bless you in front of the curtain. Look with me at this verse.

“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen (behind the curtain). Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (in front of the curtain).

*Matthew 6:6*¹³

The power to minister effectively in front of the curtain comes from the time you spend with God behind the curtain. People won't see you praying behind the curtain, but they will experience the result of your prayers behind the curtain. People's lives will be changed as God works through you.

When you go behind the curtain to spend time with God, it's important to go alone. We are always around people. And we should be, ministry is all about people. But before we are with people, we must spend time alone with God. Look what it says about Jesus in the book of Mark.

“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.”

*Mark 1:35*¹⁴

Have you seen or heard of the show *Alone*? It's a reality show on the History Channel where people are dropped at separate locations in the middle of an isolated area. They are only allowed to take a few survival items with them. Whoever stays the longest is the winner. Each person has a camera to document their journey. They face dangers like predators, crazy weather and lack of supplies. But one of the biggest challenges they face is being alone. No contact with the outside world. They could be alone like this for weeks and even months. And it's tough to be alone with no human contact for that long. Remember the movie *Castaway* with Tom Hanks? He is shipwrecked on an island all alone. He becomes so

desperate for interaction with another person, that he takes a volleyball from the wreckage, paints a face on it and names it “Wilson.” It appears that having a volleyball for a companion is better than no companion at all.

I think that’s why it’s hard for many of us to spend time alone with God. With the rise of technology, smart phones, the internet and social media, we are constantly in contact with other people. Stopping the outside contact for 30 minutes to an hour to spend time with God can be tough for some.

But alone is where you will grow the most, draw closer to Jesus and receive what you need to lead yourself well. Think about some of the benefits of spending time alone with God.

Alone is where you’ll connect with God. When you slip away to a quiet place...alone...you will find a Heavenly Father who is waiting to spend time with you. When was the last time you were alone with God? I mean really alone. No noise. No distractions. No one else around. No technology in your hand. When you slip away to a quiet place...alone...you will find a Heavenly Father who is waiting to meet with you and spend time with you.

Alone is where you’ll be able to hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. Away from the noise created by the internet and social media, His voice will be easier to get in tune with.

Alone is where you’ll find time to think. When you are alone, you have the ability to self-evaluate...plan...dream...meditate.

Alone is where your faith can grow deeper and stronger. It was in a prison cell that Joseph’s faith and trust in God was strengthened.

Alone is where God prepares you for His calling on your life. Moses prepared to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt by spending time alone. Paul spent several years alone, preparing for the ministry God had for him.

Alone is where you can ask the hard questions. Jonah was alone when he asked God the hard questions and wrestled with what

he considered an injustice. We all have times when we don't understand the "why" of what God is doing. When we are alone, we can bring those questions and struggles to God.

Alone is where you will find rest. Jesus says this to us...

"Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Mark 6:31¹⁵

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30¹⁶

Alone is where your prayers will be answered. You'll discover God's promises and see them come to pass. Here are two examples of God's promises when you spend time with Him in prayer.

**"Ask and it will be given to you;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be
opened to you."
Matthew 7:7¹⁷**

**LEAD
YOURSELF
WELL**

THE WAY UP



IS DOWN

**BY
STAYING
HUMBLE**

*“So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God,
and at the right time He will lift you up in honor.”
I Peter 5:6¹⁸*

“Great leaders don’t think they’re great. They have a humble spirit that helps them see not how much they know, but how much they don’t know.”

“Growing leaders are always in school.”²⁰

Always remember that you can’t accomplish anything without God. Keep John 15 in mind. Abide in Jesus. Depend on His power, rather than your own. We don’t bring success to God. He brings it to us. When we realize we are walking and ministering with His power, it give us Godfidence. You can walk boldly in Godfidence, knowing God is with you.

Fruit comes from the seed not the sower.”

Stay teachable so you can remain usable. Don’t let success turn you into a know-it-all. Be a learn-it-all. Keep a humble, teachable spirit. Be a leader who is always learning. Learn from everywhere you go and from everyone you meet. When you are open to it , everyone and everything can be your teacher. If you want to be an expert, you have to keep a beginner’s mind-set.

“Everyone says they are teachable until there is a lesson to be learned.”

Find out what your weaknesses are and work on them. Always strive to be better. Be so busy improving yourself that you don’t have time to criticize others.

Have people who speak into your life and help you find your blind spots.

They call them blind spots for a reason.

You can’t see them without help. Be courageous enough to hear the truth about yourself. You can’t overcome blind spots if you’re unwilling to allow others to help you identify them.

Always give the credit to God. Doing this privately is more important than doing it publicly. When others praise you, don’t become “pious” in your humility by saying something like “It’s all because of Jesus.” Everyone already knows that. Acknowledge their compliment with a simple “thank you” while internally thanking God for His work through your life. I have watched godly leaders when others acknowledge them and this is what they do.

Know that the commendations and condemnations of man will come and go. Don’t let either sway you. Ask God to grow you to the place where the praises of men will not cause you to feel exalted in pride, nor will their criticisms cause you to become fearful or discouraged.

“Don’t believe your press reports either way.”

Don’t pursue success...pursue God. God hasn’t called us to be “successful.” He has called us to be faithful to love and serve Him. Success is knowing Him and making Him known.

The biggest room in your life should be room for improvement.²⁰

Success will test you. Just as fire brings out the impurities in silver and gold, so success will bring out our impurities. One of the hardest things for anyone to handle is when they are praised by others. Our fallen nature is quick to take credit for achievement. Serve for the cause, not for the applause.

*“Fire tests the purity of silver and gold,
but a person is tested by being praised.”*

Proverbs 27:21²¹

Remember that what you do with past success can determine how much future success God gives you. The Bible reminds us that if we humble ourselves, we will be exalted in God’s time. If you are faithful to give God the glory for a little success, He may entrust you with more success.

“It’s time we got off our high horses and walked in a humble confidence in God and His promises.”

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY ENCOURAGING YOURSELF

“And David was greatly distressed: for the people spoke of stoning him, because the souls of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons, and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

I Samuel 30 ²²

Have you ever had a bad day as you led in ministry? How bad was it? I bet it wasn’t quite as bad as David’s was. As the leader, the people were so ticked off at him, they were getting ready to stone

him to death. How would you feel if the people you were leading got so angry that they were ready to kill you?

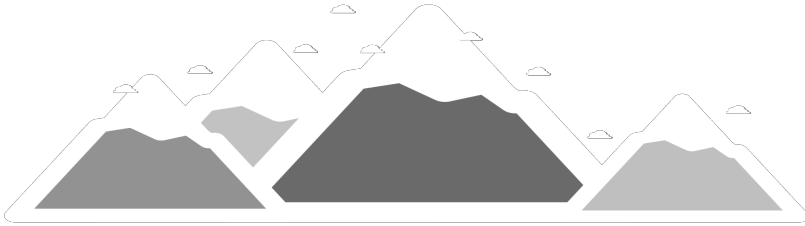
How did David respond? Did he run away from the problem? Did he quit and relinquish his role as the leader. Did he let discouragement take over and sink him? Did he call a board meeting to discuss the matter? No. The Bible says he encouraged himself in the Lord his God. His source of joy, affirmation and fulfillment as a leader came from His relationship with God. He didn't let the discouragement and defeats take him down.

There will be times when you get discouraged because things aren't going as planned. Times when your vision for the ministry is met with mumbles and grumbling. Times when it seems nothing is working. When things are going so bad that you're a step away from quitting. Times when you are at the end of your rope and are about to let go. And there will be no one to help you. No one to turn to.

When this happens, do what David did. He got alone with God and encouraged himself. To lead yourself well, you must get to the point where your encouragement doesn't have to come from outward sources, but rather from inward. When there is no pat on the back, encourage yourself in the Lord. When you don't hear the words "thank you" after a long project that you put blood, sweat and tears into, encourage yourself in the Lord. When you have a group of families in the church that are upset at you, encourage yourself in the Lord. When your ministry budget gets cut back because giving is down, encourage yourself in the Lord. When attendance is down, encourage yourself in the Lord. In Psalm 16, we see how David encouraged himself in the Lord. Look what it says.

*"You make known to me the path of life in Your presence
there is fullness of joy at Your right hand are pleasures
forevermore."
Psalm 16:11²³*

In times of stress, discouragement or trials, David encouraged himself by getting in God's presence. It was in God's presence that He was encouraged, re-charged and found joy. God's presence is available for you today just as it was for David so many years ago. Lead yourself well by getting in His presence. It is there you will find the strength and encouragement you need to go on.



LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY RECOGNIZING THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF MINISTRY

Do you sometimes find yourself discouraged after a big event? Or you have an incredible weekend of ministry only to get an email from a parent who is upset about something that happened? Or you see a new family come to Christ and start growing in their faith, but two weeks later three families leave the church due to job changes? At times when you should be rejoicing, you find yourself discouraged? It makes You wonder if there's something wrong with you as a leader.

No, you're not crazy. In fact, it's perfectly normal to experience highs and lows in ministry. It happened to Elijah too. At a time when you'd think he would be happy, he's discouraged. He's just defeated over 800 false prophets of Baal. He's just prayed and saw God bring fire down from heaven. He's just experienced a major victory and now he's ready to quit. Looks what he says...

*"I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life,
for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."
I Kings 19:4*

When he wrote this, Elijah was being attacked by Jezebel the queen and is running for his life. He feels defeated, discouraged and depressed to the point where he wants to die. An extreme high in ministry followed by an extreme low. Can you relate?

If you're going to lead yourself well, you've got to realize that lows normally follow the highs. It's part of the ebb and flow of ministry. Recognizing this will help you keep things in perspective. It's also wise not to make any rash decisions when you're going through a low time. Low times tend to muddy your thinking and cloud your judgment. Let's see how God guided Elijah through his time of discouragement and taught him how to lead himself well.

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR PHYSICAL NEEDS

Discouragement can come from simply being physically exhausted. Elijah had gone through a major event and was physically drained. You can give and give and give until your tank is on E. A big part of beating discouragement is knowing when it's time to re-coup physically. Notice what Elijah did. He rested. Look at this verse.

"Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree." (vs. 5)²⁵

SOMETIMES THE MOST SPIRITUAL THING YOU CAN DO IS TAKE A NAP

Notice that God first ministered to Elijah's physical needs. Lack of sleep can catch up to you and lead to discouragement. Make sure you're getting plenty of rest. You may have to occasionally burn the midnight oil, but if you burn it every night without replenishing it, you will eventually have no oil left to burn.

“All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.” (vs. 5-6)²⁶

God continues to minister to Elijah’s physical needs by encouraging him to eat. If you want to lead yourself well, you need to eat right. Eating properly can help you fight off discouragement. What you put in your body affects how you feel and how much energy you have to minister to others.

As a leader, it’s important to stay healthy. The better health you are in and the better you eat, the longer you will be able to serve Jesus. I know it’s not always easy to stay healthy. Everywhere you turn there is food calling your name. “Fasting” in the Bible is not referring to going to a “fast” food restaurant. It’s important to watch what you eat and maintain a healthy weight.

For most people, it takes work to stay healthy. I’m one of those people. When I was a teenager I could eat anything I wanted and not gain weight. I could eat a whole box of Oreos and not gain a pound. Now that I’m in my 50’s, it’s not that way. Now I can just look at a box of Oreos and gain 5 pounds. I have to monitor my caloric intake each day.

I also have to work out five days a week at the gym. Do I enjoy it? Some days, but most days “no.” They call it a “work out” for a reason - it’s a lot of work. Especially when your favorite machine is the “vending machine.” You have to make a commitment to exercising and stick with it. When early January rolls around, the gym I work out at is full of people. People who have made a new year’s resolution to work out. Some last a month, but by March, many have stopped coming. One man I met at the gym is a farmer. He told me after a few weeks that he was going to have to stop working out. Said it was too hard on his “calves.” Another lady told me in February that she was going to break up with the gym-said things just weren’t “working out.” I know those were corny jokes,

but the truth is if you want to lead yourself well, a big part of it is staying in shape physically.

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY BEING HONEST WITH GOD

God then asks Elijah an open-ended question. In verse 9, God asks, *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*²⁶ Then He let Elijah vent. Look what Elijah says in verse 10.

*“Elijah replied, ‘I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with You, torn down Your altars, and killed every one of Your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.’”*²⁷

As a leader, when you’re discouraged, you must be selective in whom you vent your frustrations to. Volunteers are not the ones you should vent to. Church members are not the ones you should vent to. If you must vent your frustrations, then talk with the person you report to. But first and foremost, you should vent to God. He’s always willing to listen to your cries of discouragement. When you’re discouraged, pour out your heart to Him. He’s a big God. He can handle it. He wants to hear you vocalize your frustrations and discouragement.

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY SPENDING TIME IN GOD’S PRESENCE

Notice what God told Elijah to do in verses 11-12.

“Then He said, ‘Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.’ And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore

*into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire. but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*²⁸

More than anything, Elijah needed a fresh encounter with God. And notice where it was found. It wasn't in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. It was in the gentle whisper of His still, small voice.

You see, the way to beat discouragement is not by rushing into another big event. The way to beat discouragement is not by attending another grandiose conference with ground-shaking music or fiery keynote speakers or breakout sessions with big ideas. The way to beat discouragement is not having another high attendance day.

The way to beat discouragement is by getting alone...like Elijah did...and in that solitude, listen for the still, quiet voice of God. In God's presence, you will find the joy you've lost. In God's presence, your tank will be re-filled. In God's presence, you will be encouraged. In God's presence, you will find your nerves calming, your fears receding, your passion rekindling and your hope restored.

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY REMEMBERING YOUR CALLING

“Then the Lord said to him: ‘Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria’.” (vs. 15)²⁹

Notice what God tells Elijah to do next. He tells him to go and anoint Hazael as king. God was reminding Elijah of his calling in life. Anointing kings is what prophets do. Get back up and get to work doing

what you were made to do...be a prophet. Elijah, you may be in a low place and feel like quitting. But I want to remind you of the call I have put on your life.

You are reading this because you have a calling on your life. God has anointed and appointed you to reach kids and their families with the Gospel. God has called you to help disciple them and teach them what it means to follow Jesus for a lifetime. Don't let the low times tell you otherwise. You are just as called on a lousy day as you are on a great day.

Always go back to your calling. Remember it? How the Holy Spirit whispered in your ear that you were made to serve Jesus? Remember the newness and nervous excitement you felt when you first starting serving the Lord? You served with a smile that came from joy that was rising up from within. Has that waned? Has the smile been replaced with a smirk? Has the joy been replaced with just getting by?

Again, remember why you started doing this. It's your purpose. It's your destiny. It's why you were put on this earth. God hasn't changed His mind about you. Stay on assignment.

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY GETTING HELP

Elijah felt like he was alone in ministry. Look what He told God in verse 10.

"I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." ³⁰

Do you ever feel that way? Like you are the only one in your church that really cares about reaching the next generation? Like you're carrying the entire weight of the ministry you lead? Do you feel like

you're constantly short on volunteers? Or you ask people to volunteer, but no one wants to get involved? Do you ever feel like you don't have the support you need? You're not alone. We've all felt that way at times...just like Elijah did. Feeling alone in your ministry can quickly lead to discouragement. God reminded Elijah that he was not alone. Look what He shares with him in verses 16-18.

“And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place...yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”³¹

God showed Elijah that it was 7,000 times better than he knew. Thousands of people had the same heart for God as he did and they were ready to serve.

See, I believe God has people prepared to help you, just like he had people prepared to help Elijah. God has people ready to come alongside you and help you reach the next generation. You simply have to connect with them and invite them to join you. I believe if you'll ask God to lead you to those He's been preparing; you will hear the word “yes” when you ask them to serve with you.

I remember a few years ago, we were looking for someone to join our safety and security team at church. We began to pray for God to lead us to the person He was preparing. We've had noticed a father who had three daughters in the ministry. They had been attending about 6 months. As we prayed for God to lead us to the person He was preparing for the safety and security volunteer position, we felt led to approach this father. Could he be the divine appointment we were praying for?

One Sunday morning a few weeks later, we saw this father enter the kids' area to drop off his children. We knew it was the right time, so we approached him and introduced ourselves. We asked if he would be interested in serving on the volunteer safety and security

team. When we said that, he got tears in his eyes. He proceeded to tell us that they had been attending the church for about 6 months. He had been praying about serving somewhere in the church. He said he had noticed the men and women who volunteered on the safety and security team. He had told God that's the role he'd love to serve in. But he was hesitant to ask about helping because he didn't know if we needed anyone, if he was a good fit, etc. He told God to let him know if that's the role he was to serve in.

And now we were there asking him to serve on that team. He answered with a resounding "yes." He came on board and became a key leader on that team.

That's why you should ask God for divine appointments. God has volunteers prepared to help you in the ministry. God has people ready to come alongside you. Ask Him to lead you to those people and you will hear "yes."

It is crucial that you ask God to send people to help you in the ministry. You can only do so much by yourself. You weren't meant to carry the ministry by yourself. You were meant to do ministry as a team.



**Focus more
on sharing
the ministry
than carrying
the ministry.**

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY MOTIVATING YOURSELF

The true story of David defeating Goliath is one of most dramatic scenes in the Bible. It oozes with adventure, courage, conflict, drama and triumph. David, a young shepherd boy, enters the story when he shows up with food for his brothers, who are fighting with Israel against their enemies, the Philistines. David gets there just in time to see the hulk of a man named Goliath walking out into the battle zone between the two armies. Goliath walks out

to make his daily challenge. He wants to fight one man from the Israelites. Winner takes all. In his rant, Goliath makes fun of the God of Israel, sending curses and mockery the Israelite's direction.

No one responds to Goliath's challenge. Though I'm sure the Israelites were boiling with anger as Goliath mocked them and God, no one was motivated enough to go out and face this giant of a man with little to no chance of winning.

Excuse me. Wait a minute! Actually, there is someone among the Israelites that has enough motivation to face Goliath. Who is it? The King? No. The strongest Israelite warrior? No. How about the man with full battle armor on? No. Or is it the most seasoned warrior? No. It's the young shepherd boy who is there delivering food to his brothers.

When he hears Goliath mocking God, motivation starts building inside him. He looks around and asks if they were going to let this man mock God? Don't they have enough courage to go and face this giant man. He's so motivated that he asks the King for permission to go fight Goliath. The King reluctantly agrees. I'm sure he was playing the scenario out in his mind. If Goliath beats David, which has a 99.9999% chance of happening, the Israelites will have to surrender. But he has no choice, there is no one lined up to do this except Daniel.

So, Daniel gets the nod and goes out to face Goliath with nothing but a sling shot and 5 smooth stones. Goliath is surprised and begins to laugh and make fun of David. David, full of motivation to protect his family and honor God, responds right back, letting Goliath know he's about to be defeated.

We know what happens. David defeats Goliath and saves the day for the Israelites. While everyone else had cowered down, David had so much faith and courage that he just couldn't let it go. This big bully had to be defeated. David used his slingshot to send a God-guided, sin-seeking stone like a rocket into Goliath's head. It knocked Goliath down. David then grabbed Goliath's sword

and finished the job. I bet there was a lot of gambling money lost that day as people picked Goliath to win, only to lose.

Where did David get his motivation? It wasn't from his brothers. It wasn't from the King. It wasn't from the other Israelite soldiers. David's motivation came from within.

As you aspire to lead yourself well, take note of David's motivation and let it inspire you to motivate yourself. When you make a mistake, let it motivate you and use it to pave your road to success. When you feel like no one else believes in you, believe in yourself and stay motivated to follow God's call on your life. When you face your own giants; let it motivate you to defeat them. When you fail, instead of giving up, let your mistakes become the motivation you use to succeed.

"A vision fulfilled is normally the result of a 1,000 failures."

You've probably familiar with WD-40. Most people have a can at home to get things to stop squeaking, moving smoother and a variety of other household and automotive needs. Have you ever wondered how the inventors came up with the name WD-40?

WD-40 got its name because the inventors failed the first 39 times they were trying to make the formula. Finally, on the 40th attempt, it came together.³² WD-40 literally means "Water Displacement - 40th attempt." The inventors were motivated enough to keep going despite 39 failed attempts. I'm glad they were motivated to keep going. There would be a lot more things squeaking if they had quit.

Angry Birds, a popular game, was created by Rovio's team on the 52nd attempt.³³ They spent eight years and nearly went bankrupt before finally creating their massive hit. Now that's being motivated.

And then there's Colonel Sanders (KFC) who was turned down 1,009 times before a restaurant agreed to use his chicken recipe.³⁴ That's some serious motivation. What if he had given up along the journey? I'm sure he was tempted to quit. But deep inside,

he was motivated to ask and ask and ask, until he heard a “yes.”

How about Harrison Ford? He wasn’t always “Indiana Jones.” When he first started acting, he was rejected countless times and was told he would never make it in the acting business.³⁵ That didn’t stop him. He was motivated and kept working hard. Now he is considered an icon in Hollywood. He has been in over 50 movies at the time of this writing.

My favorite example of someone who was motivated and didn’t give up is Walt Disney. As a young man, he was hired to work at the Kansas City Star newspaper. He was later fired from the paper because “he lacked imagination and had no good ideas.”³⁶

That had to be hard to hear as a young man. But what they didn’t realize is that Walt knew how to motivate himself. His motivation would be tested many more times.

In 1922, Walt started his first film company with a partner in Kansas City. He ended up not being able to cover his overhead and his studio went bankrupt. Things got so bad at one point that he could not pay his rent and survived by eating dog food.³⁷ Surely now he would give up and quit. Nope, too much inward motivation to stop doing what he loved.

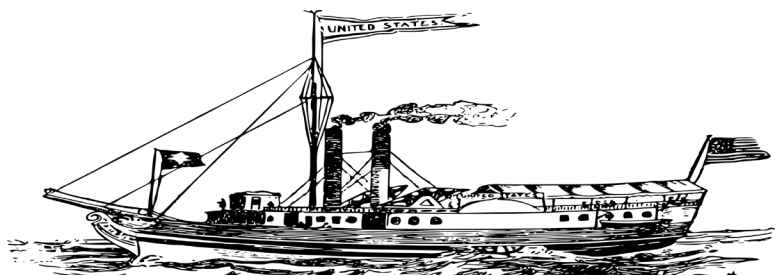
In 1927, Walt tried to get MGM Studios to distribute Mickey Mouse. He was told that the idea would never work. A giant mouse on the screen would terrify women. Still motivated. His movie, Pinocchio, lost half-a-million dollars in its first release. Still motivated.

His movie, Alice in Wonderland, initially lost half-million dollars.³⁸ Still motivated. Those are just a few of the times he failed. But what he didn’t do, was let the failures kidnap his motivation. Look what he said about this.

*“All the adversity I’ve had in my life, all my troubles and obstacles, have strengthened me. You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you”*³⁹

LEAD YOUR FAMILY WELL

The story is told of two steamboats that decided to race down the river. Early on, one of the steamboats pulled ahead. The other boat, in an effort to catch up, began dumping all of their wood into the fire.



Still behind and desperate to win, they began dumping all the cargo they were transporting into the fire as well. It worked. They pulled ahead of the other steamboat and won the race. But they failed in the process, because when they arrived at their destination, they had burned up all of their precious cargo.

There is a valuable lesson in this for us. We can get so busy in ministry and our priorities can get so out of whack, that we lose our most precious cargo...our family. Our spouse. Our children. Our grandchildren. Our close friends.

Far too many leaders get so consumed by the ministry, that they neglect their most important ministry, their family. I have to raise my hand and make a confession in this area. When my two boys were younger, I worked too many hours. There were times when I wasn't there for dinner time. There were days off that I didn't take to spend time with them. I was at work on Saturdays, when I should have been home with my wife. It took years for me to adjust to a better schedule for my family's sake. And for several years, it caused my oldest son to be bitter about it.

Thankfully, by God's grace, he has forgiven me and we have a good relationship. And both of my sons love God and are serving Him. I wish I could reverse the clock and go back and spend more time with my family. But I can't. I can only give them my best moving forward and make every day with them count.

There is a verse in Mark 8:36 that says this...

“And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?”⁴⁰

How about this as well?

“And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own family?”

At times, it feels like you are juggling a bunch of plates, doesn't it



There will be times when it's simply impossible to keep all those plates spinning. Something will have to be dropped or missed. Just remember this - if you have to drop a plate, don't ever let it be the family plate. Drop the hobby plate...but don't drop your

family plate. Your set of golf clubs will be there after your child graduates. If you have to make a choice: drop the overtime at work plate, but don't drop your family plate. Your kids don't need more stuff...they need more of you.

If you're just starting out in ministry or you have young children, please, please, please take this to heart. Put your family first. If you lose your family, then you've lost what matters most.

Seize every hour, every day, every week you can grab to lead your family well. I know the days are long (especially if you have a preschooler), but the years are short. Your kids will be grown and gone before you can blink. Make every day count. Give your time and attention to what really matters...your family.

LEAD YOURSELF WELL BY CARING FOR YOURSELF

*“They made me the keeper of the vineyards:
but mine own vineyard have I not kept.”
Song of Solomon 1:6 ⁴¹*

The person writing this got so busy taking care of other people's vineyards, that she neglected to take care of her own vineyard. She was so busy planting seeds in other people's vineyards, that her own vineyard was barren. She was so busy watering other people's vineyards, that her own vineyard became parched. She was so busy pulling weeds out of other people's vineyards, that her own vineyard became overgrown with weeds.

Sound familiar? You can get so busy taking care of other people's needs, that you neglect to care for your own needs. You can be so committed to helping other peoples' families, that your own family suffers. You can get so entrenched in helping save other couples' marriages, that you neglect to invest in your own marriage.

If you want to care for others, first make sure you are caring for yourself. You can't give what you don't have. Let's look at some key ways you can care for yourself.

Care for yourself spiritually by attending worship.

Attending the adult service or “going to big church” as those in children's ministry often refer to it, can be a constant struggle for many children's ministry leaders. And the reality is that many children's ministry leaders hardly ever attend the adult service.

To be transparent, it has been a constant tension for me over the years as well. I have to be very intentional about getting in the adult service on weekends. You see, every children's ministry leader needs to care for himself/herself by attending “big” church. But that can be a challenge, can't it? Here are some of the obstacles you may face as you attempt to get in “big church.”

- **Lack of volunteers.** Not having enough volunteer leaders to supervise the rooms when you are out.
- **Lack of delegation.** You have to do everything yourself. Many times, this is fueled by control issues.
- **Lack of empowerment.** You haven't empowered leaders to lead and take on key roles that will free you up to be outside of the children's area during services.
- **Lack of a plan.** You must be very intentional about getting in “big” church. When you don't have a rotation plan for everyone to get into a service, it can become difficult.
- **Guilt.** You feel bad about going into the adult service while your volunteers are serving in children's ministry.
- **Tyranny of the urgent.** You plan on attending, but something “pops up” that changes your plans.

- **Love for children’s ministry.** You love being in children’s ministry so much that you really don’t have a desire to attend “big church.” You are so used to the children’s ministry environment that you have a hard time sitting still and paying attention in “big” church.

But as children’s ministry leaders, we need to care for ourselves by attending “big” church on a regular basis. Here’s why:

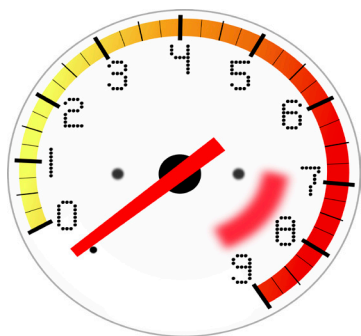
- **Big church helps you see the big picture.** It takes you out of your silo and helps you see the overall vision of the church. It enables you to more effectively align with the direction of the church as a whole.
- **Big church brings big spiritual growth.** Faith comes by hearing the Word. Hearing the Word of God helps you grow in your faith.
- **Big church brings big spiritual renewal.** Corporate worship and corporate prayer will refresh your soul. It will pour water on your parched passion, energy and joy. If you’re going to go the distance in children’s ministry, you must keep your spirit renewed. A big way this happens is by attending “big” church.
- **Big church models a big value.** Hopefully you require your volunteers to attend big church. When you also attend, you are amplifying the value and importance of it.
- **Big church can give your children’s ministry big exposure.** Anytime you can get in front of the congregation it’s a big win for the children’s ministry. It might be making an announcement, leading a prayer, or even bringing a message.

- **Big church can lead to big connections.** Need more adult volunteers? Go where they are. Hang out before and after the service. Meet adults. Build connections.
- **Big church can be a big boost for your family.** If we are not careful, we can get in a pattern of not worshiping with our own family. When is the last time you worshiped with your spouse? With your kids? We must not sacrifice worshiping with our family for the sake of children’s ministry. Weekends such as Christmas and Easter can be extremely busy in children’s ministry. But make sure you carve out time to attend a service in “big” church with your family. Don’t look back and regret not attending worship with your family.

Care for yourself emotionally. My youngest son, Caleb, loves cars. It’s his love language. When he was a high school student, we decided to buy him a Mustang GT. I know, probably not the wisest move to buy a teenage boy all that horsepower. But we did so with the stipulation that he would work and help pay for it. He loves that car and still has it to this day in college, where he’s studying to be a RN. I don’t see him ever trading it in.

He put some custom exhaust pipes on the Mustang. He likes to crank it and then amp up the RPM’s, which gets very, very loud. If you’re not familiar with cars, RPM stands for Revolutions Per Minute. It’s how much pressure you’re putting on the motor. One thing I explained to him when he first started driving the car had to do with the RPM’s. The higher you rev the motor; the higher the RPM’s go. Caleb likes revving those RPM’s. Especially when the car is in park and he’s warming it up. Most Mustangs have a RPM range of 1000 up to 8,000 RPM’s. Once you get in the 6,000 to 8,000 RPM area, you’ll notice you’re in the red zone which is marked. This means you are really putting some major stress on the

motor. You can stay there for a little while, but if the car stays in the red zone continuously, you run the risk of damaging the motor. You can't see it, but you have a personal gauge like the Mustang does. And when you don't take care of yourself emotionally, you'll find yourself over in that red, "high stress" area. Live in the red zone all the time and you'll fry yourself emotionally. You simply weren't designed to live under high-stress and distress all the time.



Here's another example of caring for yourself emotionally. Remember the story of the Israelites and the wall of Jericho? Israel was supposed to conquer the city of Jericho. But the wall around the city was massive. There was no way they could get through that wall by themselves. So, God told them to march around the massive wall 1 time. They were to march with trumpets blaring and carrying the ark of the covenant with them.

They did this for 6 days in a row, but there was no sign of the wall cracking, much less tumbling down. On the 7th day, God told them to march around the wall 7 times. Can you imagine that?

I'm sure there were some complaints and gripes about having to march around the wall that many times. They had just spent 6 days marching around the wall and now God wants us to march around it 7 times? Sounds exhausting!

Sometimes God asks us to go the 2nd mile, or should I say the 7th mile, to see if we really want the miracle we're asking Him for. And often, it's on the 7th mile, you will see God do some extraordinary miracles. That's what happened for the Israelites. Once they had gone around 7 times as God instructed, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. That being said, you can't live in the red, maxed out RPM zone all the time or you'll crash and burn. And you can't "march around the walls" 7 times every day.

Identify and know when your high stress, pedal to the

metal, all hands-on deck times are. It might be the week of camp? Perhaps it's VBS time? Or beginning a high-intensity program for recruiting more volunteers? Rev it up and walk the 7 miles at those times. But don't stay in that mode after it's over. It's okay to visit there occasionally when you have to get something big done. But don't live there. You can't, if you want to finish strong.

Care for yourself by staying focused on your course. Look what the Apostle Paul said in his final days on earth.

*"I have fought a good fight, I have finished MY COURSE,
I have kept the faith."
2 Timothy 4:7⁴²*

Paul makes it clear in this verse, that he had finished the custom designed course that God had prepared for Him. I believe God has a custom designed course He has designed for you as well. No one can fulfill God's plan for you except you!

But we tend to take our eyes off the course God wants us to run and start looking at other people's courses. Comparing our course to their course. Wondering why our course is not as glamorous and high profile as someone else's. When we entertain those thoughts, and let them simmer, it can cause us to start trying to run in someone else's lane.

Jealousy can set in. Bitterness at God can seep into your spirit. Discouragement can steal your joy. You can become disillusioned with the ministry God has called you to lead.

Lead yourself well. Don't fall into the trap of comparing your ministry to other peoples' ministry. Coveting what you don't have will cause you to not enjoy what you do have. Paul reminds us of this. Look what he says about the comparison game in 2 Corinthians 10:12:

"We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise."⁴³

When you start comparing your course with someone else's course, the Bible says it is not wise. This is because one of two things happens. You see someone whose ministry is smaller than yours or not as influential as yours or not reaching as many families as yours, and it opens the door for pride to come walking in. Pride that leads to you thinking the ministry is blessed because of you, rather than because of God's grace and favor.

Or the flip side happens when you play the comparison game. You see someone's course that is bigger than yours, "cooler" than yours or more talented than yours and you get discouraged and want to quit. Doubt and lack of faith starts entering your spirit. Do any of these sound familiar?

"I wish I had their ministry position."

"I wish I could sing as well as him."

"I wish I could speak at that conference like her."

"I wish I could teach kids as well as her."

"I wish I had his personality."

"Wow...I'm glad I'm not at that church. Mine is so much better."

"Our church is the biggest in town. Everyone needs to copy what we're doing or they're not going to grow."

"I'm not going to listen to her advice... she hasn't been in ministry as long as me."

"Our children's ministry is more effective than theirs."

True success is not based on how much better or worse your course is compared to others. It is based on being faithful and finishing the unique course that God planned for you. Grow to get better personally, not to compete with others. And don't lose the blessings of what you have by fretting about what you don't have. Be too busy watering your own grass that you don't even notice the grass on the other side of the fence.

I think David is such a great example of this. We talked earlier about his battle with Goliath. Let's go back to it and look deeper about the moments before the clash. David shows up at the battlefield with some food for his brothers who are fighting for the Israelites. While he's dropping off the food, Goliath comes strutting out to make his daily challenge and to mock God.

David hears the challenge and when no one responds, he decides fighting Goliath is part of God's plan for his life. He approaches King Saul and informs the king that he is the person for the job. He will fight Goliath and protect the honor of the Israelites and more importantly, God's honor.

As David prepares to face Goliath, the king brings his personal armor and tells David to wear it to battle. Wow! An opportunity to wear the king's armor? What an honor! Look how David responds in I Samuel 17.

“Then Saul gave David his own armor - a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before. ‘I can’t go in these,’ he protested to Saul. ‘I’m not used to them.’ So, David took them off again. He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them into his shepherd’s bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd’s staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine.”⁴⁴

They tried to get David to be someone he wasn't. He wasn't a soldier...he was a shepherd. They gave him armor. He tried it on, but

it didn't work for him. They handed him a sword. But his hand wasn't made for a sword...it was made for a slingshot. God didn't want another soldier...He wanted a shepherd boy to win the battle.

So, David made the decision to go to battle as David. David the shepherd boy, that is. He realized he wasn't meant to go to battle in the king's armor. He wasn't Saul. He was David. For years, God had prepared David for this battle as he protected his family's sheep from wild animals. God was going to bring the victory through David the shepherd boy, rather than through David trying to be someone else.

When I first started in ministry, I had several famous pastors that I looked up to. I would try to be like them instead of being myself. I would wear the same style of clothes as them. I would even try to sound like them when I taught. But soon, I learned that God didn't want another one of them. He wanted me to be who He created me to be.

Just like David had a unique calling on his life, so do you. God has a ministry course designed just for you. Don't try to be someone else or run someone else's course. As you find your unique signature from God, you can then fulfill the role He has for you.

God only made one you and then threw away the pattern. While you were still in your mother's womb, He formed you. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. God doesn't want you to try to be someone else. He wants you to be you. No one can be you...but you.

**“God wants to pour out His blessings on you,
not on your version of someone else.”**

Someone will always be faster than you, smarter than you, better looking than you and more talented than you. But no one can be you. God created you for a special work that only you can do. He's not looking down and saying, “Oh, there's Susan...I better find something for her to do.” No...God had a work that He wanted done and He created you to do it. Be you and watch God use you

to change the world. The same principle applies to your ministry. Don't fall into the trap of comparing your ministry to other ministries. God wants to use your ministry to reach people that other ministries can't reach.

When you start comparing your ministry to other ministries, it will either make you humiliated or haughty. And neither are a healthy thought pattern.

When I first started going to Children's Ministry conferences, I would get really excited as I saw what fast growing churches were doing. I would come back all fired up. Ready to do ministry just like them. Ready to change my programming to look just like theirs. Sometimes I made drastic changes quickly without taking enough time to see if it was what God wanted for our ministry. My thought process was to duplicate exactly what they were doing and I would get the same results they were getting.

Over time (and with a lot of mistakes), I realized that God hadn't called our children's ministry to be just like the children's ministries that I wanted to carbon copy. I realized different parts of the country have different cultures. Some things that work for a church on the west coast might not work for a church in the mid-west. Each church has its own context. That doesn't mean we shouldn't learn from others. It means that we should contextualize it for our ministry.

Care for yourself by pacing yourself.

“Greatness in ministry is not measured in years, but in decades.”

Did you know that over 1,500 pastors quit the ministry every month?⁴⁵ There are a variety of reasons why this happens. Some quit because of moral failure. Some because of doubting their calling. Others for financial reasons. And some quit because they are burned out. Exhausted. Wary in well doing.

We must remember that God has not called us to be successful. He has called us to be faithful. And if you're going to be faithful and go the distance, then you've got to find a pace that you can maintain.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.”

Hebrews 12:1⁴⁶

Over the years, I've seen people jump into ministry and run as fast as they could. But soon they burned out and quit. Why? They didn't establish a pace they could sustain long-term.

**The best way
to be successful
in ministry is to
stay in ministry.**

“We must remember that ministry is not a sprint...it's a marathon.”

Three young men started preaching around the same time in the 1940's. One of the three was named Chuck Templeton. After a few years of preaching, Chuck didn't guard his heart like we've been talking about and had a crisis of faith and stopped preaching. He went down a path that led him to eventually being an agnostic.

One of the other two remaining men was named Bron Clifford. Bron became an alcoholic, deserted his family and died from addiction at the age of 35.

The third person in the trio had a different story. He guarded his heart, found a good pace to run at and served Jesus faithfully for over 68 years. You've probably heard of him, his name was Billy Graham. Many who heard all three men speak when they were

young, said Bron and Chuck were the better speakers. But you'd probably never heard about Bron and Chuck before reading this... because they didn't guard their hearts and pace themselves. But Billy did. He stayed focused on His lane and remaining faithful. The result? He preached around the world to millions of people via television, radio, print and in-person.

God doesn't need another Billy Graham, Chris Tomlin, Beth Moore, Andy Stanley, Tony Evans, Anne Graham Lotz or Steven Furtick. He needs you. You being who He created you to be and doing what He created you to do. No one can be you but you. God can change the world through you.

Care for yourself by resting. How many hours are you working each week? 50? 60? 70? 80? It's easy to slip into the 60-80 hour range in ministry. And as I mentioned previously, there are times when you'll have to do the extra laps around the city to see a miracle. But on an average week, how many hours are you putting in? I pose this question to encourage you to find a rhythm of rest.

Rest by turning off technology, social media and email one day a week. I know that's hard to do, but it's not as hard as rebuilding a strained relationship due to staring into a phone screen rather than your spouse and children's eyes.

Rest by taking a day off each week. If you don't, it will catch up with you and you will burn out. Even God took a day off and rested. If He took a day off, surely you need to as well.

Rest by using your vacation time. In 2015, 41% of Americans didn't take a single vacation day.⁴⁷ And 54% of Americans didn't use all their vacation days during the same year.⁴⁸

I had to learn this the hard way. What I'm going to share with you now is not easy for me to share. But I believe I must share this, because it can help prevent you and other people from making the same mistake I did. So, here goes...

I'm wired with a type "A" personality...a high "D" if you're familiar with the DISC personality test. Very driven, an overachiever

...never satisfied with the status quo. I entered full-time ministry over 30 years ago. From the start, I had an extreme passion to make a difference for Christ and reach others with His message. Many times, during those 30 years, I became unbalanced. I was so driven that it caused me to work too many hours, not take care of myself physically and not get enough rest.

After just a few years in ministry, the door opened for me to serve in a mega church. This fueled my drive even more. My pace quickened as my responsibilities increased. My unbalance became even more apparent. This was no one's fault but my own. I served under pastors and leaders who cared for me and encouraged me to slow down and find some balance. But I wasn't wise enough to listen...I mean really listen. I'd nod my head in agreement and then continue right on with my unrelenting pace.

In spring of 2008, my drive had reached a breaking point. For the past three years, I had been working 70-80 hours a week... getting into the office at 6:00 a.m. and going home after 8:00 p.m. The ministry I was leading had exploded with growth and I was just trying to keep my head above water. I was also writing a book with deadlines to meet. In addition, I was flying around the country speaking at conferences. I would leave for the conferences on Friday, speak all day Saturday, get back after midnight on Saturday, and then be up early on Sunday to help lead three services that day. Monday it all started again with no break. Fridays were supposed to be my day off...but I rarely took them. If I wasn't speaking at a conference, I was at the office working. My excuse was, "My wife is working and my kids are in school...so I'll just work." I had accumulated over six weeks of unused vacation time.

Finally in May of 2008, my body said, "That's enough." I woke up in the middle of the night with extreme chest pains. I thought I was having a heart attack. I went to urgent care and they ran an EKG and several other tests. They couldn't find anything wrong with me.

The chest pains continued and over the next several days, I

developed what felt like the worst case of the flu that I had ever experienced. My body ached all over. I lost my appetite. I could barely sleep at night. Added to all this was the fact I was in the middle of a ministry transition. I knew God was done with me at the church I was at and He had opened the door for me to serve at another church in Florida. The stress of moving only made my condition worse.

My flu like symptoms continued. In fact, they got worse and worse. I continued to go to several different doctors and have multiple tests ran trying to figure out what was wrong. None of the tests showed there was anything wrong with me.

I continued to have no appetite and wasn't eating. I also continued to have a hard time sleeping. I finally hit the bottom. I could barely walk. I could not sleep at night. I went seven nights without sleeping. Yes, you read correctly. A full week without sleeping. I would just lay there at night, staring at the ceiling, my mind racing. I thought I was going to die. I felt like I had fallen into a dark pit and couldn't get out. I had no emotions. I couldn't laugh...I couldn't feel any joy...I didn't care about anything. I didn't want to talk to anyone, I didn't want to go outside and I couldn't stand even the slightest noise. Even a spoon hitting the side of a plate made me want to scream. I felt like a zombie. I wasn't myself. It was like I was stuck in a bad dream and couldn't get out.

Finally, when I got to Florida, someone told me about a doctor who they thought could help me. He opened my eyes to the possibility that I was going through clinical depression. My first reaction was "Depression...what's that?" I had heard it mentioned, but thought it meant you were just sad or discouraged. Through talking with this doctor and researching online, I found out more about clinical depression. I discovered there is a chemical in our brain called serotonin. When we go through stress, it depletes it. Continued stress can eliminate it. When it is eliminated, the result is called "clinical depression."

It became clear this was what had happened to me. I was

going through clinical depression. The years of drive, stress and not resting had finally caught up with me. I thought my life and ministry were over. I desperately needed help. I discovered that you can't just "pull" yourself out of clinical depression.

People who don't understand what clinical depression is may just say "Read a Bible verse, pray, and get over it." That's what I would have said before I experienced it. Now I realize you need medical help. Yes, God can bring instant healing...but He may also choose to bring healing through a doctor. That's how He brought hope into my life. The doctor told me I needed to give my mind and body time to stabilize. I needed to take medication that would help my serotonin build back up. He gave me medication to help me sleep. The reason I couldn't sleep was because my adrenaline was stuck. My mind couldn't slow down to rest. The medication he gave me helped my thoughts slow down and allowed me to start sleeping.

It was a gradual process. After a month of taking the medication, I gradually started feeling more like my old self again. I started to enjoy being around people. I still had ups and downs, but with each passing month, I begin to crawl out of the deep dark pit called clinical depression. That was 11 years ago. I feel great now, but I still must make sure I rest, lest I get caught in the same trap again.

Don't let your ministry drive completely drive your life.

It is easy to get consumed with the ministry to the point where you have no other life outside of it. The work will be there tomorrow. Go home and have dinner with your family. Use your vacation time. You only get so many vacation opportunities before your kids are grown and gone. Spending an extended time with your kids is more important than any project sitting on your desk.

Learn to say "no." Sometimes you have to say "no" to some good things, so you can say "yes" to the most important things. Put your time with your family on your calendar. Then when you're asked to do something on that day, your response would be, "I'm tied

up on that day. Maybe we can schedule something on another day?”

Family is important. My family stood by me through all this. I wouldn't have made it without them. They are the most important thing in my life. They are my most important ministry.

Exercise. As I mentioned in chapter one, I work out five days a week. I do cardio and weight lifting. Why? Because I want to look like Mr. Universe? No, that's not happening. I exercise because it's a great stress reliever and it can help stave off depression. It helps me stay healthy and feeling good.

We are nothing without God. At my lowest point, I realized that my work, gifts and drive are nothing without God. I was stripped down to the point where I realized that He is my all in all. I can do nothing without His help and blessing.

Listen to those around you. I should have listened to those who were telling me to slow down. I now have several people that hold me accountable and make sure I am taking my day off, going home at the right time, taking vacation, etc.

So, there you have it...the short version of my journey through depression. If you are reading this and you are experiencing depression now or have in the past, I trust it will help you see there is hope. You can make it. Things will get better. Just stay close to family and friends. Trust in God. Get medical help and remember that others have been where you are.

When you go through dark times, just remember that it won't last forever. The sun will shine upon you again.



Care for yourself by keeping your priorities in order. If you are going to be spiritually healthy, then you've got to have your priorities in order. Here's what the order needs to be.

FAITH

In Luke 10, Jesus sent out 72 disciples to do ministry. He prepared them by painting a very realistic picture. He included the good, the bad, and the ugly side of ministry.

Some people would welcome them...some would not. Some people would listen to them...some would not. Some people would invite them in for dinner...some would not. In some places, they would see miracles...in some places they would not. And so, the 72 went out to do ministry. And they came back pumped! Excited! They had seen miracles! They had experienced great victories! Even the evil spirits submitted to them when they spoke in the name of Jesus! Jesus responded to them by saying this in verses 18-20.⁴⁹

“He replied, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’.”

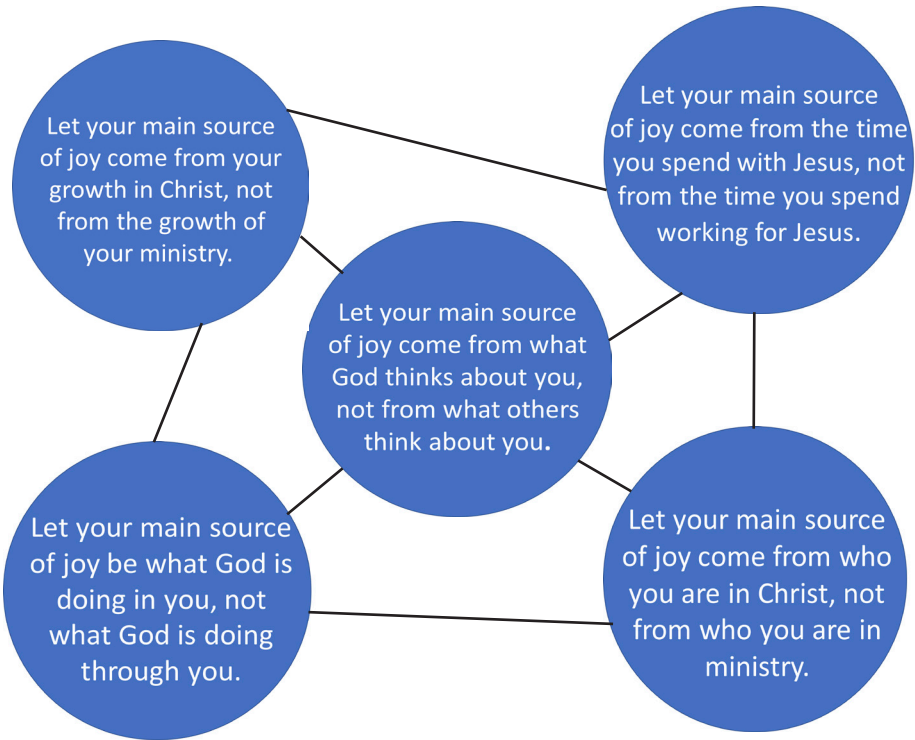
What was Jesus saying? He was reminding them that their main source of joy should come from what God had done IN them , not from what God had done THROUGH them.

There will be times when you will see great things happen in ministry...and there will be times when you'll wonder if anyone is even listening. There will be times when you'll see kids healed and there will be times when you'll stand beside a little coffin. There will be kids who grow up to serve Jesus and there will be kids who grow up and walk away from the faith. There will be times when you'll get 10 new volunteers and there will be times when 10 volunteers quit. There will be times when you get a budget increase and there will be times when the budget gets cut.

If your joy comes from how things are going in ministry...then you'll find yourself running short at times. But one thing

remains the same throughout the ups and downs of ministry. You have a relationship with Jesus! Your name is written in Heaven! No matter how good or bad things get in ministry...you get to spend eternity in Heaven with Jesus!

If your joy comes from how things are going in ministry...then you'll find yourself running short at times. But one thing remains the same throughout the ups and downs of ministry. You have a relationship with Jesus! Your name is written in Heaven! No matter how good or bad things get in ministry, you get to spend eternity in Heaven with Jesus!



FAMILY

After our relationship with God, our family should be next. Love them. Care for them. Invest in them. Show them by your words and actions that they mean the world to you.

FAITH FAMILY MINISTRY

Ministry should be your 3rd priority. Pursue God's call on your life with passion. Serve with all your heart. Share the Gospel with people. Help people grow in their faith.

Invest in people. Be the hands and feet of Jesus for people. This simple order encapsulates what the balanced Christian life is. Keep these in the proper order by leading yourself well.

The Bible often compares our journey as Christians to an athletic race. The verse we shared earlier in this chapter is a great example. Look again at what it says in Hebrews 12:1-2.

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.”*⁵⁰

This verse implies that the saints who have gone on before us are in heaven now. Like a relay race, they ran their part of the course and have passed the baton down through the years to the next generation. The baton is now in our hands and we are

running our part of the course. The next generation is behind us now, waiting for us to pass the baton to them. And here's what is so cool. Think about what happens when a team is running a relay race. Each person on the team finishes their part of the race and then their eyes go toward the finish line. They cheer on their teammates and when the last runner crosses the finish line, they gather together for a big celebration.

The saints in heaven see you with the baton. They are watching as you run your part of the race and you can be sure they are cheering for you. Waiting for when the last runner has crossed the finish line to gather with them for a great celebration in heaven.

My friend, lead yourself well. Take to heart the things I have shared with you in this first chapter. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Run well. Love well. Serve well. Let's cross the finish line strong. Here are some questions that I'd encourage you to work through first by yourself and then with your team.

Personal Reflection:

Do I have a steady influx of spiritual oxygen coming into my spirit, that enables me to minister life to the next generation?

What are some steps I can take to have more spiritual energy and vitality to pass on?

How is my personal relationship with Jesus right now? Am I spending time with Him? What are 3 steps I can take to deepen my relationship with Him?

1.

2.

3.

Is there anything currently taking my eyes off Jesus? What area(s) of my life do I need to refocus on Him?

What am I hiding behind the curtain that I need to stop doing?

Who are the people who are draining my battery? What can I do to reduce or stop the drain?

What problems are draining my battery? What can I do to reduce or stop the drain?

What pressure is currently draining my battery? What can I do to reduce or stop the drain?

Have I created the margin necessary to:

- spend time with Jesus?
- take my day off?
- use my vacation time?
- spend time with my family?

What do I need to say “no” to so I can spend more time with my family?

Does my primary motivation and encouragement come from within or from without? How can I adjust this if needed?

What are 3 things I can give away / delegate that will enable me to spend more time focusing on my primary passion?

1.

2.

3.

Am I attending “big church” with my family on a regular basis? Why or why not? How can I start attending more often?

What are 5 things I’m going to start doing or stop doing so I can lead myself better?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Can I finish strong at my current pace? If not, what can I do to adjust it?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Team Discussion Questions:

How can we stay full so we can fill others?

What are some things that can take our eyes off Jesus? How can we avoid that happening?

What are 3 ways we can keep everyone focused on the vision?

1.

2.

3.

What are some of the highs and lows you've experienced in ministry?
What did it teach you?

What are some takeaways you picked up from the process of David defeating Goliath?

Why should we not compare our ministry and spiritual gifts to other people's ministry and spiritual gifts?

Action Steps:

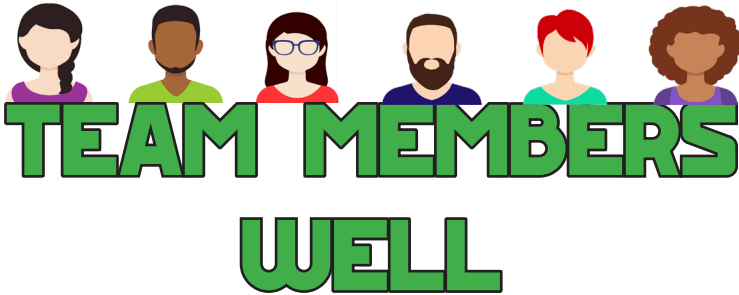
1.

2.

3.

2

LEAD



“First rule of leadership: everything is your fault.”

- A Bug's Life¹

I mentioned in the introduction that there is something ironic about leading in children’s ministry. It’s this - children’s ministry is just as much, if not more, about the adults and students who serve the kids, than it is about the kids themselves. As a children’s ministry leader, your primary role is to equip the adults and students who serve directly with the kids. This may not be the case, if you’re a

teacher who serves with one class. But as soon as you assume a role like Children's Pastor, Children's Director, Ministry Leader or whatever you call the person who oversees the ministry, your role quickly switches to spending most of your time investing in the leaders who serve with the kids. Leading staff and volunteers must be a top priority for a children's pastor, director, etc.

It's not about what you can do, it's about what you can empower others to do.

Bringing other people into the picture makes the picture better. I often share this statement when a children's pastor asks about leading in children's ministry.

“The success of your ministry rises and falls on the strength of the volunteer team you build.”

I also share this statement with young leaders who are getting started in children's ministry...

“If I had to choose one thing to be good at in children's ministry, it would be building teams.”

Great teams are built by great leaders. And I've had the privilege of serving with some great pastors over the years. I've watched and learned as they led churches with tens of thousands of people. I've watched how they've led staff teams with hundreds of team members and volunteer teams that numbered in the thousands. What I've learned from these high-profile leaders has been life-changing for me.

But that's not what I'm going to talk about today. I want to tell you about a leader that I met in an unexpected place and how he modeled what it means to lead well. If you're ready, we'll dive into the story.

The story begins on a Friday evening. But not just any Friday evening for me. It was my wife and I's 28th wedding anniversary. We had decided to go to dinner and a movie. So off we went, first stop was the restaurant. The food was great and we enjoyed talking and sharing about the last 28 years we've been together. We finished our dinner and went out to the car to head to the theater. That's when the "fun" began. I pushed the button that starts the car and "nothing" happened. I pushed it again. Same result. I could tell from the sound that the battery was weak. I tried it again and this time got the famous "clicking" sound that tells you this isn't happening.

By now it was 6:30ish and I knew most of the mechanic shops would be closed for the day. As I stood there, I looked both directions for some glimmer of hope. Down the street I could see an automotive business. It was worth a shot. We walked over to the store and could see they had just finished their last car for the day and were packing up their tools, locking up, etc. I thought to myself, "There's no way they're going to help us. They've probably had a long day and are ready to go home. Especially on a Friday evening.

I was telling one of the employees my dilemma, when I saw a man come walking out of the office area. He came over and listened to what I was telling the employee about my car. I knew I was about to hear "There's no way we can get to it today and we are closing

any ways.” The man who walked out of the office spoke up and said, “I’ll be glad to take a look at it.” Let me get my truck and some jumper cables and I’ll meet you over there.” I met him back at our car and as we were talking, I found out that he was the owner of the business.

In fact, he owned eight automotive shops across the city. I was about to learn why he was so successful as a leader. Here’s what I learned about leadership by watching him lead that evening.

LEAD WELL BY BEING A SERVANT LEADER

Even though he had several employees working that day, he was willing to take care of our car personally. As I interacted with some of his employees, they told me they loved working for him because he doesn’t just bark down orders. He gets right in there and works with them. Whatever needs to be done, he is always willing to jump in and get his hands dirty.

It reminded me of another leader who didn’t mind getting His hands dirty. His name is Jesus. In Mark 9, an interesting situation arises that highlights how Jesus led.

“They came to Capernaum. When He was in the house, He asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.”

Mark 9:33-34²

I get a kick out of what happens in this story. The disciples were walking with Jesus on the road to Capernaum. Along the way, they were arguing about who was the greatest. When they arrive at the house, Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about? They get quiet because they knew they were busted. It reminds me of when I was in elementary school and the teacher would leave the room for a few minutes. She would say “no talking while I’m

gone” or “read the next chapter in your books” while I’m gone. When she left, everyone would start talking and cutting up. As soon as the door opened upon her return, everyone got so quiet, you could have heard a pin drop. It was that kind same kind of situation with the disciples that evening.

Jesus knew what they had been arguing about. And when he asked the question, they knew that He knew. And so they got quiet. Jesus used it as a teachable moment about leadership. He sat down and said this.

*“Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last,
and the servant of all.”³*

Time and time again, Jesus emphasized that leadership is not about being served by others, but rather it’s about serving others. As Jesus was preparing the disciples to lead well after His departure, He gives them a plan for being extraordinary leaders. The plan is found in this verse - John 15:13. Here’s what it says...

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”⁴

Inside this verse are 4 keys to great leadership.

Key #1 - Leading well is grounded in loving people.

(There is no greater **LOVE**...)

If you want to lead well, then you’ve got to love people. Love is the foundation it rests upon. It’s a genuine love for people that reflects God’s heart. Throughout this chapter, Jesus talked about loving people. Love must be the motivating factor of leadership.

- Ask God to fill your heart with love for the children and families in your community.

- Ask God to fill your heart with love for the broken families in your community.
- Ask God to fill your heart with love for your volunteers.
- Ask God to fill your heart with love for those who seem to be unlovable.
- Ask God to fill your heart with love for those who are far from God in your community.
- Ask God to fill your heart with love for the child who disrupts the ministry and gives you more grey hair each week.

You may be reading this and you're hesitant to open your heart to love people because you tried that in the past and you got burned. Don't let the past make decisions for you. God wants to fill your heart afresh and anew with love for the children, families and people you are called to lead.

Unconditional love is what opens the hearts of people to your leadership and influence. You've heard it said many times - **People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.**

My son, Caleb, at the time of this writing is dating a precious young lady named Nataly. They met in a college classroom where they both attend school in Florida. As they continued to date and it was becoming a serious relationship, I decided to go and meet Nataly's family. These could be my son's future in-laws so wanted to check them out, as would any father. I'm sure her parents wanted to check us out as well to make sure we weren't cray cray.

And so, we went there and were introduced to Nataly's family. As I begin to talk with her father, Nareth, and her mother, Cydnee, I found out that they were born in Cambodia. When they were young children, about the age of 7 or 8, the communist seized control of Cambodia. The communist group was called the Khmer Rouge.

After they secured control of the country, the communists begin killing anyone who was a perceived threat or whose lifestyle and beliefs went against their beliefs.

Nareth and Cydnee shared with me that their parents were arrested and led away. Cydnee saw her father be led away for execution. He turned as he was being led away and told her not to follow him and the men who had arrested him.

Nareth and Cydnee obviously now had no parents around and so they were taken to a concentration camp. There they worked all day in the fields, fearing for their lives every second of the day.

Nareth told me that one day during a meal, which consisted of a small serving of rice, that the communist soldiers came and randomly selected two boys out of the group. They proceeded to take the boys a few yards from the group and then proceeded to kill them. The soldiers told them that if they ever tried to escape, that would be their fate as well.

Nareth and Cydnee decided they would try to escape, because if they didn't, they knew were going to die in the concentration camp. Later research revealed that between 1975 and 1979, an estimated two million Cambodians died by execution, forced labor and famine.⁵

And so they snuck away from the camp and walked for two weeks through the jungle. While in the jungle, they survived by eating whatever they could find, whether it was worms or plants or spiders or anything that was edible. Finally, after two weeks of walking, they crossed over into Thailand and were placed in a refugee camp.

While living in the refugee camp, they were sponsored to come to America. They ended up in an apartment complex in southern California. All of the tenants in the apartments were Cambodians. Until one day, a man named Peter moved into one of the apartments. This man was not Cambodian. He was a Caucasian who had grown up in the U.S. They begin to wonder why this man would move right in the middle of them. What did he want? Why was he here? It took time, but Peter earned their respect and trust.

He got to know them and begin investing in them. Whether it was helping someone find work or teaching someone English or teaching the kids how to play basketball or running someone to the store, he was there for them.

After Peter had earned their respect and trust, one day he announced he would be having a Bible study in his apartment. At first, Nareth was hesitant. He was Buddhist and didn't know anything about Christianity. But out of respect for Peter, he decided to go. As he attended the Bible study, he heard about Jesus for the first time and the Holy Spirit began to do His work. Soon Nareth came to Christ, as did Cydnee. It totally transformed their lives.

Fast forward to now. Nareth and Cydnee are married with 2 children (as I mentioned earlier - their daughter is dating my son), they have very successful businesses and lead mission trips back to Cambodia.

As Nareth told me this incredible story for the first time, I begin to think about how Peter influenced them to Jesus. I could only think of one word that would cause someone to move and immerse themselves in a group of people they didn't know - LOVE. Peter moved into that apartment complex because he was compelled by love to reach the families with the Gospel. Peter served them well and that opened the door for him to share Jesus with them. A great leader is the hands and feet of Jesus serving people first, which earns him / her the right to tell people about the hands and feet of Jesus that were pierced with nails for them.

Key #2 - Leading well is about serving others.

(There is no greater love than to **LAY DOWN** one's life...)

When you say the word "leadership" many people think about...

Working your way up to the top - even if it means
crawling over other people.

Getting the corner office with the great view.

Promoting themselves.

Getting a more influential job.

Being known as powerful.

Taking what is yours.

Getting what you want first.

The disciples had that mind-set as well. You could hear it in their conversations and feel it in their desire to be important in the Gods kingdom. But before you place blame on them, think about this. Before Jesus came, that was the leadership culture they had been raised in.

There were used to the leadership of the Romans. Rule by force. Take what you want from others. Conquer. Win at all costs. Be the most powerful.

There were also used to the leadership of the Jewish rulers. Keep the commandments. Be proud. Look down your theological nose at others. Wear the best clothes to impress others. Keep the letter of the law and condemn those who don't.

Being raised in this culture, no wonder they got into arguments about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. No wonder they were concerned about titles and who would sit where at the table.

As they begin to follow Jesus, for the first time, they saw and heard about a greater way to lead. Jesus comes along and says let Me show you and tell you what true greatness is in leadership.

In Matthew 20, we see another incident of the disciples arguing about who was going to sit where at the table. Everyone wanted to have the seat of honor. He pulls them together for a lesson about what great leadership looks like. He starts off by immediately confronting their warped view of leading. You can see this in verse 25.

“But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them.”⁶

Jesus tells them that great leadership is not about how many people you are over. And it’s not about how many people are serving you. Here’s where He helps them see what it means to lead well. Look at verse 26.

“But among you it will be different.”⁷

Here he goes. He’s about to introduce them to a different kind of leadership. A kind of leadership that goes against everything they’ve seen modeled growing up.

“Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave.”⁸

He’s letting them know that leading well is not about being served. Rather, it’s about serving others. It’s not about how many people are under you. It’s about how many people you are lifting up. It’s not about lording your authority over people. It’s about serving people with a humble spirit. It’s not about taking.

It's about giving. Jesus then says I am modeling this for you. I've devoted my life to two things. He shared what He is devoted to in vs. 28.

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to **serve** others and to **give** His life as a ransom for many.”⁹*

He's telling the disciples; they can sum up His life in those two words - serve and give. Great leadership is about serving and giving. He will be the ultimate example of this as He gives His life to save the world.

It's almost time for Jesus to give His life on the cross. He's bringing the disciples together for one last meal before the crucifixion. They are meeting in a house in the upper room.

The custom was to have your feet washed as you entered someone's house. This task was normally done by a servant. It was considered one of the lowest jobs you could have in that day. Washing dirty, stinky, calloused feet. No wonder it was considered one of the lowest jobs a person could have.

As they arrive at the house, it becomes apparent that there is not a servant present who will be washing everyone's feet. I can see the disciples looking at each other, wondering if anyone would do this lowly job. No one makes a move.

Jesus knows this is an opportunity to teach the disciples another lesson about leadership. Soon they will be leading the most important movement on the planet and He wants to prepare them to lead well.

None of the disciples have made a move to be the foot washer. They sit down for the meal, dirty feet and all. Not about to stoop so low to wash one another's feet. But here comes Jesus. He gets up from His place, gathers a basin with water and a towel. One by one, He washes the disciples' feet as they watch in bewilderment. He finishes up and then says this...

“Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you..”¹⁰

Jesus showed them that night by example that leading well is not about having a title; it’s about serving others with a towel. It’s not about having a position; it’s about having a posture of serving. It’s not about pondering your rights; it’s about pondering your responsibilities. True success in ministry comes from helping others be successful.

I believe you model this so well by serving in children’s ministry. You change the diapers of other people’s children. And that’s got to be smellier than the disciples feet were. You wipe the dirty noses of preschoolers. You clean up messes that elementary kids have left behind. I want to say thank you for having the true heart of a servant.

Servant leadership? Think about it. At first glance it seems like an oxymoron, doesn’t it? But it’s the greatest kind of leadership and it’s what you must be, if you want to lead well.

Before you can lead well, you must first learn how to follow well. Before you become a great leader, you must first be committed to being a great servant.

**People don’t follow a title.
They follow someone they
love and respect.**

One sign of a great leader is their humbleness. A humbleness that enables them to serve others. Look what it says about Jesus in Philippians 2:3-8

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!”¹¹

Think about it. Jesus, the Son of God, came down to the earth and humbled Himself to a cruel death on a cross, because of His love for you and me. What a great example He set for us.

“The best way to travel forward is to stop riding a high horse and start walking in humility.”

Key #3 - Leading well is about depending on God.

(There is no greater love than to lay down **ONE’S LIFE**...)

As you read the rest of John 13, you will see Jesus teaching the disciples that spiritual power and life flows through the vine (Jesus) and into the branches (us) and blossoms into spiritual fruit. He tells them that without the life giving power of God moving, nothing will happen. Nada! Zilcho! Nothing! Big O!

“If you want to lead well, you must realize that nothing of eternal value happens through your own power, wisdom or strength.”

That’s actually good news. It’s not about how much talent you have or don’t have. It’s not about having a big budget to work with and it’s not about having amazing programs. It’s about having a big dependence on God. The Apostle Paul got this. He said it like this.

“When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn’t use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God’s secret plan. For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. I came to you in weakness - timid and trembling. And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.”

I Corinthians 2:1-5 ¹²

When I was in elementary school, I had a paper route. The papers would be dropped off at my house after school. I would fold them and put a rubber band around them. If it was raining or there was a good chance for rain, I’d also put them in a plastic bag. Then I’d load them in the basket on the front of my bike and off I went. I had over a hundred customers. One of the places the route took me was to an apartment complex. The city had a large university, so most of the apartments were occupied by college students.

Things were going great with my paper route, until it came the first snow of the winter season. As I was delivering my papers in the apartment complex, several of the college students decided to have some fun with the little kid delivering papers. Whack! I got hit by a snowball. Whack! Whack! Whack!!! That one almost knocked me off my bike. Those cruel college students kept bombing me with snowball until I finally made it out of there alive.

I had a big dilemma on my hands. I couldn’t stand up to those big college students. If I tried to throw snow balls back at them, that would only encourage them and I would end up buried in a snow bank. I needed some help. As I thought more about how I was going to survive this, I suddenly had an idea. The idea was Kenny. Kenny lived a few houses down from me. He was a senior in high school. He was a big, tall, strong guy. He was also the starting

pitcher for the largest high school in town. His fastballs clocked in the 90's.

I shared my dilemma with him and asked if he could help me. He said he would be glad to. The next time it snowed, I was ready to put my plan into action. I went and got Kenny and he followed me on his big ten speed bike. When we got to the apartment complex, he hung back behind some trees that bordered the apartments. Sure enough, as I started delivering the papers, out came the college students. Whack! Whack! Whack.! They started bombing me. That's when I shouted out "Kenny! Help!" Suddenly the college students were met with 95 mph snowballs coming back at them with deadly accuracy. Kenny drove them back into their apartments and I never had any more trouble with being hit by snowballs from those college kids. As I look back on that day, I am reminded that you and I have a great big, strong, powerful God who can push back any problem, challenge or hopeless situation that may be thrown at you. He's got your back and He's as close as the mention of His name. He simply asks that we trust and depend on Him.

Some of you who are reading this right now have problems and scary situations that you're dealing with. Personal challenges and ministry stuff you're trying your best to sort out, but with no answer in sight yet. Go to a quiet place. Get alone. Call upon Jesus for help. Let go of your need to try to contain the situation or figure it out for yourself. Fall on your knees and ask God to do what you cannot do. That's what leaders do to lead well. They depend upon God. They do not walk in their own confidence. Rather they walk with Godfidence. Knowing that through His power anything is possible.

Key #4 - Leading well is about leading through relationship.
*(There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's **FRIENDS**.)*
*John 15:13*¹³

Jesus again modeled this so well. He led through relationships. You can see this in how He addresses the disciples. He calls them His friends. The word “friends” in the verse is a word that was used by a king to identify his inner circle. His closest friends that He chose to surround himself with. The king would console with this inner circle when he faced a major decision. He went to them for advice even before he talked to the captain of his army or one of his senators or another high-ranking official. Jesus said that’s the kind of leadership I’m modeling for you. This is how you lead through relationship. Think with me about a well-known incident recorded in God’s Word. It provides a contrast between leading through relationship vs. leading through requirements. The scene is the Red Sea. Moses is there leading the Israelites. What did Moses do? He led the Israelites through the sea and safely to the other side.

"Leading well is when people begin following you not because they have to, but because they want to."

Compare that to what Pharaoh did. He drove his soldiers into the sea, where they ended up perishing. When you level and invest in people, they will begin to trust you and they will follow you anywhere. Even through a sea. Think about the people you lead. Are you having to drive them? Or are you leading them by earning their trust and loyalty? If you want to inspire people and see them serve with you for a lifetime, then realize it must be done through relationship.

“How long people serve with you is in direct correlation to the depth of the relationships they make.”

One of the best leaders I've served with is a lady named Naomi. She oversaw one of the campuses at our church. As the director, who oversaw all the campuses, I went to visit her campus on a regular basis. Each time I was there and walked down the children's ministry hallway, I noticed there were always volunteers filling every classroom. And not just the bare minimum. She had extra volunteers in the rooms as well. I also noticed that the volunteers on her team were always happy and smiling. You could feel the great chemistry and culture that permeated the areas she oversaw. I asked her one Sunday, how she managed to get so many volunteers? How did she always fill the rooms with happy volunteers who were eager to serve? Her answer to me was simple, but profound. She replied,

*"I don't have volunteers...I have **friends.**"*

Bingo! There it is! She had built an outstanding team through relationships. As she led relationally, she won the trust and respect of her team members. Do you want to lead well with staff and volunteers? I've got the answer - it's found in a song you've heard heard on Toy Story. It's called "You've Got a Friend in Me."

Get to personally know the people who are serving on your team. Have them over for dinner. Start a Bible study together. Do life together. Celebrate together. Invest in them. Love their families. Do something nice for their kids. Journey with them through the ups and downs. This is how Jesus led and it still works today. This is how you will see people go the distance with you.

LEAD WELL BY VALUING PEOPLE

Have you ever gone to a place of business and the people working there made you feel like you were bothering them? Or you walk up to the desk and they ignore you? It makes you feel

unimportant, doesn't it?

Back to the story of my car breaking down on our anniversary evening. So the owner of the shop helps me get the car over to his shop. I apologized for causing him to have to stay after store hours to fix my car. I could tell not only by his words, but by his actions and mannerism that he was happy to help us. When he found out we were on our way to see a movie as part of our anniversary evening. He said if the car wasn't ready in time for us to drive it to the theater, that he would drive us to the theater, finish fixing the car and then have it ready for us at the theater. My wife and I felt valued by this man and his team. **You see, people won't remember everything you do, but they will remember how you made them feel.**

As a leader, how do you make staff and volunteers feel? Do you treat them and talk to them in such a way that they feel encouraged, loved and important? Remember this:

**“Don't use people to build the ministry,
use the ministry to build people.”**

**“If you want to lead people well,
you must first value people.”**

A big way you can value staff and volunteers is by showing them that you care more about them as a person than you do about the work they do. I remember a weekend when one of our key volunteers didn't show up to serve. He was faithful and dependable, so I was surprised he didn't show up. Later that day, I found out that his aging mother had gotten very sick that Sunday morning and he had to take her to the hospital.

The next day, I decided to call him and let him know we were praying for his mother and ask if there was anything we could do to help like bringing meals by, helping around the yard, etc. The phone rang and he picked up. The first words he spoke were, “I apologize for not being there to serve yesterday, my mother got very sick and

I had to rush her to the hospital.” My heart sank. His first thought when he heard my voice wasn’t “Pastor Dale is calling to check on my mom and pray with me.” It was “Pastor Dale is calling to ask why I wasn’t there to serve yesterday.”

Why was that? It was because I hadn’t been the leader he needed me to be and hadn’t shown him how much I valued him as a person. It was a wake-up call for me and I promised myself that I would do a better job of showing our team members how much I value them.

If you want to lead your staff and volunteers well, then show them you value them. Move beyond the “hey, how are you doing?” Find out how they are really doing. Most people won’t tell you unless you dig down a little deeper. Listen to them. Be there in for them in their time of need. Encourage them. People respond more to encouragement than they do criticism. In many cases, they will look to you as their pastor. Shepherd them well.

LEAD WELL BY MOTIVATING PEOPLE

Back to the repair shop. Not only did the owner stay after hours to get my car going, but his employees stayed as well. They loved working there and it showed on their face and by their actions. It was obvious that they were motivated to work there and help bring continuing growth for the company. There are many different ways to motivate people. Asking them to help fulfill a vision is a big one. Relationships people build while serving can be another motivating factor. Showing them the impact they are making is another biggie.

One of the most important opportunities you have to motivate people is when you gather to pray before you serve that day. It’s a great time to get them fired up, but it takes some skill to do it. Here’s a simple, 4 step approach that will help you be a master motivator.

Step 1 - Remind them what they are doing and the tasks involved. This gives them a clear picture of what success will look like.

Example: “Where are all our small group leaders? (raise hands) Remember your primary job as a small group leader is to connect with the kids and make them feel known, accepted and loved.”

Step 2 - Acknowledge the challenges of the roles. Praise them for sticking with it and being a difference maker.

Example: “I know serving in children’s ministry is not always easy. There are weeks where you come in tired from working all week and wonder if you have anything left to give the kids. And yet you always find a way to make a difference in the kids’ lives. You may wonder at times if the kids are getting anything you are sharing with them. We all feel that way sometimes.”

Step 3 - Bring value (the why) to the roles. Explain why the role is important. Link it to the ministries’ purpose or vision. Share a story from a previous week about a volunteer who served well and made a difference.

Example: “When you serve in the nursery, you help parents hear the Gospel without being distracted. People find new life in Christ.”

Example: “People decide in the first 8 minutes if they are going to return to our church. As a greeter, when you welcome them and help them check in quickly and efficiently, you are helping bring them back to God. The sermon starts way before the service.

Step 4 - Get Them Fired Up. Stack hands and shout out together, “Jesus” or “Let’s Go Team.” If sports teams can do this for a temporary win, then why shouldn’t your volunteer team cheer for an eternal win?

Let's bring together all four in a pre-service meeting you've called to motivate volunteers who are getting ready to serve in VBS.

“Hey friends, it’s great to see you today. We have a great day ahead of us. Where are all of our check-in volunteers? Yeah! Your role is to help families be able to check in quickly and without stress. Group leaders, remember your job is to connect with the kids in your group and guide them through the activities. Game leaders, you will be leading the kids thorough the outside games. Worship team, your role is to engage the kids in worshipping God. I know many of you have taken vacation time to serve this week. Many of you just came from a long day at work and yet you are finding the energy to invest in the children. And where are the members of our craft team? You’ve been working behind-the-scenes for months. I’m so grateful for your heart for the next generation. Your commitment to Christ always inspires me. I want to remind us today that what we do is so important. We have an opportunity today to make an eternal impact in the lives of kids and families. I was thinking this morning of you, Randy, and how you took time last week to make the new kid, James, feel welcome. You could tell that he was nervous when his parents brought him. But you stepped right in and helped him connect with a group of boys his age. And when the Gospel was shared, I saw him raise his hand to enter a relationship with Jesus. That’s what it’s all about! That’s why we do what we do! Let’s go out and make it another great day of ministry! Who is with me? Awesome. Let’s pray and then go to our areas.” (pray then stack hands and cheer, “1...2...3...Jesus!”)

If you will be intentional about doing this, you will have volunteers that know what their role is and they will be passionate about making a difference through it.

LEAD WELL BY GOING THE SECOND MILE

Since he was working on my car and it was past 5 pm, the parts store wasn't doing deliveries. Instead of saying, "That's it! The parts stores delivery system is closed, so we'll have to wait until the

stores open tomorrow to finish this.” Nope, not him. He said, “I’ll be back in a few minutes. He jumped in his car, drove “the second mile” to the parts store, picked up the part and brought it back.

“There is usually plenty of room on the second mile.”

As a leader, set the example for staff and volunteers by going the second mile yourself. The second mile is where big impact happens. What are some areas where you can go the second mile? How about...

Having a separate check-in area for guests so they don’t have to wait in line.

Instead of pointing out the directions to a classroom for a new family, walk them there.

Instead of having young mothers with babies’ park wherever they can find a spot, have reserved parking for them up front.

If a mother left her purse at church and calls to ask if you’ve seen it, you tell her not to worry, you find it and you deliver it to their house.

*“Let the second mile become second nature.
The biggest impact happens on the second mile.”*

LEAD WELL BY NOT GIVING UP OR QUITTING IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

When I went inside to pay for the car repair, I noticed a picture on the office wall of the business completely destroyed. He

told me that a few years ago, a tornado had swept in and blown away their entire shop. Thankfully, they escaped being hurt by crouching down in the basement. But that wasn't going to cause him to quit. He rebuilt the store and kept moving forward. Do effective leaders face opposition? Yes, just like everyone else, but they don't quit. Do effective leaders have volunteers turn their back on them and stop serving? Yes, but they don't give up. Do effective leaders have bad days? Sure, just like everyone else. But, they focus on the promises of God and keep moving forward.

Not quitting or giving up reminds me of Sylvester Stallone's story. I'm sure your familiar with him from the Rocky and Rambo movies. I'll call him by his nickname - Sly. He was born in New York. His mother had complications during his birth. The doctor had to use two pairs of forceps during his birth. The doctor misused the forceps and accidently severed a nerve and caused paralysis in parts of Sly's face. The lower left side of his face is paralyzed - including parts of his lip, tongue and chin. This is why he has slightly slurred speech.

When he was 5-years-old, his parents divorced. He had a hard time coping with this. He lived with his father for a while, but was also in and out of foster homes. He struggled emotionally and was expelled from several schools.

Sly had a strong desire to be an actor, so he dropped out of school to try and build a career in New York. He did whatever he could to pay the bills. He cleaned out lion cages at the zoo, worked as an usher at movie theaters and other odd and end jobs. Sly continued to struggle financially while trying to get a big break. He became so broke that he became homeless and had to sell his dog for \$25 to pay bills.

A few weeks after he sold his beloved dog, Sly was watching a boxing match. It inspired him to write a movie script titled "Rocky." He wrote the entire script in less than a day. He took the script to the studios but was turned down many times. But he

wouldn't quit. Even though he heard "no" and "no" and "no" and "no" and "no," he wouldn't quit.

Finally, a studio said "yes." They offered him \$300,000 for the script with one stipulation. Sly couldn't be in the movie. They didn't think he had the acting skills for it. Even though he was broke, Sly said no. He wanted to play the role of the boxer. Sly didn't give up and finally a studio offered him \$35,000 for the script and he could play the role of the boxer. The first thing he did with the windfall of money was locate the man he'd sold his dog to. The man charged him \$15,000 for the dog! But he was soon able to buy whatever he wanted. His boxing movie *Rocky* grossed 225 million and was nominated for several Oscars. In addition, 6 more films came out of the Rocky series. The combined sales of his movies is now over 2 billion dollars.¹⁵

If Sly was that determined to succeed as an actor, how much more should we be determined to follow Jesus and complete His will for our lives.

Never

Never

Never

Never Quit!

There will be times when you are discouraged. Don't quit! There will be times when you so tired you can barely see straight. Don't quit! You will be criticized. Don't quit! You will question if it's worth it. Don't quit! You will have seasons where you question your calling. You will have times when it seems your prayers are not being answered.

LEAD WELL BY INSPIRING LOYALTY & LONGEVITY

As I talked with the employees, I found they had all been with him for years. Most over 10 years. Some over 20 years. It was a great reminder that leadership can lead to a team sticking together for the long haul. Most people don't leave a company because of pay. They leave because they don't like their boss or feel they have been mistreated by him or her.

“The tenure of the team members on a team is a good indicator of how effective the leadership of the team is. Teams that are led well tend to keep team members. Teams that are not led well tend to have a lot of turnover.”

As a leader, how do you lead in a way that people will trust you and follow your leadership for the long term? Let's talk about some of the keys. You can inspire trust through integrity. Integrity in leadership is needed more than ever. The news is flooded with reports of political leaders, ministers, teachers and celebrities who have abused children, been unfaithful to their spouse, embezzled money and not kept their word.

This has caused trust in institutions and authority figures to plummet...including clergy. In the past, clergy has normally ranked high on the integrity list. In 1985, 67% of people surveyed said they have trust in clergy's integrity. But a recent Gallup poll shows that

Americans rating for clergy has fallen to 42%¹⁶. Can you blame people? We've given them some good reasons to not trust ministers and other church authority figures. If we're going to lead well and inspire people to follow us, we're going to have to start practicing what we preach. Time to walk the talk. Time to be transparent. Time to put boundaries up that will help us live with integrity and honesty.



How can you and I earn people's trust? Circle the words that stand out to you in James 3:13-18.

“If you are wise and understand God’s ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don’t cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God’s kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.”

James 3: 13-18

You can also inspire by **developing people**. When you are intentional about pouring into people...when people know you are committed to helping them become a better person and leader...when you call people up instead of calling them out...it inspires them. They will be drawn to you. Inspiring leadership and micromanaging aren't compatible. Inspiring leaders empower people and then give them room to lead, fail, and learn from their failures.

“Good leaders are powerful. Inspiring leaders are empowering.”



As a leader, your primary role is to develop people. **You must move from being a doer to being a developer.** Your goal is to reproduce yourself. This is done by intentionally mentoring and developing the people on your team. As a leader, here are your marching orders found in Ephesians 4:12-13¹⁸.

*“Their responsibility is to **EQUIP** God’s people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.”*

As you invest in people, you will see the ministry grow and flourish. **It's not about what you can do, rather it's about what you can empower other people to do.** Never do ministry alone. Have someone you are training and investing in. How do you develop people? Here are some practical steps.

First, let's talk about developing people through feedback. Feedback is an essential element of developing the people on your team. **Feedback helps people grow not just in their ministry skills, but as disciples as well.** This verse talks about this concept.

*“Let us think of ways to motivate one another
to acts of love and good works.”
Hebrews 10:24 ¹⁹*

Before you start going around giving people feedback, let's talk about how to give it in a manner that the person will gladly receive it. Giving feedback takes some skill, but it's something you can learn and master the art of.

The first thing to remember is that feedback is grounded in relationship. When someone knows you care about them and have their best interest in mind, they will listen and receive the feedback you are offering.

When I was in middle school, I played on the basketball team. My coach pulled me aside one day after practice and asked if he could give me a pointer. I said yes. He explained to me that when I was shooting the ball, my elbow and arm were going out wide. This was causing my shots to veer left and not go in the basket. He showed me how to keep my arm in tight and line up my elbow with the basketball. I received his feedback and put it into practice. And it changed my game. I started making a lot more of my shots.

Why did I listen to him? Because I knew he had my best

interest in mind. His motive was helping me improve as a player. It's the same way with the people you are leading. If they know you have their best interest in mind, they will listen to what you have to say. And if it said in the right manner, they will receive it and put it into practice.

Let's talk about more tips on giving feedback. **Feedback should be given privately.** Pull them to the side to talk or meet with them during the week

Ask permission to give feedback. You can't just walk up to a stranger and give them feedback. Again, this is where the relationship factor comes in. You can say, "I have a few ideas for you if you're open to it?" or "Could I offer you a thought?" or "Is this a good time to share a thought with you?"

Feedback should be given privately. The goal is not to embarrass the person. Pull them off to the side to talk with them or meet with them during the week.

Use the word "I" instead of "You." When you use the word "you" it can come across as criticism. But when you use the word "I" it sounds more like advice. Here's an example.

"You did a good job greeting everyone today as they entered the building, but **YOU** didn't smile very much. It's important to smile, so people feel like you're glad they came." (can cause to be defensive)

Instead say this.

"You did a good job greeting everyone today as they entered the building. You know, **I** have found that if **I** smile when greeting people, it makes them feel like I'm glad they came."
(sounds like advice)

Use the word AND instead of BUT. Here's an example.

"You did a good job leading the small group today, **BUT** you didn't let the kids ask enough questions."

Instead say this.

“You did a good job leading the small group today and **I** think you can make it even better the next time, if you let the kids talk more.”
(sounds like encouragement)

Use the words “The next time.” (points people to the future)

Look at this example.

“You did you good job leading the small group today and I think you can make it even better **the next time**. I have found that when I let the kids talk and discuss, they get more out of it.”

These small tweaks can make you a master at giving feedback.

Since your goal is to help the person grow, **feedback should be ongoing**. It’s not a one and done. Make it a journey you are going on with the person. Provide them with steps they can take toward the goals they want to achieve.

Here’s an example. If the person’s goal is to become a better large group teacher, you can work with them to develop steps to take toward that goal. Look at these examples.

Goal: Be a better large group teacher.

Step 1: Watch an experienced mentor teach.

Step 2: Teach with mentor and get feedback from them afterwards.

Step 3: Teach by themselves and get feedback afterwards. (goal is to have improved what was identified in previous feedback).

Step 4: Repeat step 3 (goal is again to have improved what was identified in previous feedback)

Step 5: Repeat step 3.

Step 6: Read book about communicating.

Step 7: Ask for feedback on an ongoing basis.

Now let's talk about **developing people through hard conversations**. Few people are naturally good at having hard conversations. But here is a plan that can help you navigate conflict and bring a peaceful resolution.

There are 3 steps to remember as you deal with conflict, whether it's your conflict with someone else or it's helping resolve conflict between other people. It's important to go into the meeting already knowing what your strategy is. This will help you stay calmer during the meeting.

Step 1 - State what happened / what is happening.

Step 2 - Share what emotions / feelings are being affected.

Step 3 - Explain what you'd like to see the person(s) change or adjust moving forward.

Here's an example using the 3 steps.

You have a volunteer that is being brash and rude to parents when they come to pick up their kids. You've received several complaints. You know you need to have a conversation with the person.

(state what happened / is happening)

"John, I've had several parents say you are rude to them when they come to pick up their child. I stood by the door last week when parents were picking up and I did notice you were abrupt with several parents."

(share how it is affecting people)

"It's making parents feel like you don't care about them."

(explain what you'd like to change or adjust moving forward)

“In the future, I'd like to encourage you to be more loving with your words and tone. I know your heart. You love kids and parents. That's why are you serving. I think sometimes it just gets lost in translation when there are a lot of people waiting in line and things get stressful. If you'll allow me, I'd like to invest in you and help you improve your people skills. I have a great book that has helped me that I'd be glad to share with you. I'd also like to spend some time with you in the next few weeks working on this.”

Develop people by using the Law of the Few. You can only personally develop a small group of people at a time. Think about Jesus...He had 12 disciples, but out of that, He had 3 that He spent more time with and invested in.

When it comes to pouring yourself into others, you should pick them carefully and prayerfully. You should love all of your volunteers equally, but when it comes to choosing who you will pour your time, energy and resources into, you should be very selective.

“Love equally...invest selectively.”

Who are three passionate people in your ministry who want to grow? Who are three people you see potential in? Who are three people on your team that have a teachable spirit?

Develop people with a personal growth plan. Once you have chosen your three people, start working with them to develop their personal growth plan. The plan can include books to read, personality tests, notes from teaching sessions, follow-up assignments and more. If you help them grow, you can see them step into leadership roles. I've this happen many, many times.

At a church I served at, we had 72 people on our children's ministry staff team. Out of the 72, only 5 were brought in from the outside. We had developed 67 people and saw them step into staff positions. All of these precious people started out as volunteers. You can do the same if you are intentional about raising up volunteers and following the strategy outlined.

Personal Reflection:

How can I be more of a servant leader?

Am I using volunteers to build the ministry or using the ministry to build volunteers?

How can I be more effective at mentoring volunteers?

Who are 3 people I am going to invest in?

How can I personally become better at gathering feedback?

How can I inspire loyalty and longevity in my team members?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Team Discussion Questions:

What are some ways we can better serve the people we are leading?

How can we move from having volunteers to having friends?

How can we develop volunteers into leaders?

What are some steps we can take to become better at conflict resolution?

How can we go the second mile in these areas?

- check-in
- single parents
- classroom identification
- follow up with first-time guests

What can we do better to help set volunteers up for success?

How can we do better at valuing our team members?

How can we improve our pre-service huddle time?

How can we get more feedback?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.

LEAD THE MINISTRY WELL



“Leadership is your ability to hide your panic from others.”

Laozi¹

Ahhh...there’s nothing like leading in children’s ministry. It’s a fun, challenging, exciting, roller coaster ride that leaves you out-of-breath, yet longing for more. You get to shape and mold the next generation of believers. You get to partner with parents and equip them to lead their children spiritually. You get to see kids soak up the Word of God and grow in their faith. You get to come alongside other people and not only serve with them, but also do life with them. You become part of a family. As family members, you are privy to some things other people don’t know about. Here are a

a few of them...dedicated to you who serve so faithfully and passionately for kids and families. Here are some things only those in children's ministry will understand.

You know how to pray for healing for dogs, cats and goldfish.

You know the proper pronunciation for baptize is babbapitized.

You're an expert at telling knock-knock jokes.

You believe Larry and Bob should be nominated for an Oscar.

You laugh when the other ministries in the church say summer is a slow season.

You're in great shape from doing worship song motions every weekend.

Offering comes in coins, not bills.

You've ordered something from Oriental Trading in the last 3 months.

You know the name of at least 3 puppets.

You wear your Sunday best to church - a t-shirt with a children's ministry logo on it.

The church janitor has been mad at you on several occasions.

You believe the manna in the Old Testament was goldfish crackers.

You know the go to answer for any review question you don't know is "Jesus."

I trust a few of those brought a smile to your face. Leading an entire children's ministry is no joke though. As I said earlier, children's ministry is one of the most challenging roles in the church. You are leading people of all ages and have to be good at wearing several different responsibility hats.

The good news is you have been appointed and anointed by God for the task. Simply put - you got this, because God has you. He will empower you and enable you to lead the ministry well.

In this chapter, I want to give you a 30,000 ft. view of the ministry. As the leader of the ministry, you have to be able to get above the noise on a regular basis and look, plan and prepare for where God is leading the ministry. Let's talk about some key areas that should be on your radar as the leader.

I must warn you - I like to alliterate, so all of these key words start with the letter P. These are areas that you must focus on and be proactive in, if you want to lead the ministry well. There are 16 total. Let's get started with number 1.

#1 - PRESENT A



FOR THE MINISTRY

What is vision? I believe it's looking beyond what is and seeing what can be. Back in 1953, a man named Walt Disney stood looking at some orange groves in Southern California. But he saw more than orange trees and dirt.

“I first saw the site for Disneyland back in 1953. In those days, it was all flat land – no rivers, no mountains, no castles or rocketships – just orange groves and a few acres of walnut trees.”

*Walt Disney*²

Where others saw orange trees, Walt saw a castle. Where others saw dirt, Walt saw a merry-go-round. Where others saw weeds, Walt saw a rocket ship ride. Walt pursued his vision and the result was Disneyland opening on July 17, 1955.³

One day Walt was standing by the exit of Disneyland. It was mid-afternoon and he noticed a family was leaving the park way before closing time. It was very unusual to see a family leave early. Most families stayed for the fireworks show and didn't leave until closing time. Walt was curious why they were leaving early, so he stopped to ask them. They said they could see the freeway from one of the rides and saw the traffic was getting bad, so they decided to leave early to beat the crowds.

That bothered Walt. His vision was to create a place where you could forget about the outside world and enjoy being immersed in “the happiest place on earth.” The fact that you could still see the outside world from some of the rides got Walt dreaming again. A fresh vision began to form in his mind. He wanted to create another place that had plenty of land so people couldn't see the outside world while in the park. His vision turned into Disney World in Florida where he could buy enough land so people could be fully immersed in the park.

As a leader in children's ministry, it's your responsibility to cast vision for the ministry you lead. Can you see beyond what is currently in place and see what can be? Do you have a vision for the ministry you lead? If not, sit down and create a vision for the ministry. Make it no more than one sentence. If you make it any longer, people will have a hard time remembering it. It's often a good idea to take your church's or ministry's vision and translate it into children's ministry.

However you do it, get a vision that you are excited about. If you're not excited about it, then your team will not be excited about it.

*“Great ministries are built by people who have a vision from God that enables them to look beyond what is and see what can be.
Bottom line...vision comes from visionary leaders.”*

Over the years, I've had the privilege of serving with some great pastors. They all have something in common. It's this...they are visionary leaders. They get a vision from God and they passionately pursue the vision. Which brings us to the benefits of leading with vision.

People are drawn to a compelling vision. People want to be a part of something that is making an impact. Something that is exciting. Something that makes their heart beat faster when you talk about it.

One of the best ways to build a solid volunteer team is by casting vision. People are not drawn to desperation; they are drawn to vision. And if you want high capacity volunteers, then you've got to have a high capacity vision.

There's another great example of this with Walt Disney. His vision for creating Disneyland was at a crossroads. To move forward, it had to be approved by the board of directors. Several board members were complaining and saying that Walt should not try to enter the amusement park business. Walt had to convince them that his vision was viable. He stood and addressed the board with these words.

“There's nothing like it in the world. I know because I've looked. That's why it can be great: because it will be unique. A new concept in entertainment, and I think...I know...it can be a success.”
Walt Disney ⁴

Those at the meeting said Walt had tears in his eyes when he finished talking. The board could feel and see Walt's vision for Disneyland. His enthusiasm was contagious and it persuaded the board to say "yes."

***"Enthusiasm
for a vision is
not taught...
it's caught."***

Once you have a vision, you must communicate the vision. Every time you lead a staff meeting, you should mention the vision. Every report you go over should be used to point people to the vision. Every prayer meeting you have, you should pray the vision will be fulfilled. Every email you send out should have the vision on it.

You should remind people of the the vision at every training meeting you have. You get the point. Keep talking and talking and talking about and pointing people to the vision. If there's one thing you want to over communicate, it's the vision for the ministry.

Create core values that fuel the vision. Core values are the pistons that drive your ministry vision.

Provide steps to the vision. Inspiration without action is like riding one of those toy, stationary cars you find in front of a grocery store. There's a lot of noise, but you don't actually go anywhere. Having measurable steps in place will give your team members wins along the way that will keep them inspired.

Put the vision on loop. When I was a little boy, we had a fireplace in our house that we used during the winter months. I loved sitting by the fire on cold winter days. But there was something about the fire. If we didn't keep adding wood to it, soon it would burn out. That's the way a fire works. You have to keep adding wood to it. Vision is the same way. It's not a one and done.

Vision will burn out if you don't keep communicating it. You have to keep saying it. You have to keep emphasizing it or it will go out. Casting vision is one of the most important things you will do as a leader.

The Word of God reminds us of this in Proverbs 29:18.⁵ It says, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* Let that verse play out in your ministry:

Where there is no vision, there are not enough volunteers.

Where there is no vision, no one is excited about serving.

Where there is no vision, there is no growth.

Where there is no vision, there is no alignment.

Where there is no vision, the baptistery is empty.

But where there is vision, people far from God are reached.

Where there is vision, lives are impacted.

Where there is vision, volunteers are excited about serving.

Where there is vision, there is growth.

Where there is vision, there is unity.

Where there is vision, people rally around it.

I hope you understand what a big deal vision is! It's the starting point if you want to build a dynamic ministry.





If you want to lead the ministry well, safety and security must be a top priority. You must be committed to protecting children and families. In Matthew 18, we see how important it is to Jesus.

“And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

*Matthew 18:2-6*⁶

I'd say protecting children is a big deal to Jesus, so it should be a big deal to us as well. We must also remember that we have an enemy whose agenda is to still, kill and destroy.

“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy...”

*John 10:10*⁷

Safety and security must be one of your ministry’s biggest focuses. If you want your church to grow, you must have a solid safety and security plan in place.

Millennial parents live with the constant awareness that they and their children could be attacked at any time and at any place. They hear the reports of deadly shootings in movie theaters, schools, malls, vacation spots, sporting events and yes...even in churches. Recent research shows that...

30% of parents fear their child will be hurt in an accident.⁸

25% of parents fear someone will hurt or attack their child.⁸

23% of parents fear their children won't feel safe in the world.⁸

14% of parents fear their kids will be kidnapped.⁸

It is vital that you implement and follow a comprehensive safety and security plan. The plan should include...

- A thorough onboarding process for new volunteers that includes a background check, reference calls and a personal interview.
- Attending an orientation where safety and security guidelines are explained.
- No one ever being alone with a child. Room cannot be opened until there are at least 2 adults there.
- Only parents and volunteers are allowed in the children's area.
- Parents must present a pick-up tag before child is released.
- Evacuation plan.

- Lock down plan.
- Having a volunteer security team.
- Hiring a police officer to guard the children's areas.
- Having a nurse or doctor on-site in case of an emergency.

Carefully explain your safety and security plan to first-time guests. This will help relieve some of the fears they are feeling when dropping off their child. As I said earlier, with the violence and terrorism we have seen in recent years, young parents need to know their child is safe in your care. When they hear what your guidelines are and see a police officer or volunteer security team present, they are much more likely to return to your church.

Ratios are also a key part of safety and security. When new families see a room that is crowded or doesn't have a good adult to child ratio, they are less likely to turn. Here is the ideal ratio for each age group.

Infants - 1 volunteer for every 2 children -
(ideally 1 volunteer for every child)

Crawlers - 1 volunteer for every 3 children

Toddlers - 1 volunteer for every 4 children

2-year-olds - 1 volunteer for every 4 children

3-year-olds - 1 volunteer for every 8 children

4-year-olds - 1 volunteer for every 8 children

5-year-olds thru 5th grade - 1 volunteer for every 10 children
(ideally 1 volunteer for every 8 children)

Don't become complacent about safety and security. A shooting can happen in small towns just like it can in a large city. The church shooting in Texas that left 26 dead was in a small town. I sometimes encounter churches that say "We don't need a safety and security plan. We are a small church and everyone knows each other." Please, please, please don't have that frame of mind. It can happen anywhere, so we must be prepared to protect the children and families God has placed in our care. Look what the Bible says in 1 Peter 5.

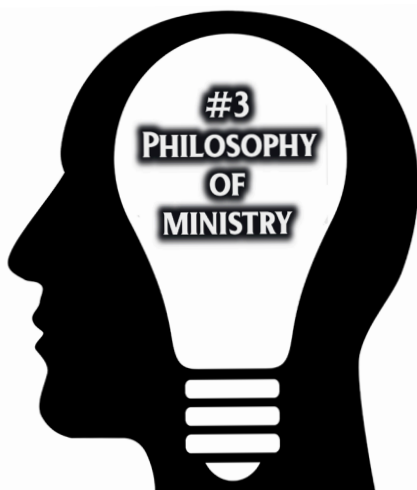
“Stay alert. Watch out *for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”*
I Peter 5:8⁹

We are told to stay alert and watch out. The enemy is looking for people to devour. This doesn't mean we are to live in fear. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind. But we must be empowered and ready should the enemy launch an attack. I have heard churches say. "We're just going to trust God. He will protect us." There's nothing wrong with trusting God -in fact, we should. But God also wants us to do our duty to be prepared for an attack. Check out this verse from Psalm 21.

*“The horse is prepared against the day of battle:
but safety is of the LORD.”*
Proverbs 21:31¹⁰

We are to prepare for the enemy's attack. We must do our very best to put safety measures in place. God expects us to do our part, while praying for His protection and safety. The flip side is someone who doesn't prepare and just says "God will protect us." Perhaps the way He wants to protect you is through the very

safety measures you are not putting in place. We are to both prepare and pray. Pray like everything depends upon God and prepare like everything depends on you. Walk guard around the precious children and families God has blessed your church with and say “The enemy will not do damage here. Not on my watch!”



As the leader over the ministry, it is your job to set the philosophy of the ministry. When we talk about ministry philosophy, we’re talking about how you do ministry and the mind-set that guides your ministry. Here’s an example of a clearly stated ministry philosophy.

- Make church a fun and exciting experience for kids. (Psalm 122:1)
- Provide a safe and secure environment. (Psalm 4:8)
- Creatively present the timeless truths of the Bible in an engaging, culturally relevant and age-appropriate way.
(I Corinthians 9:19-23)
- Teach practical life-application, not just information. (James 1:22)
- Partner with parents in their children’s spiritual growth.
(Deuteronomy 6:5-9)
- Reach out to children and their families who don’t have a relationship with Christ. (Luke 19:10)

- Help kids and parents build meaningful relationships through small groups. (John 13:34-35)
- Enlist, Equip, Empower and Encourage team members to use their gifts in ministry. (Ephesians 4:11-12)
- Equip kids and parents to reach and serve their generation for Christ. (Matthew 28:19-20)
- Be dedicated to excellence. (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

Use your philosophy of ministry to help you make decisions about which programs, events, classes, etc. you will do and how you will do what you do.

#4 - PROMOTION OF THE MINISTRY



Let's start this one with a question. How much is children's ministry valued at your church? Not much? A lot? Somewhere in between? No matter where it is on the scale right now, it can become more valued and emphasized at your church. How's that going to happen?

The answer is you. As a leader in children's ministry, you are the person God can use to elevate children's ministry in your church. You are called to be the children's ministry champion in your church. It's time to stop waiting on someone else to assume

this responsibility. Now is the time to take action. You've got to be the squeaky wheel for children's ministry. There are several steps you can take to do this.

Look for articles that emphasize the importance of children's ministry and why churches should make it a priority. You can get these articles from blogs (I blog 5 days a week with articles about children's ministry and family ministry at www.buildingchildrensministry.com). You can also share magazine articles, books about children's ministry or notes from a conference you attended. **Email one of the articles to your pastor and other key staff leaders.** Send it with a note something like this.

"Hi Pastor, came across this article about how children's ministry makes such a big impact in people's lives. Thought you might like to see it. Thanks for the opportunity to be part of the team and serve as your children's pastor/director/coordinator (or what your title is)."

Now you shouldn't send one every day. If you do that, you'll not just be a squeaky wheel, you'll become an annoying squeaky wheel and that will make things awkward. Use wisdom about when you send them and how many you send. Normally, I would send no more than 3 to 4 a year. The articles you do send - make sure they are high impact articles that talk about how children's ministry can be a major growth engine for the church. Articles that talk about the importance of reaching the next generation. Articles that share the fact that God will bless the church that makes children's ministry a priority.

Share stories of life change with the leaders in your church. Share about the family who has started attending because their child came first with a friend, had a great time and then returned, dragging her parents with her. Share about the amazing volunteer who goes the second mile each week. Share about children and

parents who followed Jesus in baptism because of VBS. Share about the family who told you they have started using the take home materials to disciple their kids. Church leaders love to hear those type of stories and it will not only encourage them, but will show that children's ministry is making a difference for the entire church.

Another way to promote the children's ministry is to have a **children's day each year**. On this Sunday, you go all out to highlight children's ministry. Kids lead worship and provide special music in the adult service. Kids pray for and take up the offering in the adult service. Encourage kids to invite their unchurched friends and neighbors to come. Have a special guest in the children's service that day. Have the children's pastor / director speak that day and share with the church the importance of reaching and discipling the next generation. Have lots of balloons and decorations for this special day. Go all out to make it a high attendance weekend. Give every child who comes a special gift on that day.

In addition to a children's day, **2 to 3 times a year have the kids lead in worship, pray for the offering and give a brief testimony in the adult service**. Share the vision of children's ministry. This will keep the visibility high. As the children's ministry leader, you need to get in front of the congregation and share the vision for children's ministry as often as possible. Ask if you can make announcements, pray for the offering, host the service, etc. Share some testimonies of kids and families who have been impacted by the ministry.

You can also set up a booth in the church lobby to raise awareness of children's ministry. Make it fun, colorful and engaging. Have information about the ministry and a small giveaway for anyone who stops by the booth. Be there and be available to invite people to serve and answer questions parents might have.

Become good friends with the communication people in your church. Ask them for space in the church bulletin to promote

upcoming events and programs in children's ministry. Ask for some slides that highlight children's ministry to run on the screens before and after the service.

Promote the ministry using social media tools like Facebook and Instagram. The majority of parents in your ministry are on one or more of those social media platforms. You and I know how important children's ministry is. Don't keep it to yourself. Spread the word!

#5 - BRING PASSION TO THE MINISTRY

You will read about "passion" several times in this book. I can't emphasize enough how important it is. As the leader, one of your biggest responsibilities is to bring passion to the ministry. By passion, I mean excitement, commitment, enthusiasm, and zeal all wrapped up in one package.

If you want a team that is passionate about the ministry, then you must first be passionate. If you want a team that is friendly, then you must first be friendly. If you want a team that has fun, then you have to be fun.

Here's a simple analogy that explains what it means to lead with passion. **A thermometer measures the temperature. But a thermostat sets the temperature.** See the difference? As the leader, your role is to set the spiritual temperature in the ministry. That means if you walk in on Sunday morning to meet volunteers before the service starts and they're talking about how tired they are, you respond with energy and enthusiasm and raise the spiritual temperature. If you walk into a kid's service and the kids are just standing there and not worshipping, then you get in the middle of them and start leading by example in worship. When there's an all church volunteer training, you get your team there and you're all sitting down front, cheering on the pastor. It means you get pumped when you're sharing about the ministry with new volunteers.

Want to know how much passion the volunteers in your ministry have? Walk around on Sunday and look into their eyes. Listen to their conversations. Watch how they interact with the kids and their parents. That will tell you. And whether they are excited or exhausted, is determined by your leadership. The volunteer team is a reflection of you. If you don't like what you see, turn and look in the mirror. And vow that the person looking back at you is going to start leading with passion!



#6 - THE PEOPLE OF THE MINISTRY

Being a leader in ministry is about loving people. Jesus came for people. Jesus died for people. Jesus' heart beats for people. Yes. People will hurt you. Love them any ways. Yes. People will betray you. Love them any ways. Yes. People will let you down. Love them any ways. Yes. People will take advantage of you. Love them any ways. Yes. People will walk away from you. Love them any ways.

Always put people before programs. **Remember - use your ministry to build people instead of using people to build your ministry.**

There will be times when you have your day fully scheduled out. Your to-do-list is prioritized and you're ready to get going, when suddenly there is a knock on your door or your cell phone rings. It's a person who really needs your help. There goes your "to-do" list. And be okay with that.

**“People come before to-do-lists.
because people is why we do what we do.”**

Jesus, our example, was in the middle of the mess as He ministered to people. The woman who reached out to get Jesus' attention by touching the hem of His garment, was healed because Jesus was in the middle of people. Rather than just hanging out with the disciples all the time, Jesus spent time with those who needed His forgiveness. Sinners. Thieves. Prostitutes. Tax Collectors. If you want to lead like Jesus, then make people your priority... even when it disrupts your schedule.



“How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”
Psalm 133:1 ¹¹

*“This is how everyone will know that you are My disciples,
if you have love for one another.”*
John 13:35 ¹²

Unity is a must if you want to see your ministry move forward. But unity doesn't happen by accident. You have to work for it. Protect it. Fight for it. How can you preserve the unity of the ministry you lead? There are 3 key things you must do to keep unity.

1. Keep everyone committed to a common vision. Having competing visions is like a car that's not aligned. It can cause the car to drift off in the wrong direction. Rally everyone to the vision. Don't waste time arguing about what color the walls should be painted or what snack the kids should be given. Let someone make a decision and stay focused on decisions and topics that are going to keep the ministry on track.

2. Lead everyone to embrace a set of core values and live them out. As we explained earlier, core values are the non-negotiable behaviors that define what you expect from your team members and are unwilling to compromise on. Here's an example of a set of core values.

Inside out. (lead with character and integrity)

Passion for people. (desire to reach and disciple others)

Live to Give (serve, give to help others)

All for one. (unity)

Grow to Go (outreach)

It's crucial to give your core values to new volunteers in writing as you bring them on the team. Go over them and explain that everyone on the team agrees to live by these. Teach about the core values in one of your volunteer trainings each year. You should go over the core values on a regular basis. You should also use the core values to hold team members accountable. Here's an example.

You find out that one of the teachers is complaining about a curriculum change. She is talking to other volunteers and telling them she doesn't like the new lessons and is questioning why the change was made. When you hear this, you set up a meeting with her.

When you meet with her, you ask her to share why she doesn't like the new curriculum. You listen and address her concerns. You also talk with her about the disunity her complaining is causing. You remind her about the core value (all for one) that she agreed to serve by. You ask if she can still abide by that core value? She says "yes." You remind her that any time she doesn't understand a decision that has been made or needs clarity on anything, she is welcome to come straight to you and together you will work it out. Which leads to the third key to preserving unity.

3. Have the team make a commitment to direct communication. Unity only works if the team commits to direct communication. Direct communication means that if you have a disagreement, conflict or misunderstanding with another team member, you should go directly to that person to talk about it. This is the Biblical way to deal with matters like this.

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Matthew 18:15-16¹³

I told my team that there would be times when I would blow it. I would do something or say something that didn't make sense or offended them. I asked that when that happens to use direct communication. In other words, come directly to me. You can yell at me at me and scream at me, if you're really upset. I promise I will listen and we will work it out together.

Here's an easy way to think about direct communication and tell your team how it works. Always talk up. Disunity happens when people talk sideways to each other or down to someone they oversee, rather than talking up to the person they report to.

Let me share an example with you. At a church I served at as children’s ministry director, the person that I reported to, made a decision about children’s ministry that was going to totally mess up our children’s ministry schedule. The person who made the executive decision didn’t consult with me or any of the children’s ministry staff before making the decision. I knew I needed to go to the person who made the decision. I asked for a meeting. As we sat down, the first thing I said was, “I want you to know that I have not talked sideways or down. You are the only person I will share this with. I haven’t talked to anyone else nor will I in the future. I will only talk up to you - the person I report to. The person expressed appreciation that I had went directly to them. We were able to talk through the person’s executive decision and they agreed to reverse the decision. If I had gone to other people on staff and complained, it would not have worked. The best thing to do is to always go up when you need resolution. It takes courage, but unity is worth it.

#8 - SET THE PRIORITIES FOR THE MINISTRY



Your priorities are what your ministry is going to focus on. Your priorities should all be steps that help you accomplish your vision/mission statement. Your priorities will determine what programs, events, classes, etc. you will put on your calendar. Let’s talk about what that means for your ministry and some things to keep in mind as you decide what your priorities will be.

Focus on doing a few things well. When I first started in ministry a few decades ago, I was taught that the more ministries you had, the more people you would reach. With that way of thinking, I was always looking for new ministries to start. The more events, programs, classes, etc. that I could place on the calendar, the better.

But over the years, by watching other churches that were thriving by doing a few things well and from personally experiencing the frustration that can come from having too many ministries, I changed my ministry philosophy. I found that less really is more.

“You can do a lot of things mediocre and leave a blur or you can do a few things well and leave a mark.”

I am typing this on a Mac Book Pro laptop. And I use an iPad and iPhone as well. I am biased, but I love using Mac products. I’m sure you’ve heard of Steve Jobs. He was the founder of Macintosh. He is a great example of what can happen when you focus on doing a few things well.

In 1998, Steve shrunk Apple’s products line from 350 to 10. So instead of creating 350 mediocre products, he focused on creating 10 incredible products. You see, the natural pull is toward complexity. You have to be diligent if you want to do a few things well. If you try to do too much you can end up with volunteers that are burned out, a budget that is spread thin and resources that aren’t adequate.

One of the best things you can put on your ministry calendar is eraser marks. Let’s talk about how you can keep your priorities simple and focused well.

Know when to say “yes” and when to say “no.”

“People think focus means saying yes to the thing you’ve got to focus on. But that’s not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I’m actually as proud of the things we haven’t done as the things I have done.

Innovation is saying ‘no’ to 1,000 things.”

Steve Jobs ¹⁴

There will always be “knocks” on your door...people wanting to hear a “yes.” The knock will come from a dad who has a great idea. The knock will come from a music group that is going to be coming through your area. The knock will come from a new family in the church who asks if you offer a popular ministry program. The knock will come from an idea a staff member has. The knock will come from a prominent family in the church who wants you to start a certain program. The knock will come from someone who wants to use your church facilities for a special event. The knock will come from someone who offers specialty classes for kids and wants to enter a business partnership. The knock will come from a conference you attend.

When opportunity knocks, you must decide if you want to open the door or not. And opening the door should depend on whether or not the knock lines up with your priorities and can help you achieve your vision.

There are a lot of good things you can do. But don't do something just because it's a “good thing.” What you are looking for and praying for is a God thing. Look at this scenario in the New Testament. It's a great example of determining if something is a “good thing” or a “God thing.”

*“Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the **Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the Word in the province of Asia at that time.** Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the **Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there.**”*

Acts 16:6-7 ¹⁵

Was it a “good thing” for Paul to go and minister to the people in Asia, Mysia, and Bithynia? Of course. But it wasn't a “God thing.” He had other plans for them. Check out the rest of the verses.

*“That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’ So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that **God was calling us to preach the Good News there.**”*

Acts 16:9-10 ¹⁶

This time it was a “God thing.” See the difference? In your ministry, you will constantly be offered “good things” to do. Programs, ideas, events, and initiatives will come your way in abundance. But just because it’s a “good thing” doesn’t mean it’s a “God thing” for your ministry.

How do you determine the difference between a good thing and a God thing? Here are some questions to ask yourself.

Will this help us fulfill the vision God has for our ministry?

Does this line up with our strategy and direction?

How will this impact the ministry as a whole?

Is this sustainable?

How will this impact resources and staff?

How will this impact other ministries?

Is this opportunity already offered at other churches in our area?

Is this a “niche” that God wants us to use? Is the opportunity based on the personal interest of a few?

Am I willing to move something else off the plate to make this happen?

Will this bear fruit that remains?

Will this help us reach people who are lost or just bring in consumer church people from other churches?

How many volunteers will it take to make it happen?

Will it pull volunteers away from other key areas where they are already serving?

Saying “no” has just as much, if not more power than saying “yes.” Why? Saying “no” allows you to say “yes” to what is most important. It’s important to understand the difference between being busy and being productive. One of the best ways to know is to measure outcome, not activity. The ministry can be busy, but little to no fruit is seen. The ministry becomes like a merry-go-round with lots of noise and movement but no true progress. How do you know if you’re busy, but producing little fruit?

Here are 10 signs.

1. You don’t have time to stop and celebrate the wins.
2. You often have to use your day off to get everything done.
3. You don’t have time to stop and evaluate what you’re doing.
4. Ministries compete for use of rooms.
5. Ministries have big events that are too close together or even overlap.
6. Families often have to “divide and conquer” to be a part of multiple things going on at the same time.
7. Families sometimes skip weekend services because they are worn out from weekday programs or special events.

8. You have more than one special event per quarter.
9. The quality of weekend services suffers because of weekday programs.
10. Volunteers are serving in more than one program in your ministry.

One thing that comes to light is this - be process driven instead of program driven. Think “pathways to growth” instead of programs.



“Plan your work and then work your plan.”

After you’ve confirmed where the ministry is headed and what will take you there, it’s time to put your steps on the church calendar. Lay out a clear pathway using programs, events, special days and other calendar items. I highly recommend planning a year in advance.

“Priorities should drive planning.”

Sit down with your team and work through the following questions for each item you’re thinking about putting on the calendar.

Why?

Why should we do this?
Why have we not tried this before?

Who?

Who will own this?
Who will attend this?

What?

What will this be called?
What will the cost be?

How?

How will this benefit the people who attend?
How will we sustain this if it is reoccurring?

Where?

Where will this happen?
Where will we advertise this?

When?

When would be the best time of the week/month/year to have this?
When would we launch this?

As you are planning, here is something to remember.

“Plan with your average family in mind.”

In every church, there are 3 groups of people.

- Very conservative families (compared to the rest of the church).

- Average families.
- Families who don't know there is a line that can be crossed.

When you do something that pushes the envelope in your church culture, you will hear from the conservative families, since they are normally the most vocal.

When they criticize the song you played or the movie clip you showed or the reference you used or the person you quoted or the lesson you taught, it's important to respond with grace, understanding and wisdom.

Here's a real-time example. A few years ago, we decided to use a secular song as part of a family experience we were creating. Below is a letter we received from one of the conservative families.

*"Tonight, I was so delighted to hear ***** preach a strong Biblical message on our sanctifying our minds and way of life...without compromising and caving to today's culture, yet in love. I am praying your church keeps preaching this way and refrains from trying to be like the world (I was very concerned about the *****song taught to the children and sung in the sanctuary). I assume it was a one-time error in judgment and the elders will be more involved at all levels of this large organization! I am praying *****will be a strong light for the most HIGH LORD JESUS."*

My response...

*"Hi *****,
Thank you so much for sharing your concern about the children's song. I understand your concern and am so thankful for your commitment to seeing kids grow up to love Jesus. It's people like you who have a heart for the next generation that makes ***** such a great place for kids and parents to*

discover Jesus. I believe you are referencing the song that was part of our Fall Festival outreach service that was held back in October. Each part of that service was carefully thought through and planned to create an environment that would reach out to the many unchurched families who came that night for the very first time. As a church family, we all have varying degrees of preferences when it comes to music and using the culture to connect with unchurched families. We weigh all of this in our decision making and do what we feel will be most effective for the church as a whole in reaching unchurched people.

*Thank you again for sharing your heart. As part of the family, we always welcome and appreciate your feedback and will use it to help access future planning. Have a great week and let us know if we can be of any more help.”
Dale Hudson*

A few key takeaways from my response...

- acknowledge their concern
- explain the why behind your decision
- let them know they have been heard and their feedback will be taken into consideration
- explain that your decisions are based on what is best for the church as a whole and its mission to reach the unchurched
- thank them for the feedback
- let them know their feedback is always welcome

Again, remember this, when deciding whether or not you should do something that pushes the envelope, make your decision based on the average family in your church, not on the families on the far left or far right.

#10 - PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER MINISTRIES

Become a collaborator with the rest of the church and be a bridge to the other ministries in the church. How can you partner with the men's ministry? How can you partner with the women's ministry? How can you collaborate with the student ministry to ensure a complete discipleship pathway from preschool to high school? Plan the children's ministry calendar in collaboration with the other ministries. This will help eliminate date conflicts. You must constantly be thinking how you can see the children's ministry benefit the church as a whole.

#11 - PROBLEM SOLVING FOR THE MINISTRY

As the leader of the ministry, guess where problems and conflicts will land? On your desk. As the leader, it's important for you to become a problem fixer and conflict resolver. You must become known as someone who can fix problems. There will also be times when people on your team will have conflict. You will be the one who mediates this using Biblical guidelines. Read and learn all you can about navigating conflict. Your people skills are one of the main personal growth areas you should concentrate on.

Don't make decisions alone. Have two or three people that can help you in the decision-making process. Here's an example. You have a potential volunteer that is ready and able to serve, but when you ran the person's background check, it revealed that the potential volunteer was arrested and convicted 2 years ago for a DUI.

Since then, the potential volunteer has accepted Jesus as his Savior and has gotten himself cleaned up through celebrate recovery. He is excited about serving Jesus and helping kids grow in their faith. Should you let him serve? Don't make the decision alone. Bring in 2-3 people and get their insight and advice before making the final decision.

#12 - PURSUE EXCELLENCE FOR THE MINISTRY

There's a show at Disneyland and Disney World that's called the *Enchanted Tiki Bird Room*. The show is set in a tropical, jungle setting. Tropical birds, statues and tropical flowers come to life in a South Seas musical celebration. When it opened in 1963, it was the first use of true audio-animatronics.¹⁷ Walt had commissioned his visioneers to build the show and now he was ready to see what they had created. Walt observed the test show and had one main comment. He said, "You can't see the birds breathing. When the birds are not talking or singing, they don't look alive because they aren't breathing. I'd like you to make them breathe the entire show, not just when they are talking or singing."

The Imagineers responded by saying that having the birds breathe all the time was overkill. 99% of the people who would attend the show, would not notice. They told Walt it would be a major overhaul to make that happen. They would have to find a way to re-wire the birds, sync them, etc. They felt it wasn't worth the added time and effort. Walt listened to them and then responded with this statement.

"People can feel perfection. Quality is the imperceptible things that guests might not even know they see. But devotion to detail lets guests know that they're worth the effort."
Walt Disney ¹⁸

Sounds like this verse in God's Word.

*"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,
as working for the Lord."
Colossians 3:23 ¹⁹*

Successful children’s ministries are built on doing the small things with excellence. They pay attention to the details. Their bathrooms are clean. Their check-in areas are neat and free of clutter. They promptly follow up with parents who contact them. You won’t find typos on their take home papers or other printed materials. They know what their weak spots are and they are actively seeking to improve in those areas. They hold themselves accountable for giving their best in everything they do.

*“Mediocrity is a choice.
You won’t find it on anyone’s birth certificate.”
David Anderson²⁰*

Are you like me? Does it tick you off when someone says, *“It’s good enough. They are just kids. It won’t matter to them.”* I think people use statements like this to try and justify why they are not giving their very best. I believe we should give 110% to children’s ministry. Are there any perfect ministries? No. Being committed to excellence doesn’t mean you’ll be perfect. But it does mean you strive for perfection. You go all out to make what you do for the kids first-class. You do the very best with what you have to work with.

I sometimes hear people in children’s ministry say, “If I had Disney’s budget, I could do things with excellence too.” Hang on a minute. Did you know that Walt started with nothing? When he first started out, he was constantly broke. It got so bad for awhile that he survived on eating dog food.²¹ Yes, you read it correctly, dog food. But he had a passion to create excellent environments for kids and families. It was his passion and commitment to excellence that increased his company’s budget to what it is today. First came the passion and then came the resources. Take whatever resources you have, add your passion and commitment to excellence to it, and you’ll see great things happen.

#13 - PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

If you want to influence kids, then you've got to first influence their biggest influencer. Who is their biggest influencer? Their parents.

"No one has more influence in a child's life than his or her parents."

Let's talk about some ways you can partner with parents and equip them with the tools, resources and knowledge they need to lead their children spiritually.

Spiritual milestones. There are certain times in a child's life when parents come asking for your help. Here are five milestones that are high-impact times when you can make a major difference in the lives of parents and their children.

- Parent & Child Dedication
- Bible Presentation (entering elementary)
- Salvation
- Baptism
- Transition into middle school

You can attach a class and time of celebration to each of these milestones. These are such great times to speak into the lives of parents and equip them to raise their children to love Jesus. An example is Parent & Child Dedication. Notice it is called "Parent" and child dedication. The goal is to equip parents so they can lay a spiritual foundation in the lives of their children. In the class, you can share what the dedication is about AND share with parents the importance of attending church faithfully. You can give them tools and tips for talking about faith at home. Each of these 5 milestones can be used to make a huge impact in families' lives. You can get the class & celebration kits/curriculum for these milestones at www.buildingchildrensministry.com.

Take Home Pages. A key goal should be to extend what you taught the kids at church to their home. This is so faith conversations can happen during the week between children and their parents. Include key questions from what you taught, some fun activities that reinforce the main point of the lesson and a Bible verse that parents can help kids memorize. I suggest getting these into the hands of parents as they are exiting on Sunday.

Social Media. The vast majority of parents use social media. In fact, the most recent stats show that 84% of Millennial moms are on Facebook and get recommendations from it.²² You can use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media platforms to connect with parents and influence them. It's as simple as starting a page for your ministry and inviting them to join. You can post parenting tips, announcements, discussion questions from the lesson, memory verses, etc.

Text Messages. Did you know that 98% of text messages get read and 90% get read in three seconds.²³ Parents may not always answer a phone call, but they will read a text message. You can leverage this by sending text messages with discussion questions from the lesson, announcements, memory verse, etc.

YouTube. Create short videos from your lessons that parents and kids can watch together on YouTube.

Apps. You can create your own app or use some existing apps that are designed to get kids and parents having faith discussions at home.

Next up in technology. There will always be new technology emerging that you can use to encourage and equip parents as they lead their children spiritually. Monitor the most recent stats and always be looking for the best ways to connect with parents. However you do it, make parental involvement one of your top priorities.

BRING PARENTS INTO YOUR STRATEGY

#14-PRESENT **GOALS** FOR THE MINISTRY



If you want to reach new heights in your ministry, then you need to put your goals for new heights in writing. This involves setting goals for each ministry year. Goals can help you measure your progress in fulfilling your vision. It can also motivate you to keep pressing toward your vision. You've heard the statement -"If you aim for nothing, you'll hit it every time." Let's look at some suggested goals you should set.

General Goals:

- first-time guests
- first-time guests that returned
- overall attendance growth
- number of kids in small groups
- attendance at events
- milestones attendance
- volunteers serving
- volunteer retention
- volunteers attending training

Spiritual Steps:

- parent & child dedication class
- Bible presentation class
- decision to follow Jesus class
- baptism class & baptism
- small group
- serving



MONITOR THE PULSE OF THE MINISTRY

My wife is in nursing school at the time of this writing. She has to practice the basics like taking someone's temperature, putting in iv's, measuring heart rates, taking someone's pulse, etc. I have become her practice dummy. She tries everything I listed and more on me (except the iv insertion - I haven't volunteered for that yet).

If you want to know if someone is alive, then you check their pulse. Someone's pulse rate can also tell you how healthy they are. A normal, resting pulse rate for an adult would be between 60 and 100 beats per minute.²⁴

As a ministry leader, one of your big tasks is to constantly monitor the pulse rate of the ministry you lead. This will help you see what's working, what's not working, areas of strength, weak areas, how you are progressing on ministry goals, etc.

A good way to monitor the pulse of the ministry is by having a dashboard. A dashboard can give you a great overall picture of how the ministry is progressing or regressing. It can also help you identify trends. Here are some of the things you want on your ministry dashboard:

- overall attendance (are we growing, how is our attendance compared to this time last year)
- attendance in specific areas (nursery, preschool, elementary, etc.)
- children's ministry growth compared to the overall church's growth (children's ministry should be a minimum of 15% of the total attendance / 20-25% is considered very healthy)
- first-time guests
- returning guests
- participation in milestone events such as Parent & Child Dedication, Bible Presentation, Elementary Graduation Celebration, etc.
- number of volunteers in each area (compared to last year)
- participation in salvation class
- number of baptisms
- number of children in small groups
- number of kids serving
- volunteer-to-child ratios

#16 – PULL GROWTH LIDS AWAY



As the ministry leader, you want to be watching for growth lids and help pull them away so the ministry can continue to grow. Here's an example. If your children's ministry space gets 85% full, you will stop growing.²⁵ That means if your children's ministry classes can hold a total of 100, once you are averaging over 85, you will stop growing. You'll then have a few options: you can add/build a larger space, start an additional service or ask some

families to start attending a different service that's not as full.

Each week you can look for growth lids by asking your team and yourself these three questions:

- What went well?
- What was challenging?
- What is one change or adjustment we can make to improve?

The answers you get will help you identify and remove growth barriers. Why is it so important for us to keep monitoring the different aspects of our ministry? Why is it so important for us to continue stretching, improving and growing each week? Why is it so important for us to pursue excellence? Let me tell you a true story that will make it clear why we must give our best. I served for a number of years as the children's director at a church in South Florida. We were a multi-site church and launched new campuses on a regular basis. One of the campuses we started was in an area that had a lot of crime. We were able to secure the public high school in this town for our weekend services. This meant that our children's ministry would meet in some of the classrooms. We would go in early on Sunday morning and set up the children's classrooms and then after the service, we would take down our stuff and put the classroom back just as we found it.

I'll never forget opening Sunday. We had a great service and children's ministry went well. After the service was over and all the kids had been picked up, I was helping put the classrooms back in order. I was in a classroom by myself and was looking at the diagram they had provided to help put everything back in the right spots.

One row of chairs in the back of the room went against the wall. As I was putting the chairs there, I noticed that someone had written on the wall by the desks. I bent over to see what it said. Here's what one of the students that went to school there had written on the wall.

F#K SCHOOL..I WANT TO BE A DRUG DEALER! LIKE FATHER LIKE SON!**

As I read that, tears came to my eyes. I felt the Holy Spirit whisper to me, “That is why you are here.” It opened my eyes to realize that we had started another campus in that area because there are kids there whose greatest ambition in life is to be a drug dealer. They have no hope or aspirations apart from being a drug dealer. I keep that picture on my phone and look at on a regular basis. It’s a stark reminder of why all of us must continue to reach people with the Gospel. To reach them so they can know there’s a better way of life and it’s living for Jesus. He brings hope where there is no hope. He brings forgiveness to all who are willing to call up His name. Because of that, you and I, must keep sharing Jesus with the boys, girls, moms, dads and grandparents that we come in contact with on a daily basis.

Personal Reflection:

How can I be more effective at communicating our vision?

How passionate am I about the ministry? What are some ways I can be a thermostat instead of a thermometer?

What can I do to promote our children’s ministry more at church and in the community?

Do I have clear ministry priorities in writing? Does our programming, services, events, etc. align with those priorities? How can I bring more alignment and intentionality to what we do?

Do I have a good understanding of what our ministry’s pulse is? What can I do to have a clearer understanding of our current pulse rate?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Team Discussion:

How safe and secure is our ministry? Where are the holes in our security? How can we make it a safer place for kids and their parents?

How are our ratios in each age group? If needed, how can we improve our ratios in each room?

What is our ministry philosophy? Do we need to put it in writing? How can we empower our team with it?

Do we have unity among team members? How can we improve it?

Do we practice direct communication when there is an issue? How can we improve this?

Is there anything we need to stop doing, so other parts of our ministry can be more effective?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



“There is no greater leadership challenge than parenting.”
Jim Rohn¹

Children’s ministry is no longer just about children. It’s just as much about their parents. If you want to make an impact in the lives of children, then you must influence their greatest influencers.

No one has more influence in a child’s life than his or her parents.



It's not easy being a parent. I heard someone say, "Before I was a parent, I had three theories about raising children, now I have three children and no theories." If you're a parent, I'm sure you can identify.

And if you have more than one child, you're also a referee. One mom said when her children become unruly, she has a nice, safe playpen. She said when her kids are finished, she comes out of the playpen. If you're a parent, you also know what it's like to walk around your house and wonder how everything you touch is sticky.

Okay, enough of that. Let's talk about leading parents well. Your strategy to lead parents is just as important as your strategy to lead children. I have found that many parents want to be the spiritual leader for their children, they just don't know where to start. As children's ministry leaders, we have an incredible opportunity to come alongside them as a resource provider, cheerleader and prayer partner. Let's talk about how we can support and encourage parents in discipling their children.

UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S FAMILIES

Often television programming is a reflection of current culture. This was true in 1957, when *Leave it to Beaver* was a popular sitcom. It reflected the demographics of the average family in the 1950's. Dad and Mom were happily married. There were 2 kids. Dad worked a 9-to-5 job. Mom stayed home and was always there when the boys came home from school.

Fast forward to today and look around. You'll see the word "family" is much more complex and diverse. And if you want to lead families well, it's important to know who they are.

Television programming is still a reflection of the culture. Just as "*Leave it to Beaver*" reflected what families looked like in the 1950's, the television series "*Modern Family*" reflects the diversity and dynamics of today's families. The family consists of Jay and Gloria,

who are a married couple with one child. Gloria is from Columbia. Jay is the father and is considerably older than Gloria. They are a blended family.

Then there's Phil and Claire, who are a married couple as well. They both work and have 3 children. They live a fast-paced, hectic life with the kids being involved in sports and other events. And then there's Mitchell and Cameron, a gay couple who have an adopted daughter.

As you can see, there is a much different family dynamic than the 1950's. If you're going to lead parents well in today's culture, you need to know the unique dynamics of their families. Consider these recent findings about families.

- There are nearly 13.6 million single parents raising over 21 million children.²
- 61% of same-sex couples who live together are married.³
- 65% of children live with married parents compared to 85% in 1968.⁴
- Over 18 million adults are cohabiting.⁵
- 65% of remarriages involve children from a prior marriage on at least one side, creating a blending family.⁶
- There are 2.7 million grandparents raising their grandchildren.⁷
- 4% of adopted children are being raised by gay parents.⁸

Let's dive a little deeper into the parenting landscape and talk about...



LEADING MILLENNIAL PARENTS

Born roughly between 1980 and 2000, the Millennials are the young couples you are trying to reach and involve in your church.⁹ There are over 75 million Millennials in the United States.¹⁰ They comprise 24% of the population.¹¹ And at the time of this writing, more than 17 million Millennial women are now mothers and that number is growing by more than a million every year.¹² In fact, 82% of children born each year are born to Millennial mothers.¹³ That comes to 5 out of every 6 babies.¹⁴

Let's look at some of their unique characteristics and how we can lead Millennial parents well.

Technology is Their Mentor

Millennials grew up online. Whenever they needed help, they went online for it. Any answer they needed was just a Google search away. So, it's only natural that now, as parents, they search online for parenting help. There is unlimited information about all things parenting. Yes, they still ask their parents for advice at times, but their primary go to is the internet.

Churches that want to influence Millennial parents should look for ways to do so online. Whereas other entities offer parenting advice, the church has the opportunity to offer spiritual advice online. Perhaps it's a Facebook page that shares how to guide your child spiritually. Or maybe it's creating some YouTube videos about how to do a devotion with your child at bedtime. Perhaps it's a blog from church staff that offers spiritual parenting strategies.

Maybe it's posting spiritual parenting advice through an Instagram account. There are so many opportunities for you to connect with Millennial parents online.

Millennial Parents Invest in Their Children

Millennials have grown up in an age of difficult financial times. This has made them price conscious and savvy when it comes to spending their money. They look for shopping deals and ways to save money. The top 20 apps used by Millennials are either retail or discount-focused.

While they are careful about how they spend their money, there is one thing they will open their wallets wide for...their children. Millennial parents outspend Gen X parents on child-friendly products.¹⁵ And when it comes to spending money on their children, quality trumps quantity. Millennials are 14% more likely than Boomers to pay a premium for an innovative new product and 22% more likely to pay extra for sustainable brands.¹⁶ They want to know how things are made, where they come from and who made them.

This is a reminder that if you want to reach Millennial parents, then offer great programming and ministry for their kids. They are willing and ready to financially invest in ministries that offer programs and events that will help their children.

They Are Struggling Financially

Millennials are facing financial challenges. They reached childbearing age during the recession and many have large college debt. As a result, many of them rely on their Gen X and Boomer parents and grandparents for financial help. This can be anything from help with rent to asking grandparents to watch the grandkids while they are working.

Churches can offer financial classes and training for parents. Programs like Financial Peace University are great for helping young parents learn how to manage their finances.

Religious Nones

More Millennials are “religious nones” than any previous generation. The term “none” refers to not claiming affiliation with any religion. Look at the trend...

- 16% of Boomers are religious nones.¹⁷
- 21% of Gen Xer's are religious nones.¹⁸
- 35% of Millennials are religious nones.¹⁹

And consider these findings...

59% of Millennials who were raised in church have dropped out.²⁰

Only 2 in 10 people under 30 believe attending a church is important or worthwhile (an all-time low).²¹

35% of Millennials have an anti-church stance - even to the point that they believe the church does more harm than good.²²

This obviously means Millennials are much more likely to not pass faith to their children. It's hard to pass along something you don't believe yourself.

This is very concerning, not only for the Millennials, but for their Gen Z children as well. Here are some more specific steps you can take to engage with and lead Millennials.

Include them in planning the future of the church. Why? Because they are the future of the church.

Millennials want the opportunity to speak into the direction, strategies and vision of the church. They highly value this and refuse to be a part of a church that ignores their input. If we are going to see Millennial parents become part of and help lead the future

church, then we must give them a voice in planning that future.

Practical steps to take:

- Give them a seat at the church's leadership table.
- Host focus groups for Millennial parents. Listen to their feedback and ideas.
- Have special events and classes that are geared for young couples.

Talk It and Walk It

We talk about changing the world, but we don't get involved in things that can change the world. Millennial parents want to change the world. They are drawn to churches that are focused on changing the world. They also want their kids involved in this. A cool mission statement that talks about changing the world, but does very little about it, turns Millennials off.

Practical steps to take:

- Provide Millennials with opportunities to make a difference.
- Provide Millennials with opportunities to serve and make a difference with their child.
- Show Millennials how their involvement is making a difference.

We've got to give Millennials opportunities to get outside the four walls of the church building and do ministry. Occasionally taking up an offering for kids in a needy country is not enough. They want to go visit the child and help him /her in person.

More practical steps to take:

- Get small groups involved in serving together outside the four walls.
- Help supplement and sponsor young Millennials to go on mission trips.
- Share stories of young adults who went on a mission trip and the fruit that's resulted from it.

Church Politics

If you look behind the curtain, you will see many churches have politics going on. Power struggles over decisions. Arguing over petty things like the color of the carpet. Starting “new churches” due to church splits. A few families, that have been at the church for generations, controlling the church and turning it into a country club where only people like them are accepted.

Millennials can see right through the curtain. They see the politics, power struggles and lack of unity, and they want no part of it.

Practical steps to take:

- Create a culture of unity that is based on the church's vision.
- The less red tape, the better. Realize you don't need a committee to get permission to buy more toilet paper for the bathrooms. Empower the staff team to be able to make decisions while balancing it with accountability.
- Make decisions not based on the preference of the few, but on what's best for the future of the church.

Show Them the Money

Millennials want to know where the money they are giving is going. They don't trust institutions in general and that includes churches. They are turned off when they hear about a pastor

building a multi-million dollar house or driving a Rolls Royce, while kids in other countries are dying of starvation. They are also not big on building grand facilities that are only used for an hour a week on Sunday morning.

Practical steps to take:

- Be totally transparent about where funds are being spent.
- Show how the money is being used to help others with a special emphasis on helping the poor and needy.
- Church staff salaries should be in line with what the average family in the congregation makes. In other words, they should live comfortably, but not exorbitantly.

Move From Monologue to More Dialogue

Millennials are not interested in having someone stand behind a pulpit and yell at them. They can sit home or at the coffee shop and watch the best preachers on the planet on demand. Instead, they long for stimulating conversation in a community of people who are facing the same challenges and struggles as them.

Practical steps to take:

- Move from rows of chairs to round tables / circles as much as possible. This naturally causes more conversations to happen.
- Make sure classes for both parents and children incorporate open-ended questions that can spark deeper conversations.
- Equip small group leaders to be excellent facilitators rather than lecturers.

Lack of Community

Millennials long to be in community and they want their children to be in community as well.

Practical steps to take:

- Create small groups that address the felt needs of Millennials.
- Have small groups for their children. Whether it's a traditional classroom setting or a small group time after large group time, get their kids in a group where they can be known, cared for and prayed for by a small group leader.
- Set up serving opportunities where small groups can serve together.

Provide them with a safe place to discuss controversial issues.

Our culture is engulfed in issues like gay marriage, transgender, abortion, etc. Millennials need a safe place where they can talk through these issues to gain a Christian worldview.

Practical steps to take:

- Create environments where Millennials can ask questions about these issues.
- Provide mentors for Millennials who can bring wisdom and guidance to the table.
- Remember tolerance is a big value of Millennials.

- Talk with them, but don't argue with them, about controversial issues.
- Relationship is how you will influence them.

It's time churches face the fact that, for the most part, we're not keeping Millennials and their children engaged in our churches. Unless we make changes, there are going to be lots of empty seats in our churches where Millennials should be sitting. Unless we adjust what we're doing, our nursery, preschool and elementary ministries at our churches will continue to plateau and even shrink. Wake up! Look around! We have to reach the Millennial families in our communities or we will face extinction.

These factors have big implications for churches who want to reach, engage and influence Millennial parents. Churches must know how to navigate these unique characteristics if they want to be effective. I want to encourage you to talk through this chapter with your team. Have some honest, no-holds-barred conversations about this. Be willing to let go of the past and change what is not working. It can be done. I was at a church a few weeks ago that was filled with Millennial parents and their children. It can still be done, if you're willing to adjust as needed.

You see, behind all the stats and percentages are real families in your community and mine. Families that Jesus loves and wants to experience His love and forgiveness. Parents that He wants to walk in His wisdom and principles. Let's look at some more practical ways you can lead the families in your church and community to a closer relationship with the church and with our heavenly Father.

The hope for the world is the church. And the hope for the church is to pass along our faith to the next generation. Let's examine some more steps you can take to engage parents.



ALWAYS THINK PARENTS

Leading parents well starts with developing a mind-set that always thinks parents. You must shift your thinking from just the children to how can we involve parents in this?

How can we help parents grasp the role of primary spiritual leaders?

How can we extend the lessons into the home?

How can we equip parents to help their children live out the truth?

What tools can we place in parent's hands to help them disciple their children? Tools they will actually use?

How can we get parents involved in helping disciple their children at church?

INFLUENCING PARENTS THROUGH THEIR CHILDREN

If you want to influence parents, then it's going to primarily happen through their children. Parents have a soft spot for their children. When you do something nice for their child, you will get their attention. When you minister to children well, it opens the door to minister to their parents.

Years ago, when I got out of college, I went to help a friend plant a new church in Southern California. The new church was in the city of Moreno Valley. At the time, it was one of the fastest growing cities in the country. We rolled into town, not knowing anyone. The only place we could find to meet was an old

bingo parlor. We would come in early on Sunday and clear out all the smoke from the room. We'd set up chairs and have church. God began to bless the church and we began to grow. Guests were coming every week and we were seeing people come to Christ. Since we were a new church plant, our budget was very limited. The only place near the church we could find to live was a tiny, old, 600 sq. foot home. It had one bedroom, one bath and a kitchen/living room.

After we got moved in, I started trying to make friends with the neighbors. Three houses down, I noticed a man that looked rough and tough. I also noticed that cars would come by and slow down in front of his house. He'd come out and lean into the car while looking around suspiciously. I was pretty sure drugs were being exchanged.

**When you
take a child
by the hand,
you take a
parent by
the heart.**

As the weeks went by, the Lord began to speak to me about going over and inviting this man to church. I argued with the Lord, telling Him that the man might shoot me or stab me. There was no way I was going over there. But God wouldn't let up, He kept dealing with me about going over there. Finally, I told God I would go and introduce myself to this man.

When I got to his house and knocked on the door, he came staggering out. It was obvious he was drunk. I mean totally wasted. I introduced myself, told him about our new church and asked if he'd like to come as my guest. He began to curse and quickly let me know that he was an atheist and didn't go to church. I thanked him for his time and left. I tried a few more times to invite him, but he was always drunk and I made no progress with him. Sometimes at night, you could hear he and his wife yelling at each other. There seemed to be no peace in their house. A few weeks later, I saw two boys walking in front of our house. They looked like there were around 11 or 12 years old. I went out, introduced myself

and invited them to come to church with me. They responded and said they had never been to church, but they would like to check it out. I said awesome and told them we'd need to get their parent's permission. I asked which house they lived in. Guess where they pointed? You got it! The cursing, drunk atheist's house. I had seen the boys walking before, but had no idea he was their father. I walked down to their house and they went in and got their dad. He came out... drunk and high as usual. When I asked if his sons could ride to church with us, he cursed and reminded me that he would never go to church, but if his sons wanted to go, that would be their choice.

And so Sunday came, and my wife and I drove to their house and honked the horn. Out the boys came. They were excited to be going to church for the first time in their life. They began to come with us every Sunday and a few weeks later they invited Jesus to be their Forgiver, Leader and Friend. The boys continued to come to church regularly and developed a burden for their father. They began to pray that their dad would come to church with them and become a follower of Jesus.

One Sunday, I was picking up after the boys' class and I noticed a piece of paper on the table. I picked it up and looked at it. The teacher had the kids write down a prayer request on a piece of paper during class that day. And that was what I was looking at. It was a small note that had a simple message that the boys had written. It had their names on it and said, "We are praying our dad will come to church." I took the note and stuck it in my pocket. When I dropped the boys off at their house, I went up to the door and asked for their dad to come out. He staggered out, drunk as usual and asked what I wanted. I handed him the note and said, "Your boys wrote this...I thought you might want to see it." He took the note and staggered back into the house.

The next Sunday, I drove over to pick the boys up for church. Normally they were either waiting outside for me or they were waiting inside the house and I'd honk for them to come out. They weren't standing outside, so I honked. No response. I thought to myself,

“I must have made him mad last week with the note. Now he’s not going to let them come anymore.”

I walked up to the door and knocked. One of the boys came out and with a smile on his face and said “We’re not going to ride with you today. Our dad is going to come and so we’ll ride with him.” I was so happy as I drove to church that day. I was praying that God would do a miracle in that dad’s life. When he walked in the door for the service, one of the security team members, who was a policeman and knew the man’s record, went to the pastor and whispered to him, “He’s probably here to steal a purse or wallet. I’ll keep a close watch on him and will be ready to arrest him at a moment’s notice.”

You see, the father had been in and out of jail. He would tell me later about robberies he had been involved in, about being part of a gang in LA., about being a drug dealer and other serious crimes he had committed in the past.

And now here he was. Sitting in church for the first time in his life. I was teaching a class for 1-3rd graders during the service. I’ll never forget, after the service was over, those two boys running up to me. They were jumping up and down and smiling as they told me, “Our dad went forward at the end of the service and invited Jesus to come into His life.” Oh, me of little faith, I was happy, but in the back of my mind I was thinking, “Yeah, we’ll see if this will change his lifestyle.” I was glad to find out my lack of faith in the power of God was wrong. The cars stopped coming by. In the mornings, I would see him walking up and down the street, Bible in hand and talking with God. The arguing with his wife no longer filled the night time sounds.



He went on to become a pastor and has led hundreds and hundreds of people to Jesus. All because his two boys prayed and prayed and prayed for his salvation. Over the years, I have seen it happen hundreds of times. God uses children

to reach their parents with the Gospel. No matter where you live or what your church situation is, I can promise you this. If you will invest in children's ministry, you will reach not only kids, but entire families as well. No matter how far a father or mother is from God, when you minister to their children, you will capture their attention, open their ears to your message and gain access to their heart.

IF YOU WANT TO INFLUENCE PARENTS... YOU MUST SPEND TIME WITH PARENTS

Parents are influenced by people they love and respect. So, if you want to influence parents, then you must spend time with them. There are various ways you can do this. Let's look at a few.

Before and after service. Look for families that get there early. Take some time to connect with them. After the service, look for opportunities to spend time with some families. And think about creating some spaces where kids can play after the service while their parents watch them.

Here's an example. At one church where I served, we had an indoor playground. It was open after the service. Kids and parents would go there to hang out. We had benches where parents could sit and watch their children play. Guess where I spent my time after the service? At the playground sitting and talking with parents.

If you don't have an indoor playground, there are lots of other options. Perhaps it's a table set up with games on it. Perhaps it's ice cream for everyone. The sky is the limit. The goal is to spend time talking and hanging out with parents.

Host a parent focus group twice a year. Invite a group of 8 to 10 parents to come and spend time with you. Provide a meal or at least some snacks, depending on the time you have it. Ask them questions like:

- What expectations do you have for our children's ministry?
- What areas of spiritual growth do you desire to see in your children?
- What truths from the Bible do you want to see instilled in your children?
- What are your priorities in raising your children to love God?
- What are some positive things the ministry is doing to help your child grow spiritually?
- How can the children's ministry be more effective in helping your child grow spiritually?
- How can the children's ministry better partner with you as a parent?
- What areas are you struggling as a parent?
- What are some tools that children's ministry could provide to help you disciple your children?
- What things are working well in children's ministry?
- What things are not working in children's ministry?
- What are some ideas that can help our children's ministry be more effective?

Host and teach parenting classes. Often children's ministries will leave parenting classes in the hands of the adult ministry. But if you really want to influence parents, then why not take the initiative and schedule some parenting classes and have the children's ministry team lead them?

Start a small group with parents. This will help you establish a deeper relationship with 8-10 parents.

Have a group of parents over for dinner on a regular basis. Spend time just hanging out together.

Once you have earned the respect of parents in your church and they know you care about their family, they will open their heart to hear and receive what you have to say. You've heard the statement, people don't care how much you know, until they know how much care. I have found it to be true and I'm sure you have as well.

HELP PARENTS SEE WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Parents are under a tremendous amount of pressure to help their children be successful. Financial success. Academic success. Athletic success. Social success. All these are good things, but the most important thing is that children grow up to love Jesus and follow Him.

We must help parents
see that their greatest
accomplishment will not
be something they do,
but rather someone
they raise.

In the midst of parenting and the crazy, busy schedules today's families try to maintain, parents need someone to come alongside them and encourage them, equip them and empower them to invest in what really matters.

Let's talk about something that many parents are struggling with in today's culture. Sports. Time magazine recently reported that the youth sports industry has grown by 55% since 2010.²³ There are a lot of great things about kids being involved in sports. I played Little League and football when I was in elementary school. I played basketball all through middle school and high school. My parents were there for the games and they cheered for me. But...what they didn't do was put sports before church. It wasn't as difficult back then. We practiced a few hours a week and then had a game in the evening or on Saturday. And it was seasonal. Once the season was over, that was it until the next year. Games were played at a local field and were never played on a Sunday during church. Fast forward to now. Little League participation is down 20%.²⁴ Why? Are fewer kids playing sports? No. Here's what's happening. Local leagues are being overtaken by private club teams. Sports Engine has a searchable directory of more than 100,000 youth-sports camps, teams and leagues.²⁵ Wide World of Sports at Disney World hosted 385,285 athletes in 2016, up 28% since 2011.²⁶

Kids of all skill levels, in every team sport, are getting swept up in a kids' sports economy that dominates families' schedules, traveling and finances. For many families, sports has taken over their lives. Practices and tournaments overtake weeknights and weekends. Attending family weddings, birthday parties, anniversaries, etc. are skipped because of it. Vacation time is even being used to attend sports tournaments. The phrase "tournacation" was recently coined to describe families using their vacation time to be in sports. Many families are spending up to 10% of their annual income for their child's involvement in sports.²⁷ And the money comes pouring in.

Overall, youth sports is a \$15 billion dollar industry. Here's an example. The United States Specialty Sports Association, generated \$13.7 million in 2015 with the CEO receiving over \$831,000 in compensation.²⁹ Many parents put their kids in team sports with the hope that it will give their child the edge they need to get a college scholarship one day. One Father spent \$30,000 on his elementary age son's "career."³⁰ Another family spent over \$20,000 on their daughter's volleyball involvement in hopes of a college scholarship.³¹ But studies show only 2% of high school athletes go on to play in a NCAA Division school.³²

Another type of expense this costs families can't be measured financially. It's the cost of time. Some families spend 2 1/2 hours a day, four days a week, traveling to and from practices, not getting home until late. One family even sent their 13-year-old to live in another state to increase the time he spends practicing and playing.

Kids are losing out on the wonder of childhood.

There's nothing wrong with being competitive and wanting to win. But when playing the game for the joy of it is replaced by "win-at-all-costs," kids risk injury, burnout and depression. As kids see their parents investing so much money into their sports, they feel the pressure to succeed and play well, earn a scholarship, etc. This can lead to kids not enjoying playing. Studies show the more money parents spent on their children's sports, the more pressure their children feel to perform. When every single day, evening and weekend is crowded with practices, coaching sessions, lessons, games and traveling to games, kids lose out on the opportunity to simply be kids and enjoy playing with toys, riding their bike, camping in the backyard, building a tent out of blankets in the living room, etc.

Kids are getting a wrong message about priorities.

When families place sports is before God, it becomes an idol. When kids miss church for weeks on end because they are traveling to tournaments, it becomes an idol. When kids don't have time to attend VBS or camp because they are entrenched in a sport's league,

it becomes an idol. When success is measured on a scoreboard rather than by God's Word, it has become an idol. When a families' plans are dictated by a soccer schedule rather than by the Holy Spirit, then it has become an idol. When a family's tithe money is used for buying sports equipment, it has become an idol.

We must help parents have a balanced approach to their children's involvement in sports and not get caught up in the whirlwind that will hinder their and their child's spiritual growth and relationship with Jesus.

Another strategic step to see kids and their families attend church more often actually lies in your hands as a leader.

It's about making church a fun place to be on Sunday morning. Kids and their parents can find "funnier" things to do on Sunday morning if your service is boring. Your goal should be to make church a fun, exiting place to be. A place that is so irresistible that kids bring their friends with them. A place that is so enjoyable that kids wake up and are excited to get to God's house. A place so fun that kids drag their parents there.

HELP PARENTS MAKE CHURCH A PRIORITY

Sports is not the only thing that is causing children and families to be sporadic in their attendance patterns. As I talk with churches across the country, all are facing the same challenge. Kids and their parents are attending less frequently.

Many of you reading this were brought up attending church 2 to 3 times a week. I grew up attending Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. In addition, there were often youth events on Friday or Saturday.

Today, in many churches, the average family that attends church is there once a month, maybe twice a month. This means

they are missing 50-75% of the teaching. This shows kids by our actions, that church is optional. And it can cause kids to have a very shallow faith with little to no knowledge of Bible doctrine and apologetics.

When parents pick and choose when they will be at church, they are sending a message of lukewarm Christianity to their children. As a ministry leader, you have a great opportunity to challenge parents to line up their priorities based on Matthew 6:33.

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.” 34



Here is a practical way to explain this to kids and parents. If you ride a bicycle, you’ve probably noticed there are spokes in the wheel. Let’s say the spokes represent different parts of our life. You have the school spoke. The sports spoke. The family spoke. The friends spoke. The chores spoke. The hobbies spoke. Notice the Jesus spoke. If Jesus is a spoke in my life, then when Sunday morning comes, you may or may not head to church to worship Him and learn more about Him. It depends on what else is going on and if I want to sleep in or not. And then when Monday rolls around, you

leave Jesus behind and head out to run your own life. You will think about Jesus next time you're at church. You'll open your Bible next time you're at church.

At first glance, that might seem like a good way to live. I mean you did include Jesus one day a week, right? But when you read Matthew 6:33 and look at it closer, you will see something much different. Check out the following bicycle.



In the middle of the wheel is the hub. Every single spoke goes into the hub. The hub controls the entire wheel. This is what Matthew 6:33 is talking about when it says, “Seek the kingdom of God above all else.”³⁵

Jesus doesn't want to just be a part of families' lives. He wants to be at the center of, the hub of their life and control every moment of every day. Jesus wants families to make every decision with the “What does Jesus want us to do?” lens on. When families enter that kind of commitment, there will be no question about where they will be on the weekend. They will be in church.

EQUIP PARENTS WITH TOOLS TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

Ephesians 4:11-12 says this. “*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to **EQUIP** God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ.*”³⁶

Notice what it says we are to do as leaders in the church. We are to “equip” God’s people to do His work. This includes equipping parents to be the spiritual leaders, life travel guides and prayer intercessors for their children. Let’s look at a few ways you can come alongside parents in this important endeavor.

Equip parents by extending the lesson into their home. The goal is to get parents dialoguing with their children about the lesson during the week. You can send a take home paper that has questions, activities and fun Bible games that kids and parents can do together during the week. This will help reinforce what they heard at church. You can also make this available in a digital format.

Send a weekly email. Another way to communicate with parents is by email. You can send a weekly email that has parenting tips, questions from the lesson, upcoming events, etc.

Create a parent Facebook page. You can create a Facebook group and have your own ministry page that parents can join. At the time of this writing, 99% of Millennial moms use Facebook.³⁷

Send them a text message. 95% of Millennial moms own a smartphone.³⁸ And 98% of text messages get opened.³⁹ It’s hard to beat those stats. You can send a text message to parents with a couple of questions from the lesson to discuss with their children. Another idea is to send a message reminding parents about an upcoming event or program.

Send a note to a few parents each week, letting them know you are praying for them and their children. Make it handwritten. In a day of digital communication, a handwritten note stands out.

Have a shared worship experience. In some churches, kids and parents worship together each week during the normal service. If that’s the case with you, give parents some follow-up questions and activities based on the pastor’s message. They can use these at home to help disciple their children. Put the handouts on the internet as well for parents who prefer that format.

If children normally have their own age-appropriate worship services and classes, then consider having a shared experience for kids and their parents a few times a year. Make the service fun and memorable for both kids and parents. Give them something to take home that has some discussion questions and follow-up activities.

Partner with parents in prayer. You can do this by creating a prayer calendar for parents and join them each day in praying for their children. Another idea is to put a prayer promise on the wall in each of your classrooms. Put a different prayer verse in each room. Have the volunteers pray the prayer promise over the children sometime during class time. Let parents know you're doing this and give them a list of the verses so they can join you in praying the same prayers.

Recommend some age-appropriate devotionals for families. Give parents a list of good devotional books they can read with their child.

Get some good music on their smart phones Preferably some of them will be songs they sing at church.

Recommend some good apps they can use to learn God's Word and review what they are being taught. Some curriculum now comes with an accompanying app for parents. There are lots of great apps available for kids and parents. One I recommend for preschool and younger elementary is *The Bible App for Kids*. You can get it with a simple search in the app store.

LEVERAGE KEY MILESTONES IN FAMILIES' LIVES

There are certain times in a family's life when they "open the door" and welcome your help, advice and direction. These milestone moments are one of the best times to influence families and speak into their lives. Let's examine these unique opportunities to lead parents well.

MILESTONES MAKE A BIG IMPACT AND HELP PARENTS HIT A HOME RUN WITH THEIR CHILD.

Milestone I - Parent & Child Dedication

When a young couple has a child, their life changes instantly. A new sleep schedule, a car seat enters the picture, grocery shopping list changes, a stroller is added and parents suddenly become grandparents, just to name a few.

One change that happens involves you. For many young couples a new baby is a wake-up call spiritually. They went to church in high school, but once they left for college, they stopped attending. Then came meeting each other, dating, engagement, graduation and the start of a career. They got so busy, that they simply never returned to church. But now they are holding a precious baby in their arms and it's caused them to stop and think about providing their child with some type of spiritual upbringing.

A co-worker of theirs attends your church and invited them to come check it out. She told them you have a great nursery program. So, they decided to check it out and walked into your church for the first time. Now they have started attending fairly regularly. And when they saw the child dedication announcement, they talked about it and decided to register their baby.

How do you lead well during this incredible opportunity to influence this young couple? Let me share some background for why I believe one of the first things you should do is crucial.

I was serving as the new children's pastor at a growing church. Parent & Child Dedication was one of the things I oversaw. As I went

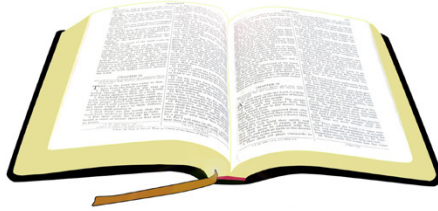
through the first couple of dedications, something became glaringly apparent. As I interacted with the parents, it became obvious that many of them had no clue what the dedication meant. And it wasn't the parent's fault. It was our fault. Many of families participating in the dedication were previously unchurched, so they had no context for what the dedication was about. To make it worse, the first time we saw them was right before the dedication started. There was no class they went through. No preliminary meeting they attended. So, you can see why so many of them didn't understand what the dedication meant. The final happening, that confirmed I needed to change the way we were doing the dedication, took place on a Sunday morning, right before the dedication was starting. We were in the auditorium and I was going around greeting the parents. I came to one couple and both of them were women. I asked who the mother was and they replied they both were the child's mother. Wow. I had to tell this same sex couple, on the spot, that only one of them could go on stage with the child. It was an awkward situation and it happened because we weren't thoroughly connecting with families before the day of the event. Our lack of clarity and planning with families who registered had caused this awkward situation.

And it wasn't fair to place this couple in this spot. Out of this, I developed a class that every parent had to go through before they could dedicate their children. In the class, we not only explained what the dedication meant, but we also shared with parents that they are the primary spiritual influence in their child's life. We taught them practical ways they can be a spiritual example and leader for their child. The response was amazing and parents began to share how it impacted their family.



Milestone 2

Bible Presentation & Celebration



The second key time parents are open to your guidance is when their child is entering elementary school. Bible Presentation Celebration is a shared experience for kids and their parents at this crucial time in their life.

Children and parents learn how we got the Bible, foundational truths about the Bible and how to make it an important part of their life. It equips parents to lead their children to love God's Word as they enter their elementary years. It also speaks into the lives of parents and helps them see why it's important to spend time reading God's Word with their child. At the end of the class, parents present their child with a Bible, speak a blessing over them and pray with their child. You can get more information about this milestone at buildingchildrensministry.com.

Milestone 3

Entering a Relationship with Jesus

When a child indicates they are interested in beginning a relationship with Jesus, parents will come to you looking for advice and insight. Nothing is more important than a parent leading their child to faith in Christ.

Years ago, when I first started in ministry, I would share the Gospel with kids in a large group setting. I would then invite those

who wanted to begin a relationship with Jesus, to raise their hand. Then I would lead everyone who had raised their hand, in a salvation prayer. It was exciting, but a couple of things stood out to me. First, I wasn't sure that all the children who raised their hand and prayed, really understood the decision they were making. Secondly, parents weren't involved. And when parents came to pick up their child and we told them the exciting news that their child has made a decision to follow Jesus, they were happy. But I could also see in their face, that they wish they could have been there and had a part in it.

So, I made a change. When children raised their hand to accept Jesus, I had them come forward and meet 1-on-1 with a counselor who talked with them individually and confirmed they understood the decision they were about to make and then prayed a salvation prayer with the child. This was definitely an improvement in helping kids confirm the decision they were making, but the parent piece was still missing. This caused me to make one more tweak that would be a game-changer for the ministry. When children indicated they wanted to begin a relationship with Jesus, we connected with their parents and invited them to bring their child to a class called Starting Point.

Starting Point is an experience that kids and parents attend together. No drop offs. Parents must attend with their child. In this class, we carefully explain the Gospel and what it means to become a follower of Christ. At the end of the class, parents can lead their child to Jesus or if the child is not quite ready, they can continue the conversation at home. Parents receive a follow-up handbook they can use to follow up with their child. Here's the cool thing many parents hear a clear Gospel presentation in the class and they decide to make a decision for Christ as well. This resource is available for you at buildingchildrensministry.com.

Milestone 4 - Baptism

After a child goes through the Starting Point class and makes

a clear decision to follow Jesus, he or she is ready to attend the Baptism for Kids class. Baptism for Kids helps kids and their parents understand baptism. What it is. Why you should be baptized? And when should you be baptized? The class is designed for kids and parents to attend together and provides follow-up tools that parents can use to help prepare their children for baptism. Again, the cool thing is this. When parents go through the class with their children, many parents realize they need to be baptized too, and you'll see parents follow Jesus in baptism with their children.

Using this strategy, I have seen as many as 460 kids and dozens of parents get baptized in one year. The Baptism 4 Kids curriculum can be ordered at buildingchildrensministry.com.

We must remember that we are here to encourage parents to have these faith conversations with their child. Their job is not to hold their child back. Nor is it to push their child into a decision. Their job is simply to walk alongside their child and have the spiritual conversations. As they are faithful to do that, the Holy Spirit is faithful to draw children, that they might find forgiveness and enter a relationship with Jesus.



Milestone 5 Elementary Graduation Celebration

Another one of the key times parents are wide open to your guidance and input is when their child is transitioning from elementary to middle school. This can be a nervous and challenging time for families. It's vital to have a clear strategy for them during this transition. The class includes Biblical teaching that will equip kids to not just survive, but to thrive in their middle school years. It also gives parents a great strategy for parenting their kids during the middle school years. This class builds a solid bridge between your children's ministry and middle school ministry. It also helps you

create a powerful, life-changing, shared experience for the kids and their parents. Guaranteed to impact them. Be prepared to see lots of tears as you guide parents through blessing and praying over their children as part of the celebration. This resource is also available at buildingchildrensministry.com. With these tools, you can create a great strategy that lets parents know from the cradle to college you will be there to equip them, encourage them and walk beside them.

GIVE PARENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE WITH THEIR CHILDREN

One of the key ways to see children (and parents) grow in their faith is to involve them in serving. There is something about serving that ignites a person's faith. The Bible says in James 2:26 that *"faith without works is dead."*⁴⁰ The flip side would be "faith with works is alive." If you want to see the children and families in your church have a passionate faith, then give them opportunities to serve together. Here are some ideas...

Let service out early and have kids and their parents work together to assemble food packages for needy families.

Set up family mission trips.

One Saturday morning a month, give kids and their parents opportunities to serve in the community.

Enlist kids and their parents to serve in appropriate serving roles such as greeters, parking, audio visual, etc.

**KIDS WHO SERVE
WITH THEIR PARENTS
ARE MORE LIKELY TO
GROW UP TO
FOLLOW JESUS**

ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO TAKE THE LONG LOOK

When you are in the midst of parenting, the days can seem long, can't they? But the years go by so fast, don't they? Remind parents of this. Encourage them to slow down and enjoy each year they have with their children. Help them take the long look and see what will really matter when their child is leaving for college.

Ask parents to think through questions like below.

What kind of person do you want our child to be?

What do you want your child to know about the Bible?

What do you want your child's relationship with God to be like?

Then have parents take the answers to those questions and build a pathway to their answers.

Here are some examples.

If you want your child to know the books of the Bible in order before leaving elementary school, then start teaching them this when they are in kindergarten.

If you want your child to be a person of honesty and character, then start teaching them now why God wants us to be honest in our dealings.

If you want your child to have a strong, growing relationship with God, then begin teaching them now the disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, personal worship, etc.

As parents, we sometimes feel embarrassed or like a failure when our child does something wacky, don't we? We beat ourselves

up and wonder what we should have done differently. The parents in your ministry are already under a ton of pressure to be the perfect parent. What they don't need is someone coming down on them for every parenting mistake they make. Rather, we should be calling them up to God's best plan for their life and parenting. We should be their biggest cheerleader, walking by them and encouraging them.

I have two sons. I am so proud of both of them. Josh, our oldest son, is married and works in a Fortune 500 company. He and his wife, Jenny, love Jesus and attend a great church. Our youngest son, Caleb, is in medical school. He also loves Jesus and has a special heart to help others.

Through their middle school and high school years, we lived in Las Vegas. I was the children's pastor there at a great church. When Josh was graduating high school and Caleb was finishing up 8th grade, I felt God leading us to serve at a church in Florida. Josh was okay with the move. There was a great Christian university he could attend there. Caleb was not happy about the move. We were moving him away from his friends and from the "cool" city of Las Vegas to Florida where, as he put it, "there was just a bunch of old people."

I thought he would get over it in a few weeks, but he didn't. His discontent and anger of being moved away from Las Vegas, grew stronger. He withdrew from my wife and I and grew angrier and angrier. We had him talk with a counselor, but that didn't help. He said he hated us for ruining his life. It got so bad one night, that he took his iPad and smashed it to pieces. We were at the end of our rope and were desperate for God to work in his life.

Someone in the church told me about a camp they had taken their child to. The camp was in the mountains of Northern California and was for parents and their children to attend together.

I asked Caleb and he said he would go with me (he liked being where but Florida). There were around 300 campers there. It was all parents and their children.

During the day, there were lots of great activities such as white water rafting, ropes course, swimming in the lake, horseback riding and more. In the afternoon, there were teaching sessions. The kids went to one session and the parents to the other session. At night, we had a worship service for everyone. Caleb seemed to be enjoying it, but there was still a huge wall between us that I was praying would come crumbling down sometime that week. One morning, they took our group on one of the mountain trails.

When we arrived at the designated spot, they separated us from our kids. While they blindfolded our kids, they told us that we were going to verbally guide our kids through an obstacle course. We couldn't touch them; we could only give them verbal clues. And besides the navigation tips, we were to whisper 3 things in their ear:

“I love you.”

“Listen to my voice.”

“I will never leave you.”

We then went and stood by our kids and the course began. I whispered the three phrases into Caleb's ear and then gave him his first verbal cue to start the obstacle course trek.

“Go 10 steps forward.”

“Take 3 steps forward and then step over the log that is lying across the path.”

“Duck down. There is a low tree branch right ahead of you.”

“Take your time and be careful. There are rocks in the pathway here.”

After we had been guiding our kids down the path for a few minutes, the camp staff got our attention and motioned for us to quietly move away from our kids without saying anything. When we

had pulled back, the camp staff quietly stepped into our place. They begin to whisper wrong directions to the kids. If they listened to the camp staff, they would run into a tree or bump into a big rock, etc. The point of the activity was to remind the kids that other voices will come along and tell you wrong things that don't match what you're parents told you. Always listen to the voice of your parents. We stepped back in and guided our kids through the rest of the course. But the activity wasn't over yet.

The course took us to a small amphitheater. Our kids were instructed to take off their blindfolds and to stand on the first level of the amphitheater. We were then asked to stand on the ground in front of our kids. This caused us to be looking up to our kids for this activity and was done this way on purpose. And what happened next would be a game changer for Caleb and I.

The camp staff leader told us that the average parent and their child only look into each other's eyes 15 seconds a day. They may talk longer than that or be in the same room longer than that, but looking directly into each other's eyes - the average was 15 seconds.

He said, "for the next 3 minutes, I want you to look into your child's eyes. Don't say anything, just look into each other's eyes."

Let me tell you, that was a long 3 minutes. But as I looked into Caleb's eyes, I begin to tear up. I was thinking about how much I loved him and the struggles we had been through for the last three years.

The 3 minutes ended, but we weren't done yet. The camp leader said, "Now I want you to tell each other what you were thinking during those 3 minutes. Parents you go first." Wow. As I began to tell Caleb how much I loved him, I began to cry. I told him I knew he was having a rough time with the move and that it had made him very, very angry at me for some time now. But despite that, I loved him and would never walk away from him. Tears were running down my face. Then the camp leader told the kids it was

their turn. They were to tell us what they were thinking during the 3 minutes. As Caleb tried to say something, he suddenly began to cry. Through his tears, he proceeded to tell me that he was sorry for all the grief he had caused us for the last 3 years. He wanted us to forgive him and make things right.

My heart filled to overflowing. My son, whom I wondered if I had lost forever, was coming back to me. His bitterness, anger and hurt melted away and I had my son again. Since then, he has become such a joy to his mother and I. He is one of the sweetest 25-year-olds that you will ever meet. He calls us several times a week and tells us that he loves us. He is a hard worker and is finishing up his nursing degree. He attends a local church where he lives.

I wanted to share that very personal story, because many of you reading this will be asked to counsel with parents who are going through a rough spot with their kids. Encourage the parents to keep taking the long look. God is at work. Keep praying. Stay faithful. Their child will grow up to be a man or woman who will make them proud. Even when they hit some rough spots, encourage parents to keep loving them unconditionally.

Encourage the parents to keep taking the long look. God is at work. Keep praying. Stay faithful. Their child will grow up to be a man or woman who will make them proud. Even when they hit some rough spots, encourage parents to keep loving them unconditionally.

Many parents blame themselves and beat themselves up over a wayward or rebellious child. Remind them it's not their fault when their kids misbehave or rebel and that you're believing Proverbs 22:6 with them. "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it."⁴¹

The long look will help
parents see that...

*"An inheritance is what you
leave for your kids.
A legacy is what you leave
in your kids."*

Your first role, if you are a father or mother, is to live this out in front of your kids. Your next responsibility is to help the parents in your ministry see this and implement it as well.

Personal Reflection:

What percentage of my time do I use to connect with and invest in parents? How can I spend more time influencing parents?

What are some opportunities I can use to get kids and parents serving together?

How can I encourage parents to join us in praying for their children?

How can I help parents see what really matters and help them become focused on it?

How can I help parents make church a priority?

Am I currently using any key milestones in families' lives to influence them for Christ? How can we improve in this area?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.

Team Discussion Questions:

How can we use the internet and social media to connect with Millennial parents?

How can we provide them with tools to invest in their children and disciple them through these avenues?

How can we provide Millennial parents with training and wisdom in managing their finances well?

How can we reach the Millennial parents in our communities who are “nones?” How can we re-engage those who grew up in church and have walked away?

What will our strategy be to get Millennial parents involved in discipleship, faithful church attendance, serving and small groups since they are very guarded with their time?

How can we help Millennial parents see the importance of making church attendance a priority for their children?

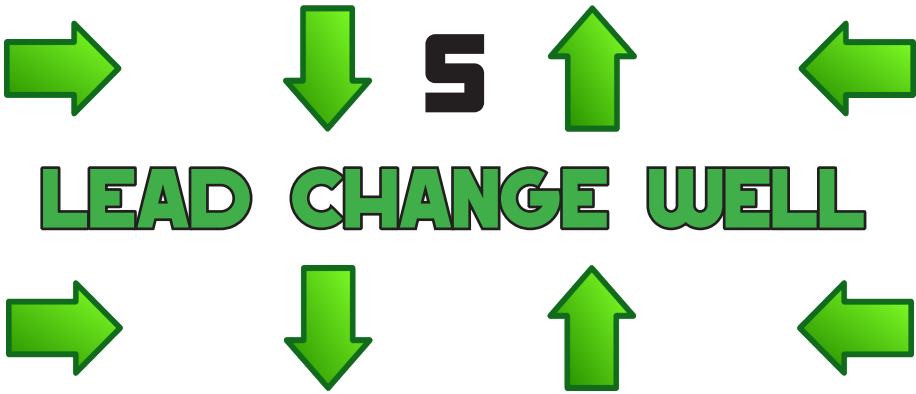
Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.





*“The problem with being a leader is that you’re never sure
if you’re being followed or chased.”¹*
Claire A. Murray

Recently, I was visiting a church on a Sunday morning. It was a downtown, influential church that has been there for over 125 years. The Sunday I was there, they were talking about some major building and remodeling plans that would enable them to reach more people with the Gospel.

One of the changes the Pastor was proposing involved replacing the pews with chairs in the auditorium. As he started sharing, I thought to myself “This is going to be interesting. I want to see how he’s going to convince the church that it needs to be done. I mean, those pews had been there a long time. They even had the engraved plaque signs at the end of each pew with the

donors' names on them. This was not going to be an easy sell. This was going to be a big change for people who have been sitting in the same spot on the same pew for many decades.”

But what would unfold in the next hour was a masterpiece of leading change. As the Pastor walked the congregation through the change proposal, I began taking notes. I want to share it with you in this chapter.

Why? Because one of the most important skills you can have is the ability to lead change. Leading change is also one of the most challenging things you will do in ministry. But it is necessary. The apostle Paul said it like this.

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”²

Philippians 3:12-14

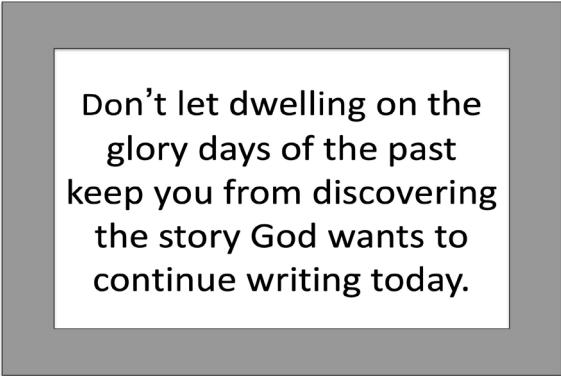
There's a natural bent toward looking back, isn't there? We find security in past accomplishments and accolades. Our confidence is closely tied to our past successes. The problem is this. Dwelling on the past...relying on the past...focusing on the past...is a slippery slope to contentment. And from contentment comes plateau or even decline.

“What brought your children's ministry to where it is now won't take it to where it needs to go tomorrow. Yesterday is not tomorrow. Things are changing and so must you if you want to move forward.”

All across the country, you will find children's ministries that are in decline. In most cases, it can be traced back to one thing. They haven't been willing to let go of the past and embrace the

future. For them, protecting the past is more important than pressing forward. And it's glaringly obvious.

Do you want your children's ministry to move forward? A better question is this. Are you willing to do what it takes to move your children's ministry forward? Are you willing to lay everything on the table and take a hard look at what is hindering you from moving forward? Are you willing to take a risk? Jump out of the comfort zone of the past and into the risk of change? Your comfort zone is keeping you in a space that's too small for you. God has something much bigger for you. Change is where forward movement is found.



**Don't let dwelling on the
glory days of the past
keep you from discovering
the story God wants to
continue writing today.**

Hopefully I've persuaded you or reinforced your belief that change is important. With that as the starting point, now let's see how the pastor led so well through some big changes. I identified 7 steps he took in leading the change. Let's take a look at them.

Step 1 for leading change well - honor the past.

The pastor took them back through the history of the church and showed how God has blessed their church when they stepped out in faith to follow the vision God had for them. He honored the previous pastors, reminded them of past building projects and past steps of faith. He showed them how the church had always said "yes" to stepping out in faith and making necessary changes.

Before you introduce future change, honor people for being willing to change in the past. This reminds people that change has always been a part of their DNA and this new change is just part of what they have always been about. I sensed doing this was a great way to start things off and it set the right tone in the room for introducing the new change. The key is honoring the past without letting it hinder the future.

Step 2 for leading change well - ask the right questions and listen. Leaders who lead change well initiate change by asking the right questions and then listening. The Pastor had asked extensive questions to a wide array of church members. Questions like, “Where do you think the church is right now? What do you think it would take for us to reach more people? How do you think we can be more effective? What obstacles do you see hindering the church from moving forward?”

Step 3 for leading change well - put the vision of the change in writing. The vision behind the proposed change was clearly stated and explained in a handout. Proposed details, time lines and plans were shared as well.

It’s crucial to show people in writing where you are taking them. Clear communication is an essential part of effective change. In fact, it’s good to over communicate. People don’t like to be caught by surprise when it comes to change. Go the second mile to communicate the change you are proposing.

“Change should be an open book...not a secret diary.”

Step 4 for leading change well - share why the change needs to happen. The pastor showed them that the current services in the auditorium were 85% full which meant their growth was being capped. To continue growing, they would have to expand the seating capacity. He showed that by replacing the pews with

chairs, they would gain 300 more seats in the auditorium.

He also showed them that the student ministry room was overflowing on Wednesday nights and needed more room. They also needed to add additional parking. To show them why they needed more parking spaces, he had someone fly a drone over the parking lot during the service a few weeks earlier. The drone, which was equipped with a camera, showed from an aerial view that the parking lot was full with no empty spaces to be seen. But it didn't stop there, the drone footage showed a car pull into the parking lot and drive all over looking for an empty space. When they couldn't find a parking spot, the car left. It was a powerful moment and as I looked around, I saw people nodding in agreement. The pastor reminded them that their mission was to reach people with the Gospel and that is why they needed to vote "yes" to adding more parking.

“The ‘why’ of the change must be the primary motivating force for the change.”

Step 5 for leading change well - Share the benefits that will come from the change. He provided a list of positive benefits that would come from the change. They would reach more people. They would have sufficient room for Bible study. It would be easier for guests to navigate the building. They would have better parking.

People want to know how the changes will benefit them. Show them how the change gives them the personal opportunity to grow, make an impact and leave a legacy. And show volunteers how they can use their gifts and talents to help the change become a reality. Think through these questions...

How can I help people see how the change will benefit them?
How can I help people see how the change will benefit others?
How can I help people see how they can use their gifts and talents to help the change become reality?

“When people see the benefits will be worth the sacrifice needed for the change to happen, they will get on board.”

Change takes people out of their comfort zone and frightens them. They have security in the way they’ve always done things. You must show them the potential that lies in the new vision. Point them toward something so great and beneficial, that it compels them to take a risk.

Step 6 for leading change well - Get key leaders onboard before taking it to the masses. The pastor had 6-7 influential, lay leaders on stage with him. He had already meet with these key leaders and gotten them onboard before he shared the vision with the entire church. He had some of the lay leaders get up and share why they were onboard with the vision.

“When people see that the key lay influencers of the ministry are onboard with the change, they are much more likely to get onboard as well.”

Step 7 for leading change well - Be prepared for some opposition. There was an older couple sitting in front of me. When the pastor announced that the project was going to cost \$10 million dollars, the lady gasped, frowned at her husband, put her head in her hands and started shaking her head in disagreement.

Was I surprised by her reaction? Not really. **Anytime you seek to make a change, it’s normal to have some opposition.** When you introduce change, it can upset some people.

Change moves people out of their comfort zone and into unfamiliar territory. That's scary for some of them and so they resist. Don't take it personal. They are just struggling with being uncomfortable. How should you respond to the opposition?

Stay humble. Your natural tendency is going to be to rise up in anger. Doesn't this person get it? We're trying to grow! We're trying to make a bigger impact for God! How dare they oppose the work of God! Don't let pride trip you up and infect you with a bad attitude.

See opposition as a gift. No matter how far out the complaint is, there is something you can learn from it. Welcome feedback... positive and negative.

Invite dialogue. Any time you have a new change or major initiative coming, ask some people to tell you why you shouldn't do it. This will help you begin to see opposition as a regular and important part of change. Here are some key questions to ask as you dialogue.

- How do you feel about the change?
- What do you think about the change? What's your take on it?
- What does the change mean for you personally? What was your first reaction when you heard about it?

As part of the dialogue, ask people who would normally be "yes" people to think of and share an opposing view. Solid teams have conflict and disagreement. If you have a healthy team, they will be able to explore all sides and views of an idea or initiative.

Solid teams have conflict and disagreement. Have a team that can help you think through every possible question and prepare answers.

Give people the opportunity to be heard. When people can lend their voice to the change, they will be more likely to buy in.

Show you care about people's concerns. See things from their point of view. Instead of trying to pull them into your shoes, step into theirs. See where they are coming from. Show that you understand their personal feelings about the change.

Ask yourself these questions:

Do I understand who the people are that are resisting the change?

Do I understand why they are resisting the change?

Am I offering options and alternatives that will help them move forward?

Normally the people who oppose the change don't always have to have things their way. They simply want to be heard and know you care about them and their concerns. When you invite open dialogue, you help break down resistance to the change. The pastor announced some specific times when people were welcome to come and examine the chairs and ask any questions they might have. What is it you need to change? Remember, it's a process. Use these steps and you can become a master at leading change.

Personal Reflection:

Am I holding the ministry with open hands? Am I willing to change what's not working...even it's a ministry or program that I started?

Do I lead well by asking questions and listening? How can I improve this skill?

Am I helping people see the “why” behind the change? How can I communicate the “why” of the change more clearly?

Do I see opposition as a gift? How can I do better with this?

Do I show people that I care about their uncertainties of moving out of their comfort zone? How can I improve in this?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Team Discussion Questions:

How can we honor the past of the ministry without letting it dictate what we do today?

When was the last time we went outside our comfort zone and took a risk? What risk do we need to take now?

How can we improve our communication to the team?

Who are 5 people that we can share ideas and changes with before we take it to everyone?

What is a big change we need to make now? Map out the process when you're ready to pursue the change?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The background of the page is white, framed by black silhouettes of rock climbers. In the top left, a climber is shown in a dynamic pose, reaching up. In the top right, another climber is shown in a similar pose, also reaching up. In the bottom left, a climber is shown in a more relaxed pose, sitting on a ledge. In the bottom right, a climber is shown in a dynamic pose, reaching up. The central text is in green and white.

LEAD WELL THROUGH CHALLENGES

6

*“A difficult road leads to a
beautiful destination.”¹*
Zig Ziglar

Children's ministry is normally full of smiles, giggles, laughter and fun times. You have the privilege of celebrating with kids and families at some of the most joyful times in their lives. Times like the birth of a child, a child making a faith commitment, a child being baptized, birthdays, graduations and more.

It's easy to lead well during those times, isn't it? But stay in children's ministry long enough and you'll be called upon to lead in challenging times as well. How you respond to the challenges will determine your success. **And success is not found with taking quick shortcuts, but rather at the end of a long drive.**

LEADING WELL THROUGH CHALLENGES IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

You will be asked to lead through challenging times like...

...a phone call from a parent whose child has been diagnosed with cancer

...a late-night request to come to the emergency room for a family who have been in a serious car wreck

...a request to lead the funeral service for a mother who passed away suddenly

...a frantic phone call about a father who has committed suicide

...a child who is in turmoil because her parents are going through a bitter divorce

...a father who has lost his job and doesn't know how his family will survive financially

...a mother who is asking for advice about how to tell her children she only has a few months to live

...a single mom who is struggling to raise her children alone and doesn't know what to do

...a young couple who are heartbroken because their baby was stillborn

...a volunteer whose wife walked out on him and the kids

...a volunteer who has been diagnosed with a terminal disease

...a volunteer whose child has turned his back on God

...a phone call from a volunteer whose teenage child was just in a serious accident.

These are just a few of the challenging times that you may be called upon to walk through with kids, families and volunteers. Leading well during these times is not easy...to say the least. I have walked with families through all the situations just mentioned. Through these experiences and through watching older, wiser leaders in these situations, I have picked up insights about leading well in kid's ministry during challenging times. I'd like to share a few of these insights with you.

Lead well by simply being there. There are times when your words will seem hollow to someone who is in so much pain they can't think straight. During these times, they probably won't remember what you said, but they will remember that you were there. Jesus has promised two things when we go through challenging times in life. He will be near and He will never leave us nor forsake us. And He shows that in the flesh through you. Be Jesus for that child.

Be Jesus for that parent. Be Jesus for that family. Show you love them and care for them by simply showing up and being there. Sit with them. Wait in the emergency room with them. Hold their hand. Cry with them. Stand beside them. Walk with them to the grave site.

Lead well by listening. During tough times listening is often more important than talking. Listen with empathy. Listen with compassion. Listen with focus. Listen as they pour their heart out.

Lead well by providing spiritual care. Pray with them. Share God's Word with them. Point them to God and the hope that is found in Him.

Lead well by providing help and support. Ask and find out what you can do to help. It may mean assisting with practical things like arranging meals, helping with funeral preparations, helping find temporary shelter, etc. This may often mean connecting them with other people in your church who can come alongside them as well. One important note. Don't try to help with areas you are not qualified to help in. Here's an example. If professional counseling is needed and you are not a licensed counselor, then connect them with someone who can provide this. If you are not a certified doctor or psychiatrist, don't try to give advice like one. Your role is to provide pastoral care.

When facing challenging times like this, are you like me? You feel inadequate because the need is so great and situation is so desperate? A few years ago, I was driving home from the office and my cellphone rang. It was the receptionist from church. She said a girl in our church had just been killed in a car wreck. She was a senior in high school and was driving home after school. Just a half mile from her house, a speeding car had run the stop sign and plowed into her car. She died on the scene. Her family has just been told and they were at home. They wanted a pastor to come and pray with them. Wow...I thought. This is going to be difficult. As I pulled in to their driveway, I asked God to help me. I'll never forget walking into that house. Everyone in the family was standing or sitting in

a state of shock. What would I say? What could I say? I hugged them and then gathered everyone into a circle and prayed with them. The words I heard myself saying seemed so empty to meet the needs of a family that just lost their beloved daughter. But I was there... and I prayed with all the faith I could muster. In times like this, we must lean upon God and go into the situation with Godfidence... knowing He is with you and will help you lead well...no matter how challenging the situation may be.

**“Feeling inadequate is a feeling, not a fact.
God has given you everything you need to
fulfill His calling on your life.”**

Lead well by what you don’t say. When you are helping someone, who is going through a challenging time, what you DON’T SAY is just as important as what you do say. If you are not prepared, you will revert to cliché statements like “I know how you feel” or “God took Him home” or “You’ll get over it” or “Time heals wounds” or “She’s in a better place.”

There will be a lot of “why’s.” And it’s okay if you can’t answer all the “why’s.” By the way...you can’t. As I mentioned, just be there. Pray and listen and care.

Let’s look at a few more challenges you will face as you lead in children’s ministry.

LEAD WELL DURING SLUMPS

There will be times when the ministry you are leading goes through a slump. If that’s you, you are not alone. It happens to everyone. Every ministry goes through a slump at times. The important thing is to know how to lead the ministry out of a slump.

Some signs you’re in a slump are decreased attendance, lack of enthusiasm, volunteers seem to just be going through

the motions and no new ideas are being generated. Basically, it feels like the temperature of the ministry is lukewarm. But you can lead the ministry out of a slump if you follow these steps.

Step #1 - Acknowledge it.

Ministry has its ups and downs. We've all been there. The Bible even talks about being faithful "in season and out of season." But sometimes our insecurities will cause us to stick our head in the sand and ignore the slump. We tell ourselves that the ministry is fine and nothing needs fixed...while in our heart we know it's not doing well. I think we all struggle at some level with our self-worth being tied to how healthy the ministry is and the temptation is to tell ourselves it's not in a slump to preserve our self-esteem. Resist the temptation of your self-worth being determined by how the ministry is doing.

“Remember your self-worth is not based on what you do, but on whose you are.”

You are priceless because you are a child of King Jesus. Your standing with Christ is not based on the health of the ministry you lead. When you realize this, it gives you the freedom to be open about the health of the ministry and acknowledge when it is not doing well.

So, the first step to getting out of a slump is having the courage to say, "The ministry is in a slump. It is not as healthy as it should be. I see it and acknowledge it and want to lead us out of it."

Step #2 - Talk about it.

This doesn't mean you go around whining to everyone about how bad things are or discourage everyone by acting like Chicken Little. What it does mean is you gather some key leaders around you and get their perspective on the situation. Approach these conversations with a positive, pro-active attitude. You can't fix this alone. You will

need others around who can help bring you bring the ministry out of the slump.

Step #3 - Find out why.

Step 2 leads us into step 3. Assess the situation. Find out what is causing the ministry to be in a slump. Identifying the “why” allows you to fix it. Write down the reasons. Some may be out of your control. But usually most of the reasons can be fixed if you identify them.

Here’s an example that I referred to earlier. A few years ago, at one of our campuses, the children’s ministry attendance was flat. We simply weren’t growing. We acknowledged it and sat down to talk about why this was happening. We soon realized that we were maxed out at one of the service hours. There was no more room to grow. This allowed us to make the decision to add an additional service hour. Once we did that, we were able to get out of the slump and start growing again. We were able to fix it, because we identified it.

Step #4 - Have the courage to change what is causing the slump.

It may mean changing an ineffective program that is draining the ministry. It may mean letting a volunteer go who is negatively impacting the ministry culture. It may mean replacing an event that you’ve always done with something else. **Tradition is good... unless it is causing a slump.**

**“Honor the past, but don’t try to
perpetuate the past.”**

I have found that some of the hardest things to change are not things that someone else started, but things that I started. Are you the same way? We like change...unless it effects our pet idea or program. But we must hold the ministry with open hands and be

willing to change anything that is causing the ministry to slump... including our own ideas. Just because something worked yesterday, doesn't mean it will work today, right?

Step #5 - Find a way to bring the excitement back.

What can you do to bring back the energy and excitement? A few years ago, we began to sense that our children's ministry was in a slump. It started with some of our campus pastors noticing that the children's ministry's energy level at their campus was down. As we talked with them, we realized they were right. In recent months, the children's ministry had kind of fallen under the radar and wasn't the life-giving, momentum-bringing force that it had been in the past.

So, we decided to find a way to change that. We decided to have a big weekend where we would highlight the children's ministry church-wide. The kids led worship in the adult service, prayed for the offering, we showed videos about what was coming up in children's ministry and much more. A few weeks later, we had a big day for our children's ministry where our kids went all out to invite their unchurched friends. It was a big success with over 220 first-time families coming that weekend. We also upped our social media presence big-time with more posts on Instagram and Facebook. We also began to be more intentional about sharing the stories of kids and families whose lives were being impacted. We felt the excitement and energy level shift back up and there was a buzz in the air.

Step #6 - Go back to your primary motivation.

If the focus remains on the what and the why is marginalized, people will begin to just go through the motions. The why is your mission statement. It's why you do what you do. Keeping people's attention on the why will help keep you out of a slump.

Step #7 - Bring new volunteers onboard.

I have found that new volunteers bring fresh energy, excitement and passion. Think about your ministry like a football team. You

need the veterans. But you also need the rookies. They not only breathe new life into the team, but they help keep the veterans on their toes as well. Do these things and you'll be able to lead your ministry out of the slump and to new heights.

LEAD WELL THROUGH LGBTQ CHALLENGES

The LGBTQ movement has gained a lot of momentum in recent years. The “T” in the letters stands for transgender. Transgender is denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex. Doctors used to call it a “transgender disorder” but now it is called “transgender dysphoria.” Gender Dysphoria is the feeling the sex of a person’s body “isn’t right” - that it feels wrong, that it should be something else, and makes them extremely uncomfortable.

Riding the wave of momentum from the gay movement, the transgender agenda has quickly gained ground. Ground that it took the gay and lesbian agenda years to gain. The debate has encompassed all areas of our society - schools, store rest rooms, government, military and entertainment.

Bruce Jenner, who earned a gold medal in the 1976 Olympics, has come out as a transgender woman named Caitlyn Jenner.² Jazz Jennings, a high school student, has a show on TLC that documents her transition into a boy.³ And Avery Jackson, a 9-year-old, was featured on the front cover of National Geographic Magazine for the article “Gender Revolution.”⁴ Gavin Grimm is a 17-year-old who was born female, but now identifies as a male, went to court to have the right to use the boy’s bathroom at Gloucester High School.⁵

There is also a big push to educate children about transgenderism. In the San Francisco area, there is a day camp called “Rainbow Camp.” It is for children, ages 4-to-12 who are exploring transgenderism.⁶ While there, kids can choose their own

pronoun and name, which indicates what they are called that day.

“Enrollment has tripled over the past few years. There has been a sea of change - maybe we can even call it a tsunami - in the number of little kids showing up with their families’.”

Diane Ebrensaft, San Francisco’s Child and Adolescent Gender Center⁷

The “big C” church is trying to figure out how to respond to this bombardment of transgenderism. If you haven’t faced any LGBTQ challenges, your turn is coming and now is the time to get prepared. Some of the key questions you need to answer ahead of time are...

Will we allow a transgender child to dress like the gender they identify with?

Which bathroom will we allow a transgender child to use?

Will we put a transgender child in a small group that matches their gender preference?

Will we allow a gay, lesbian or transgender person to serve in children’s ministry?/

Will we do a parent & child dedication for a gay couple who have adopted a child?

Will we address a transgender child by the name he or she has chosen?

Will we use pronouns that identify with the identity a transgender child has chosen?

In which cabin would a transgender child sleep at camp?

If you haven’t already worked through these questions, you need

to do so now. Know how you are going to respond, based on how you answer these questions and be prepared to explain your reasoning. As you work through these questions, here are some tips.

Tip #1 - Balance the truth with love.

Ephesians 4:15 says we should “*speak the truth in love.*”⁸ First and foremost, when dealing with one of these situations, you should show the person that you care about them. When the person knows you care about them, they are more likely to listen to what you have to say. When you only bring the truth, it can cause them to build a wall between you.

Tip #2 - Be wise when drawing a hard line. When you just hurl Bible verses at a person, you risk losing the opportunity to influence them. Stand for the truth, share the truth, but don’t beat people over the head with it. It is most effective when done through relationship and it takes time to build a relationship.

Tip #3 - Be known more for what you are for, rather than what you are against. Be known for helping people build strong marriages. Be known for loving people and helping them follow God’s plan for the home. Be known for letting people belong before they believe. Be known as a place that stands for the truth, while giving people time to get there.

Tip #4 - Be consistent with your policies. One of the questions above asks if you will allow homosexuals, lesbians or transgender people to serve in your children’s ministry? I take this approach - anyone who is involved in sex outside of marriage between a man and woman, will not be able to serve in children’s ministry. The reason? Because anyone who serves in children’s ministry is an influencer of children. We want all our children’s ministry leaders to be an example in this area. Your church might have some areas of

service where people in this situation could serve. Help connect the person to this.

Tip #5 - Don't try to navigate it alone. When you face a challenge and the decision will have major implications for the entire church, you need ask other people join you in the decision making process. In this case, I took it up to the lead pastor and elders. I knew they would want to be informed and help guide the decision-making process.

*“Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success.”
Proverbs 15:22⁹*

Tip #6 - When making decisions, err on the side of grace. Here's an example. If a transgender child wants to wear clothes that identify them with the gender they want to be, let them wear the clothes. If a transgender child wants you to use the name and pronoun of their choice, then call them by that. If a transgender child wants to be part of a small group that matches the gender they want to be, let them do it. If you don't, you will close the door of opportunity to minister to them. This doesn't mean you compromise the truth. But it does mean you can give them some “grace space” to get there.

Tip #7 - What to do when you must say “no.” Explain the reason clearly. Provide pastoral care and support. Point them to a next step. Just because they can't be teacher in children's ministry doesn't mean they can't serve in another. Help connect them to another ministry leader where they might be able to serve.

Tip #8 - Be a Safe Place for Conversation. Think about it. A child comes out as being transgender. The church, a safe place, where the child and his parents should be able to get answers and help, pushes him and his family away because they aren't

prepared for it and don't know what to do or say. In his time of greatest need, he is abandoned by the very place that could help him navigate this based on God's Word...if they had been prepared.

Tip #9 - Ministry is Messy. Embrace It. If you look at the ministry of Jesus, it was messy. While the Pharisees stayed apart from people as much as possible, Jesus was in the middle of the people. He went to people and met them right where they were. In the mud, the dirt and the sweat. He got involved in the messiness of peoples' lives. The woman at the well, the adulterous lady who was about to be stoned and the man He healed by covering his eyes with mud just to name a few. He was called the "friend of sinners" because He spent His time with people who were far from God.

*"If you are doing ministry like Jesus did,
you'll be right in the middle of the messiness of people's lives."*

*"The church is called to be a hospital where spiritually people can
get help, not a museum where perfect Christians are on display."*

Tip #10 - Be prepared to minister to families with non-traditional structures. Today's families come in lots of different forms including husband, wife and kids, grandparents raising their grandkids, same sex couples, couples that are cohabiting, single parents and blended families.

Tip #11 - Be a place where people can belong before they believe. People come with baggage. People come with addictions. People come with hurts. People come with no knowledge about what God's Word says. Be a place that comes along side people and helps them walk toward a relationship with Jesus. Be a place where people can explore what it means to follow Jesus before they make a decision. Be a place that loves people where they are and helps them

find a better place through Christ.

Come in children with gender dysphoria. Come in teenage who is struggling with your identity. Come in parents, who don't know what to do with your child, because he says he is gay. Come in grandparents who are raising your grandchild because of your daughter's bad decisions. You are welcome here! We will embrace you and the messiness you are trying to leave behind, and help you find healing and cleansing through Jesus.

We are to enter the messiness of a broken world and help people wherever they are in their journey. At the same time, we must remember that we can't "fix" people. Our role is to point people to Jesus and help them grow in their relationship with Him. It is the Holy Spirit that transforms people into the image of Christ.

"We can remind ourselves that the book of redemption in a person's life has many chapters. You may be witness to an early chapter of this person's life or a later chapter. But Christians believe that God holds that person and each and every chapter in his hands, until that person arrives at their true end—when gender and soul are made well in the presence of God."

Dr. Mark Yarhouse¹⁰

LEAD CHALLENGING PEOPLE WELL

Ministry is all about people. Nice people. Not so nice people. Encouragers. Discouragers. Positive people. Negative people. Supporters. Opposers. As a leader, you will encounter all of these. challenging people. Leading challenging people is a leadership skill that can be learned.

The first step is to change the way you view challenging people. Why? Because how you view challenging people dictates how you respond to them. If you take it personal when they

complain, you'll think they are saying, "you're not a good leader" or "your ideas stink" or "you're wrong." But if you see them as someone who can help you improve the ministry, you will respond to them differently. Here's how to see complainers in a new light.

Understand that opposition is part of change and growth. Push past your personal reactions to those who complain and realize that opposition will help you assess the quality of ideas, see different approaches and help you make high-quality decisions.

Be proactive in seeking out challenging people. Each time you have a new change or major initiative coming, ask people to tell you why you shouldn't do it. By doing this, you will begin to see opposition as a regular and important part of the decision-making process.

Ask those who are normally "yes" people to think of and share an opposing view. One characteristic of highly effective teams is their freedom to explore all sides and views of an idea or initiative. Successful teams have conflict and disagreement. Help people on your team build the skill and willingness to offer opposing views.

Train yourself to not instantly resist the challenging person. Even if you know your position is right, stop and listen, consider and evaluate the opposing idea.

See the challenging person as someone who is bringing you a gift. Normally the challenging person doesn't have bad intentions. They're usually trying to say something that they believe is for the good of the team. Shift your anger to appreciation for the challenging person. If no one brings opposing views, then the team can become unbalanced. They are helping the team get better.

SEE FEEDBACK AS A GIFT THAT CAN IMPROVE THE MINISTRY

Provide feedback for the challenging person. If the challenger is bringing the opposition with an attitude or spirit that is damaging, it is vital to help him or her learn to offer opposing views with skill and tact. Encourage him or her to also share comments when they agree, so they are balanced.

LEAD WELL THROUGH ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

Another challenge most of the churches in America are facing is infrequent attendance patterns. When I was growing up, we went to church three days a week. Sunday morning it was Sunday School and the morning service. Sunday night was Bible class and then the evening service. Wednesday was mid-week activities, Bible study and prayer. And many weeks you could also add on a teen outing or activity on Friday or Saturday. In other words, we were at the church all the time. I felt like we lived there. But the positive result was we knew our Bible very well.

Fast forward to today. the average family that attends church is there twice a month or less. In many cases, it's once every five to six weeks. That means today's kids are missing 50 to 75% of the lessons on Sunday morning. And besides that, they have very little, if any contact with the church or the people who attend there.

The result is kids are growing up with limited Bible knowledge. This is a big challenge because they are not getting a solid Biblical foundation and so when they get to college, they stop going to church altogether.

Research reveals this about the generations. I referred to some of these stats back in chapter 4.

14% of Boomers have no church affiliation¹¹

19% of Gen X'ers have no church affiliation¹²

34% of Millennials have no church affiliation¹³

13% of Gen Z say they are atheist.¹⁴

Do you see the pattern? With each generation, fewer and fewer people are making church a part of their life. And now 13% of today's kids say they are atheists. This is double the percentage of adults who say they are atheists.

So, how can we help parents see the importance of bringing their children to church faithfully? There are several things you can do. None of these by itself is the answer to seeing kids in church more regularly. But put together they form a good strategy for encouraging parents to bring their children to church more faithfully.

Encourage parents to put church attendance at the top of their Sunday schedule. If they don't put it at the top of their list, then it becomes optional and they attend when there is nothing else on the list that interests them. Encourage parents to make the decision that church is what we do on Sundays. It's not optional. Unless we are sick or out of town, we will be there.

As I talked about earlier, in today's culture, weekends are crowded with sports, games, lessons and other competing activities. Many families decide that having their kids in sports on Sunday is more important than having them in church. And so traveling sports teams takes families away from church for weeks at a time. Not only do kids miss church but in many cases they are missing out on the opportunity to simply be kids and enjoy playing with toys, riding their bike, camping in the backyard, building a tent out of blankets in the living room, etc.

Another strategic step to see kids and their families attend more often actually lies in your hands as a leader. **It's the step to making church a fun place to be on Sunday morning.** Kids and their parents can find "funnier" things to do on Sunday morning if your service is boring. Your goal should be to make church a fun, exiting place to be. A place that is so irresistible that kids bring their friends with them. A place so enjoyable that kids wake up their parents on Sunday morning, excited to go to church.

You can put “cliffhangers” in your lesson. You know what a cliffhanger is? It’s when you are watching your favorite TV show and as the show is wrapping up, you realize that there’s no way they have time to show how it plays out. It gives you a feeling that says, “I gotta’ see what happens in the next episode.” And you make sure you tune in the next week or immediately if you are binge watching, so you can see what happens.

You can use this method with your lesson, skit or video. Plan it out to end at a critical point in the story and tell the kids they’ll have to come back next week to see what happens.

You can also use some old school methods that still work. How about an attendance board where kids can add a star each week they are present? When they fill up their stars, they get rewarded.

Serving = faithfulness. There is one group of people that are at your church nearly every single week. It’s the core group of people who are serving. Create opportunities for kids and their parents to serve and I guarantee you their attendance pattern will improve. Think about or create opportunities for kids and parents to serve together.

We missed you. If you want kids and their parents to attend more frequently, those are the three words they need to hear when they miss. Every child needs to be known, cared about and missed when they are not there.]Provide miss you cards for your leaders and have them send a miss you card when a child in their group is absent. For extra impact, make it a handwritten note. As adults, we get junk mail nearly every day, don’t we? But kids rarely get mail, so it’s a big deal when they get a card from someone. Combine the steps we’ve talked about in this chapter and you will see kids and parents attend more frequently.

LEAD WELL THROUGH GROWTH OBSTACLES

What is the biggest growth challenge you are facing right now?

I ask this question because many children's ministries find their attendance plateaued or even declining and they are looking for answers.

As a leader, when you face growth obstacles, it's your job to find out why and lead through the challenge. I've had times in my ministry where the attendance plateaued. It was usually because we were 85% full. It's a rule that's consistently true. Once your space reaches 85% capacity, you are done growing until you create more space. How did we remove this challenge? We added another service time which allowed us to create more space without having to build space. And we immediately began to grow again.

The Bible is clear that Jesus wants His church to be a growing church. And He wants your children's ministry to be a growing children's ministry. Look to Him to help you identify and resolve any challenges that need to be resolved. He says this to us...

“Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.”

Luke 14:23¹⁵

My prayer is that God bestows upon you the wisdom, anointing and perseverance to turn the challenges you face into great victories for the kingdom. And that you will always remember to give God the glory for leading you and guiding you each step of the way.

Personal Reflection:

What is the biggest challenge I am facing right now?

How do I respond when the ministry is going through a slump?

How can I respond better to challenges that come my way?

How well do I listen? How can I become a better listener?

Who is a challenging person in my life right now? What can I learn from this?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.

Team Discussion Questions:

Do we have a plan for ministering to transgender children? If yes, then how effective is it?

What has the potential to put us into a ministry slump? How can we stop this from happening?

How can we encourage parents to make church their top priority on weekends?

What obstacles are keeping us from getting to the next level?
How can we remove them?

How can we make our children's ministry a more fun place for kids to attend?

How can we motivate our kids to bring their unchurched friends with them to church?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.



*“Leadership is a way of thinking, a way of acting and,
most importantly, a way of communicating.”*

Simon Sinek¹

When you think of leading well, many people don't associate it with leading up to the person they report to. But if you want to lead well, you've got to know how to lead in every direction. That means leading well for those who report to you, leading well for those beside you and leading well to the person you report to. For some of you that means leading up to your pastor well. For others,

it means leading up to an executive pastor well. And for others it means leading up to the family ministry director well. For some, it may mean leading up to your children's pastor or director.

Before we dive into this, I thought you might enjoy seeing some things you should NOT say to the person you're leading up to.

What's a background check?

During your sermon today, can you tell people they're going to hell if they don't volunteer in children's ministry?

Can I go on vacation on Easter weekend?

Do you mind if we use a video clip from the Mad Max movie in children's ministry this weekend?

Can I borrow your new car for a Costco run?

What do you think about me doing a series on Revelation for the preschoolers?

Can I take all my volunteers to Ruth's Chris steak house for an appreciation dinner and charge it to the women's ministry budget?

Can you stop going 5 minutes over on your sermon so the kids don't get restless?

Can next week's offering go to sending me to Hawaii on vacation during VBS?

Can we have a "bring your pet to church" Sunday?

I hope those brought a smile to your face and brightened your day a little. Now let's dive into how to lead up well. I'm going to refer to the person you report to as "Pastor." If you don't report to your pastor, then sub in the person you report to.

First off, let's establish this. **Your pastor wants you to lead up.** Don't wait for him/her to say to you "I'd like you to lead up to me." Take the initiative. Reach out to him/her and ask if you can start meeting with him/her on a regular basis, if you aren't already. Keep in mind, your pastor carries a heavy load. He/she is not looking for another meeting to go to. I can promise you that. So, when you approach him/her, let him/her know you'll be glad to work with whatever his/her calendar can allow for. Something is better than nothing. Now let's get into some specifics about leading up well.

Lead up well by building the church rather than just building your own kingdom. It's easy to get tunnel vision when you are leading in children's ministry. If you're not intentional about seeing the big picture, you can get so focused on the ministry you lead, that it's all you care about. You become a silo, doing your own thing over there in the kids' area. It gets to the point where someone asks you when was the last time you've been part of the worship service in the auditorium. And it's been so long you can't remember.

You are not called to just build a children's ministry. You are called to help build the entire church. Of course, your primary focus is the children's ministry...and it should be. But the end result of your focus should be to help build the church through the ministry you lead.

When making decisions, think about what is best for the entire church, not just for your ministry. Be the champion for children's ministry, but balance it with being a team player that sees the big picture.

Lead up well by aligning with the church's overall vision. We talked about having a clear vision in chapter 4. Let's dig deeper into what that means. When it comes to creating a vision statement,

I believe the best step you can take is to look at the church's overall vision statement and translate it into children's ministry. Why do this? It aligns with the church as a whole. It's also easier for people to remember, since they are hearing it from the entire church as well.

Here's an example. At one of the churches where I led the children's ministry, the vision for the church was "Impacting the world with the love and message of Jesus." We took that vision statement and translated it into the children's ministry. The children's ministry's translation was "Impacting kids and families with the love and message of Jesus." See the alignment and tweak we did to make it our children's ministry vision statement? I believe churches will benefit with an aligned vision statement across all of its ministries.

Lead up well by honoring your pastor. Brag on him/her in front of volunteers. If he/she stops by and you are with volunteers, turn the conversation to him/her. Remember him/her on his/her birthday. Do something nice for him/her on Pastor Appreciation Day in October.

Lead up well by being loyal to your pastor. He/she should know that you've got his/her back. If someone comes to you and starts criticizing the pastor, ask them if they have approached him/her with these concerns? Remember the direct communication we talked about in chapter 4? This is one of the times when direct communication is a must. Offer to go with the person to see the pastor and listen as they share their concerns.

And if you have a personal issue with something your pastor said or did, then go directly to him/her. Let him/her know that you have not talked about this with anyone else. Share your concern and work through it together. Remember from chapter 4 - always talk up, rather than sideways or down.

It is also crucial that your ministry philosophy lines up with your pastor's philosophy. You and your pastor must be aligned, if you want to reach the community. If you can't align after several

attempts, then leave quietly.

Lead up well by championing children's ministry. You must be the voice for children's ministry. Your leaders want you to be an advocate for the ministry you lead. If not you, then who? Keep the importance of children's ministry on the front burner. Share articles with church leadership about how children's ministry can be a growth engine for the church. Share the fact that 80% of people who come to Christ do so before the age of 18. Share how God has promised to bless the church that makes children's ministry a priority. Share the praise reports of children and parents who have stepped across the line of faith.

Need more space for children? Be the children's ministry champion and make the ask.

Need an increase in your budget? Be the children's ministry champion and make the ask.

Need to put children's ministry information in the announcements? Be the children's ministry champion and make the ask.

Need more volunteers? Be the children's ministry champion and make the ask.

Want children's ministry to lead worship several times a year in the adult service? Be the children's ministry champion and make the ask.

If you aren't the children's ministry champion, then who will be?

Over 19 years ago, I was the children's pastor at a mega-church. It was my first time leading in a church that had thousands of

people coming every week. The place where the children met for the children's worship service was called the chapel. It was a fitting name. It was used for most of the funerals that took place at the church. It had dark brick walls and big stained glass windows. It was a dreary place.

After meeting there for a few months, I decided it was time to be the squeaky wheel. I put together a proposal to remodel another part of the church and make it an environment that would capture the excitement and fun of kids when they are allowed to worship at their age level. The plan included theming, AV, lighting, cool theming, video games, 3D buildings in the decor, a glow-in-the-dark puppet area and more. It was going to be well over \$200,000 if approved.

I was then asked to come and present the idea to the elder board. The elder board consisted of the pastor, three executive pastors and 3-4 influential men who were deacons. I remember the night of the meeting well. I was very, very nervous. Would they smile out of empathy and send me on my way? Would they see that \$200k number and say "no way...that's way too much money?"

Up the elevator went to the floor the pastor's office was on. The elevator stopped. I got off and walked down the hallway toward the pastor's conference room. I knocked on the door and stepped inside. Wow...was I intimidated. All 6 or so men looked at me as I took my seat. The pastor introduced me and said I had a proposal I'd like them to look at.

I had prepared a handout for each person present. But before I jumped into the numbers, I shared why we needed to build a better children's ministry space. I shared the stat that 80% of people come to Jesus before the age of 18. I shared how we had outgrown the chapel and needed more space to reach more kids and families. I shared how the children's ministry can be a growth engine for the entire church. I shared how kids were stepping across the line of faith.

Then I shared with them the vision of seeing hundreds of more kids attending. And since they didn't have a driver's license,

their parents would come with them and find Christ as well. I shared the time it would give staff back, not having to set up and tear down the decorations for the chapel. I shared how God would bless the church that makes children's ministry a priority. As best I could, I cast vision for what could be, if we stepped out in faith and did this.

I'll never forget what happened next. The chairman of the elder board stood up and said he had to leave early for another appointment. He was very influential in the group and I felt if we got a "yes" from him, the rest of the board might give a green light as well.

He walked over to the door, opened it and then paused in the doorway. He said, "I believe in this project. I believe it will give us a great opportunity to reach more children and their parents. My vote is "yes."

I didn't show it on the outside, but inside I was jumping up and down with joy. The rest of the board followed him and said "yes" as well. We built the new children's area and saw the ministry experience great growth. The new space was featured in Christianity Today magazine as well as on a national ABC TV special.

And to think...all of that came from just being a squeaky wheel. What do you need to squeak about? Start squeaking and you might just see all your children's ministry dreams come true.

Lead up well by bringing solutions to problems and challenges. You want to become known as someone who fixes things...a problem solver. If you look back at the meeting agenda earlier in this chapter, you'll see one of the talking points is challenges and problems. If you are satisfied with being a mediocre leader, you can go into the meeting with challenges and problems you are facing and ask the pastor to fix it all. But if you want to lead well, you'll bring the challenges and problems, but in addition you'll also bring some solutions and fixes for the challenges and problems. You can then ask your pastor which solution he/she likes best. He/she will appreciate the fact that you have already spent time thinking thinking it through.

Lead up well by doing the best with what you have now.

What if you champion children's ministry and still can't get a much needed sound system? What if you champion children's ministry and still can't get a much needed sound system? What if you want to switch curriculums but none of the teachers want to? What if you ask for some additional space in a new building project, but the board says "not now." What if you squeak as loud as you can, but it still seems like no one is listening?

Take what God has placed in your hand and keep doing your very best with what you have. The secret to getting more for your ministry is faithfulness.

"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones."

Luke 16:10²

"The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'"

Matthew 25:23³

If you will be faithful with what you have now, He will eventually entrust you with more. Don't give up. Don't despise the "little things" the ministry has now. Keep championing children's ministry. Faithfulness will eventually transform your "little things" into "large things" as the Scripture above promises us.

Lead up well with good communication. One of the best ways you can lead up is with good communication. Ask for a scheduled, ongoing meeting with your pastor or direct report. Come to the meeting prepared. Have a printed or digital copy agenda to give him/her. Here are some talking points I recommend having on the agenda.

- personal talk about family, life situation, prayer requests
- update on talking points from last meeting
- look at current attendance and other important trends
- update on spiritual milestones participation
- update on budget
- upcoming events or programs
- staffing and volunteer questions
- challenges and problems facing
- ask if there's anything else the pastor wants to discuss

Lead up well by being an encourager. I think we often forget that our pastor needs encouragement. Your pastor carries a heavy load as he/she leads the church. He/she is always giving encouragement to others, but often doesn't receive encouragement in return. Instead of going to the pastor's office hoping he/she will encourage you, decide you're going to encourage him/her.

“A good children's ministry leader needs the pastor's encouragement...a great children's ministry leader encourages the pastor.”

Lead up well by being engaged in meetings with your pastor. Don't act like you are having to “endure” another meeting. Listen to learn. Sit up straight and lean in to what he/she is saying. Nod in agreement when he/she makes a point.

Lead up well by praying for your pastor. Let him/her know that you daily pray for him/her.

Lead up well by teaching the children to love the pastor. Ask the pastor to slip out and come visit the children's environment for a few minutes. Brag on him/her in front of the kids. Ask him/her to speak a few words of encouragement & challenge to the kids.

Lead up well by having kids show their appreciation for the pastor. You can do this in October, which is pastor appreciation month, or his/her birthday, at Christmas, etc. Have the kids write notes for the pastor. Perhaps even give the kids a list of his/her favorite candy, drinks, fruit, etc. for those who would like to bring a gift for him/her.

Lead up well by writing your pastor a note of encouragement. Occasionally write your pastor a note and express your appreciation for being part of his/her team. Mention something that he/she has done to impact your life. Don't assume that your pastor gets encouragement. Even pastors need encouragement.

**“Be a fountain
not a drain.”**

Lead up well by loving on your pastor's kids. It's not easy being a PK. Your life is under a microscope. Love them and encourage them. And give them permission to be kids like all the other kids. Often God will send an adult(s) to make an impact in the lives of PK's. Someone who believes in them and reinforces what their dad and mom are teaching them. Why not be that person?

Lead up by bearing fruit. One of the best things you can do for your pastor (and the entire church) is bear fruit. Reach new families and help strengthen the church. Grow the children's ministry. Helps kids and parents grow in their faith. Rather than being a drain on the church, be an overflowing well that helps bring

enthusiasm, passion and commitment.

I am reminded of the time when Moses, the leader of the Israelites, was leading them in a battle against the Amalekites. When Moses raised his arms with the staff he was holding, the Israelites would start winning the battle. When he got tired and lowered the staff, the Amalekites would start winning. Eventually, Moses was so totally exhausted that he couldn't keep his arms up at all.

That's when his children's pastors (work with me on this) Aaron and Hur, came to his aid and helped hold up his arms. Because of their help, Moses and the Israelites won the battle.

When you lead up well, this is a picture of what you are doing. You are encouraging and helping your pastor as he/she leads the entire church. When the children's ministry is thriving, it's a win for your pastor. When your children's ministry is reaching families, you are helping build the entire church. When you equip volunteers, you are helping your church win. When you do outreach events, you are helping your church share the Gospel with your community. When you do things with excellence, you are helping your church build a solid reputation in the community. When you lead up well, the children's ministry can become a growth catalyst for the entire church.

“A good children's ministry leader impacts the children's ministry... a great children's ministry leader impacts the entire church.”

Personal Reflection:

Have I aligned the children’s ministry with the overall church vision? If not yet, how can I make it happen?

How can I help build the entire church rather than just my ministry?

Do I champion our children’s ministry? How can I do this more effectively?

How can I be an encouragement to my pastor?

Do I come to meetings prepared and with an agenda?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.

Team Discussion Questions:

How can we be an encourager for our pastor?

How can we do a better job of communicating up?

How can we lead the kids to encourage and bless the pastor?

What are some ways we can be faithful with what we have?

What are some ways we can be like Aaron and Hur and help support our leaders?

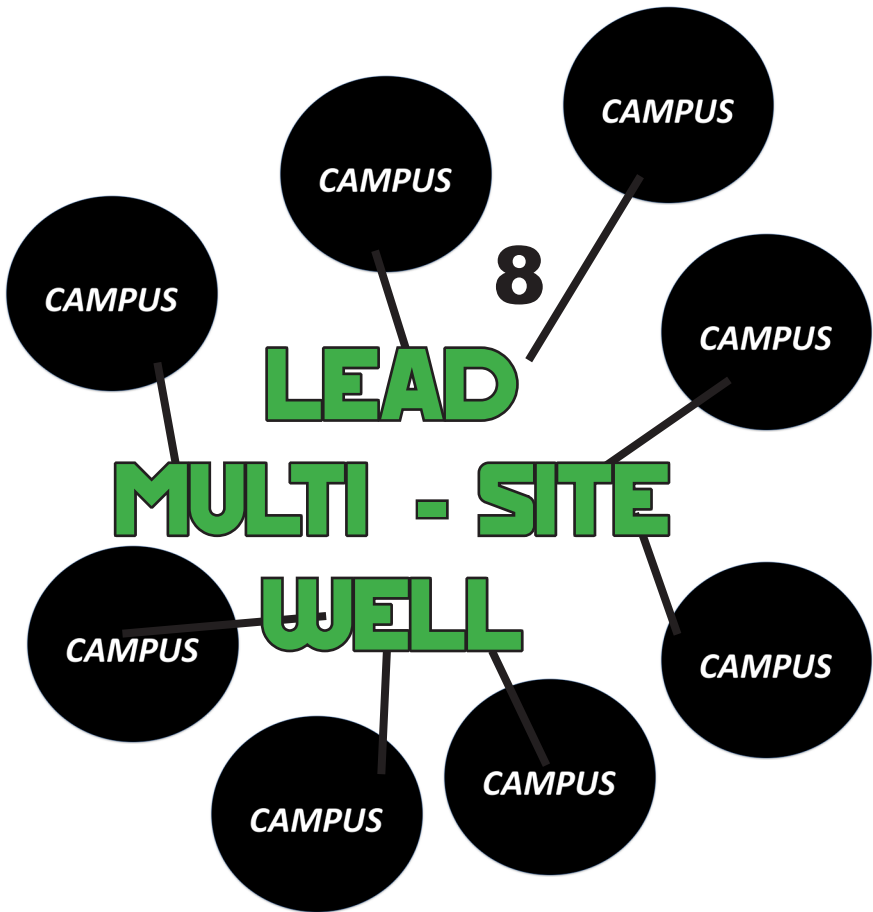
Are we leading up by bearing fruit? How can we plant more seeds in the lives of kids and families and see more fruit?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.



“The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say ‘I.’ And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say ‘I.’ They don’t think ‘I.’ They think ‘we’; they think ‘team.’ They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but ‘we’ gets the credit. This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.”
Peter Drucker¹

I can still remember the conversation and it happened 19 years ago. The Pastor I was serving with at the time, asked me to come to his office. He wanted to share something with me.

As I sat in his office, he starts sharing about a vision he has. It was to start a second location of our church in a growing area about 30 minutes from where we were. Some of our members lived there and came to our current campus. Which was awesome, but the Pastor shared what an awesome opportunity it would be to have a campus there. He believed we could reach many more families if we had a campus there in that community. I knew he was right. There was lots of new housing being built in that area and young families were moving there on a weekly basis. It would definitely be a great place to have another campus.

As I was listening to him share, in the back of my mind a question was growing. Anyone in children's ministry would be thinking the same thing. When he asked what I thought about the idea, I had one question. You know what it is.

What does this mean for children's ministry?

I quickly found out what it would mean. He said, as the lead pastor, his role would be to speak and lead at the founding campus and then drive to the second location and preach there as well. They would be staggering the service time at the second campus to make it happen.

I would be doing the same thing. I would lead the kids' service at the founding campus and then I would drive up to lead the kids' service at the new campus. I would be able to hire a part-time person to help with the new campus and of course, would need to build a solid volunteer team up there as well.

That was my first introduction to multi-site ministry. Since then, every church I have served at has been a multi-site church. I've had the joy of helping launch 12 multi-site campuses at the

churches I've served at. It never gets old, being part of an exciting, new campus and watching many new kids and families come to Christ and grow in their faith because of a new campus that came to their area.

Along with all the joy that comes with launching a new campus, comes new challenges. Leading in a multi-site ministry will stretch your leadership to the max. It involves a new way of thinking, new strategies, more collaboration and more logistics.

If you are reading this and you are currently leading in a multi-site model, I am sure you can relate. And if you're reading this and you're not in a multi-site model, there's a good chance you may be in the future.

Multi-site used to be novel idea, but now it's the norm. Look at these stats.

- 1990 - 10 multi-site churches.²
- 1998 - about 100 multi-site churches.³
- 2005 - more than 1,500 multi-site churches.⁴
- 2008 - estimated 2,000 multi-site churches.⁵
- 2012 - 5,000 multi-site churches.⁶
- Currently there are over 8,000 multi-site churches. Every major city and large community in America has a multi-site church.⁷

Here are some more interesting stats about multi-site churches:

- Over 5 million people worship at a multi-site church each weekend.⁸
- New campuses have a 90% success rate.⁹

- 33% of new campuses are mergers.
- 25% of new campuses speak a different language.
- 46% of new campuses have live teaching.
- 34% of new campuses use a combo of video & live teaching.

Let's talk about how you can lead well in the world of multi-site children's ministry. **The first thing is to find out what model your multi-site is going to embrace.** After working in multi-site ministries for the past 19 years, I have identified 3 multi-site models that churches embrace.

MODEL I - THE DISNEY WORLD MODEL

This is one church but with a distinctly different experience at each multi-site. I call it the Disney World model because when you go to the Magic Kingdom at Disney World, you are in one park, but the different areas of the park are significantly different.

Again, think about this strategy. It's one amusement park that allows each part of the park to express itself with unique rides and attractions that fit into that part of the park's theme.

Even though each part of the park is different, it all falls under the Magic Kingdom umbrella. People don't say they are going to spend the day at Tomorrow Land or Frontier Land. They say "I'm going to Disney World."

So, a church using this model would have multiple campuses under the name of one church. But families would get a different experience at each campus. Each campus does their own thing and the campuses not being aligned is intentional.

The Benefits of the Disney World Model :

- It gives more creative freedom for the people at each campus.
- Each campus can custom fit and find their niche to be more effective in reaching their demographic.

The Challenges of the Disney World Model :

- Staff and volunteers have to spend more time creating their own version of things.
- Campuses can end up not being on the same page and not going the same direction.
- An attitude of “us vs. them” can develop and lead to unhealthy competition.

MODEL 2 - THE FRANCHISE MODEL

Several years ago, I was at the Hong Kong airport, waiting for my next flight. Looking to grab a quick bite to eat, I saw the familiar golden arches and went to the McDonalds. As I looked at the menu, I saw the old familiars such as french fries, chicken mcnuggets and hamburgers. But what caught my attention was the items they had on the menu that I'd never seen at a McDonalds in the states.

In addition to the staples on their menu, they had added several things to the menu such as a rice bowl with chicken or beef. They also had red bean pies. I've never seen them on a U.S. menu before. It was obvious they were slightly adjusting their menu so they could better serve the culture that particular McDonalds was in.

The logo was the same. A lot of the food was the same. The drink cups were the same. Much of the marketing and look and feel of the store was the same. But as a franchise, they were allowed the

freedom to connect with the culture that was unique to that store and the part of the world it is in.

A church using the Franchise model has alignment across the campuses while allowing the campuses to have some contextual freedom. The environments may have the same branding, but the lessons, worship songs, etc. may be tweaked or adjusted to reach a different culture or niche. And some of the ministry philosophy transfer, so the campuses may have a slightly different emphasis. An example would be one campus may use a large group / small group format for children, while another may use the same lesson, but the structure may be traditional Sunday School classes.

The Benefits of the Franchise Model :

- Alignment with some freedom to adjust for cultural difference.
- More opportunities to collaborate.
- Work flow can be more uniform and streamlined.
- Creative people have some freedom to adjust or tweak.

The Challenges of the Franchise Model are:

- It can lead to misalignment.
- You must be intentional about setting standards for quality and content.

MODEL 3 - THE RADICAL ALIGNMENT MODEL

In this model, the goal is for all campuses to be radically aligned. No matter what campus a family walks into, they will get the exact same

experience. The lessons are the same. The formats are the same. The exact same songs are used. The logos are the same. The environments are named the same. The sermon is a video feed from the founding church campus. All the volunteers are trained the same. The check-in process is the same. You name the element and the goal is to duplicate it at every campus.

The Benefits of the Radical Alignment Model :

- Families can have the same experience at each campus.
- Opportunity for collaboration and teamwork.
- Work flow can be streamlined. Instead of 5 people going to the store to buy cotton balls for the craft, one person can go and then distribute to the other campuses.

The Challenges of the Radical Alignment Model :

- You must have buy-in from all campuses.
- Collaboration is necessary so sites have some say and input. Resentment can develop if campuses feel like stuff is being shoved down to them without any opportunity to give input.

Personally, I have always used the radical alignment method. It keeps everyone going the same direction and helps the team work smarter rather than harder. But it definitely takes leadership to do it effectively. Later in this chapter, I'll share some keys to making radical alignment work.

So, which model should you follow in your ministry? Here's where you need to start. Ask for a meeting with your pastor or the person you report to. Sit down with him/her and ask these questions:

What is the overall church vision for the campus (s)?

How can the children's ministry help fulfill this vision?

What do you want the focus of the children's ministry to be at the campus (es)?

What would be some wins for the children's ministry at the campus(es)?

Where would you like to see the children's ministry be a year after the new campus(es) launch?

Explain the three multi-site models and ask which one does he/she want you to pattern the ministry after ?

That's your starting point. Align with your pastor's vision for the site(s). From there you can build out your plan for leading multi-site well. Let's look at some other important parts of multi-site ministry.

MULTI-SITE BUDGETS

We talked about the three models for the ministry as a whole. Now let's talk about the budget for multi-site ministry. There are three budget models to consider.

Budget Model 1 is what I call the BIG BUCKET.

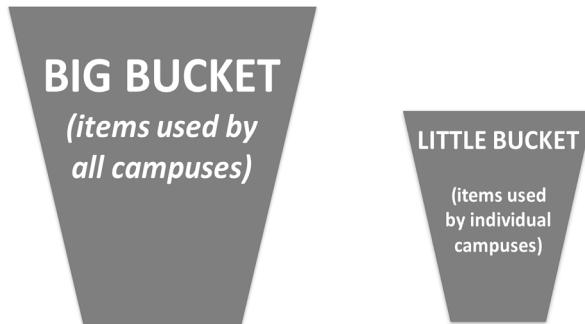
This refers to there being one budget for all campuses. One budget to rule them all, you could say. Seriously though, this strategy has one person or a group of people who handle the budget for all the campuses. They decide where the money will be spent and what it will be spent on.

Budget Model 2 is what I call the LITTLE BUCKET.

In this model, each site has its own budget and they decide where their allocated money will be spent and what it will be spent on.

Budget Model 3 is what I call the BIG BUCKET/LITTLE BUCKET MODEL. This model splits the budget into two categories. The **Big Bucket** is for items that will be used by all sites. An example would be a brochure about the ministry that all sites use. Another example would be curriculum costs. That would be a big bucket item and would come from that budget.

At the same time, there is the Little Bucket. Each campus has their own little bucket budget that they control and spend as they see fit. How much each site gets for their little bucket depends on how many kids and volunteers they have. The little bucket would be for items that are site specific. An example would be an appreciation cookout for a campus' volunteers. They could use some of their little bucket for that. Or if they wanted to purchase some board games for the kids at their campus, that would come from their little bucket. **This is the model that I have implemented when leading in a multi-site setting.**



There are three other things I have found effective when preparing a multi-site budget. **First, find out what it costs per child per year to do ministry.** This is extremely helpful for setting budgets for campus. Each campus budget can be based on their current attendance. As the campus grows, they will be allocated more money.

Secondly, keep in mind that portable campuses usually cost more per child. This means you should allocate more per child at portable campuses.

Thirdly, I recommend having a separate budget for starting a new campus. This would include everything you need to get a new campus up and running. Things like toys, cribs, rocking chairs, screens, small group leader supplies, etc.

MULTI-SITE STAFFING

How many children's ministry staff should you have at a multi-site? I recommend having one full-time staff person for every 100-125 children in attendance on an average weekend. This is ideal for providing care and nurturing for children and volunteers. I realize that in many multi-sites this ratio might not be possible due to finances. But aim for getting as close as possible. Who should you hire first? What should their role be? Here is the hiring order I follow:

- **Director** (you need a champion at each site - someone who will be responsible for the campus and lead the charge to see it grow and thrive. Starting out, this person may need to also hold another position such as preschool or elementary coordinator). This role can be full-time or part-time based on your needs and budget.
- **Early Childhood Leader** (early childhood requires more volunteers since the ratios are not as flexible as elementary). This role can be full-time or part-time based on your needs and budget.
- **Elementary Leader** (oversees the elementary program). This role can be full-time or part-time based on needs and budget. After that, your hires should be based on what your needs are.

I would encourage you to consider hiring from within. They already have your ministries' DNA and know the strategies and philosophies of the ministry.

MULTI-SITE VOLUNTEERS

Without volunteers, there is no multi-site. Look what Walt Disney said about having a good team in place right before he opened Disneyland.

“You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.”

*Walt Disney*¹⁴

Here are some things to keep in mind as you build a volunteer team for a multi-site campus.

Identify the key leaders who are going to help start the new campus. Begin meeting with them, training with them and building relationships with them at least 4 to 6 months before the launch date.

Send some of your veteran volunteers to help start the campus. Preferably ones that live near the new site. Ask the people, who you take to start the new campus, to commit to a specific time frame. An example would be asking volunteers to commit for one year. After the year is over, they can stay at the new campus or return to the one they left. You’ll find that most people will stay at the new campus. Especially if they make good connections with the volunteers and children at the new campus.

Provide training and preparation for the new volunteers who will be serving at the new campus. This includes background checks, orientation, job descriptions and shadowing seasoned volunteers. Have them start serving with the seasoned volunteers for a minimum of a month before they leave for the new campus. The goal should be to have a solid team up and running before the launch date.

I recommend doing a minimum of one soft launch service, with two being the best scenario. These run throughs will give you the

opportunity to identify things that need to be adjusted, tweaked or changed before the first official service. The soft launch should include set-up, check-in/out and the classes/programs. This preparation will make your first official Sunday much smoother. The children of the volunteers and key families can be your audience for the run through.

If the site is going to be portable, build a transition team. This team sets up and takes down all your portable items such as backdrops, registration table, nursery playpens, etc.

MULTI-SITE STRUCTURE

Each time you add a new campus it has the potential to change the dynamic of your ministry culture. It forces you to evaluate what you are doing and find new ways to do multi-site children's ministry. You must hold your structure with open hands, knowing that the next site may change everything you are doing. The structure I have followed for the many years I've led in multi-site ministry is as follows.

Central / Core Team:

- set vision for all campuses
- set ministry philosophies for all campuses
- set strategy for all campuses
- identify best practices and share them with all campuses
- support and encourage
- provide resources for all campuses

Campus / Site Team:

- implement vision, philosophies and strategy
- execute programs and events with excellence
- build volunteer teams

Starting out, most multi-site churches have a key staff member who does a dual role. They may be the director at one campus, while at the same time be the leader for the central /core team as well.

Once the ministry grows to a tipping point where it is too much for the person to do both roles, they move the person who was doing both roles into doing one role.

The tipping point is different for each ministry and is something you can work through once you reach it. One sign the ministry needs a central / core team that is a separate role is when you see things slipping or becoming unbalanced. And the person who is doing both roles will begin to say they are having a hard time doing both roles.

For me, the tipping point came when we started the 5th campus. It was too much to do both effectively. At that time, the leadership moved me into the role of just leading the central /core team and we moved someone else into just leading the campus I was previously leading.

One other thing that is important in multi-site structure is who reports to who? There are several options available and once again it's going to be what works best for your church.

Some ministries' structure has the children's director reporting to the campus pastor completely.

Another structure is the children's director reports directly to the core / central director completely.

Personally, I have found a third scenario that I prefer. The children's ministry director at each campus has a direct report line to their campus pastor and a dotted report line to the central/core director.

The campus pastor and central/core director work together to lead and invest in the site children's ministry director. An example is when it's time for a formal review, the campus pastor and the central/core director both do a review with the person. But before the review is done, the campus pastor and central / core director meet and see how their reviews line up. If there is a major difference in an area, then they talk through that and adjust as needed to present a balanced review.

KEYS TO A THRIVING MULTI-SITE MINISTRY

As I mentioned earlier, going multi-site will stretch you, push you out

of your comfort zone and change the way you do ministry. But you can do more than just survive multi-site ministry. You can thrive in it. How? Let's look at several keys I've learned over the years through watching, trying, failing, succeeding, changing and all the other words you can use to describe your new reality.

Key #1 - UNITY

If you're going to lead well in multi-site ministry, then you've got to have unity. Look what the Bible says about unity.

"Look how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity."

Psalm 133:1¹⁵

"By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:35¹⁶

"I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one – as You are in Me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in us so that the world will believe You sent Me."

John 17:21³⁸

Unity doesn't happen by accident. You have to be very intentional if you want to have unity across your campuses. It's in our fallen DNA to do our own thing, to protect our turf at all costs and to want to lead instead of following.

But unity can happen. I've seen it. Experienced it. It's a beautiful thing when all the campuses are moving forward in harmony. Great things happen. God will pour out His blessings on a ministry that demonstrates unity.

Achieve unity by talking "we" instead of "they." You will be amazed at how that one little tweak can bring unity.

You will be amazed at how that one little tweak can help bring unity. Every time you meet, every time you do an event together, every time you ask about another site say “we.” Look at this simple example.

*“What are **THEY** doing at their campus for Fall Festival?”*

(sounds like a separate group that is not part of your church).

instead say...

“What are **WE** doing at _____ site?”

(sounds like one church that is working together)

See the difference? Train yourself and the rest of your team to say “we” instead of “they.” There is power in the word “we.”

Key #2 - RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS

Not everyone is wired to be in a multi-site model. If someone wants to do their own thing and not be tied down by working with other campuses, he or she is probably not a good fit for the multi-site model. And that’s okay. For many people, they feel called to serve in a church that is committed to building one campus. God calls some churches to focus on one campus. And He will bring staff and volunteers that are wired that way. Don’t hinder someone who is called to focus on one campus. Help them find a one campus church that they can thrive in.

**When you get the right people
in the right seats, it will bring
unity and alignment to your team.**

Key #3 - Dream Together

Bring the staff and key volunteers together. Get them in a room and ask these type questions...

- What would you do if someone gave the church \$500 million dollars to spend on children's ministry?
- If you were given a magic wand that you could wave and instantly change or add something to the ministry, what would it be?
- What's an idea you've thought about for the ministry, but you haven't mentioned it yet, because you think everyone will think you are crazy?

There is something about dreaming together that brings you together as a team.

Key #4 - PLAN TOGETHER

In the summer or fall, bring together two key leaders from each site. Layout a blank calendar for the next year. Have them work together to write in the dates for what you'll be doing the next year. Once again, there's something in planning together that will bring a team closer together.

Key #5 - HAVE A COMBINED EVENT AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR

What are some events that you can do together? Camp? Family Experience? Big event for pre-teens from all campuses? Having a combined event let's everyone see the people from other campuses that are part of their church. This is a great way for people to see the big picture they are part of.

Key #6 - EMPHASIZE PRAYING FOR OTHER CAMPUSES

This is another tweak you can make that will help bring unity. Here's an example. You are leading pre-service prayer with the volunteer team. When it's your turn to pray, spend some time praying for God to bless the other campuses. You can also do this at staff meetings with great effectiveness. A multi-site church that prays for each other, will be unified.

Key #7 - KEEP EVERYONE'S FOCUS ON THE VISION

Your church's vision is what every campus should rally around. Have a very clear vision that every campus knows and is working toward. People long to be part of something bigger than themselves. When you help them see that every campus is part of the big vision, you will get buy-in.

Emphasize the vision every opportunity you have.

Talk about it. Put it on the screens....on social media...in your emails... on display posters in the hallway...and any where else you can think of.

Key #8 - HELP CAMPUSES SEE THE BIG PICTURE

I was speaking at a church in the Minneapolis area a couple of years ago. The church is multi-site with campuses spread across their metro area. The campus I was visiting had something that caught my eye in the foyer. In a prominent place, they had pictures of all of their campuses displayed. Why? Because they

wanted people at every campus to be able to see the big picture. The big picture was everyone, at every campus, being used by God to reach their city and the surrounding areas with the Gospel. When you saw the pictures of all the campuses, it was inspiring. It's a great reminder that you're a part of something that's very significant.

Key #9 - CELEBRATE THE WINS TOGETHER

When one campus wins, all campuses win. Celebrate the good things happening at individual sites, but also celebrate how God is using all the campuses working together to do amazing things.

Here's an example. We had a Sunday, across all our campuses, where we emphasized following Jesus in baptism. That day across our campuses, we saw 178 kids and many of their parents follow Jesus in baptism.

A few days later, we had a time to celebrate. We used cupcakes to spell out 178. The cupcakes were a great reminder that every site had a part in what God had done that weekend. It created a powerful moment as we were reminded that when we all work together, God can do great things. And it was a lot of fun eating those cupcakes together.

COLLABORATION

If you want to see sites working together, then give them the opportunity to provide input.

“Where there is the opportunity to provide input, there is ownership.”

Here are some practical ways you can do this.

Ask for feedback after events, programs, classes, etc. This is not only a good way to collaborate, but it also gives campuses an opportunity

to provide crucial feedback. Here's some examples of collaborating.

Invite an elementary leader from each campus, to help plan the curriculum.

Invite the director from each campus to be part of the planning for big events.

When opening a new campus, have an “assembly party” where all the sites come together and help assemble baby beds, shelving, chairs, tables, check in stations, etc.

“The smartest campus is all of the campuses creating, refining, and dreaming together.”

Have campuses share what is working well at their campus. This gives all the campuses an opportunity to learn from each other.

When you are doing a major event like summer camp, enlist leaders from each campus and give them ownership of some of the preparation.

When you collaborate, you can have one curriculum...one check-in program...one volunteer onboarding process...one training process.. one salvation and baptism strategy...one brochure...one vision.

*“You can go faster alone,
but you can go
farther together.”*

SIMPLICITY

Did you hear about the man that bought a ranch? The previous owner had never named it and so the man decided to let his family help him name it. His wife came up with name “Triple Horse Ranch. His son wanted to call the ranch “Big Sky Mountain.” His little girl wanted it to be “Sweet Cattle Castle Number 3.” And the father wanted to name it “Rancho Guakalupe.”

They went back and forth. Everyone wanted to use their name. Finally, out of frustration, the man said they would combine all the names and make it “Triple Horse Ranch Big Sky Mountain Sweet Cattle Castle Number 3 Rancho Gaukalupe.”

It took a big, big sign to fit all the of the ranch name on it.

A few months later, the man had a friend come visit him at the ranch. The friend remarked that the name of the ranch was the longest he had ever seen. They drove on down the lane to the ranch. The friend noticed there was something missing from the ranch. It was the cattle. The friend asked the man where all the cattle were. The friend replied, “they all died when I was branding them.”

This reminds me of many ministries that try to do too much. They keep adding and adding and adding programs, events and classes. Their ministry list is like the ranch name in the joke. They add so much, that it ends up hurting the ministry.

Often, the original campus has lots of programs, events, classes and ministries. The calendar is loaded down. This can cause the new campus to feel pressure to duplicate everything the original campus is doing.

I encourage new campuses to keep things simple. At least starting out (and preferably long-term). It is best for the new campus to focus on doing a few things well. The primary one being the weekend worship experience. It's better for the new campus to do a few things with excellence.

If you give in to the pressure of trying to match all the programming and events of the original campus, you may find your volunteers stretched thin, your preparation time divided, your budget drained and your life hectic.

If you want to move to all your campuses (including the original site) to a more simplistic church model, the new campus is the place to test it.

DISTRIBUTION

When you go multi-site, you'll have to adjust your thinking from "me" to "we." Questions will quickly rise about how you're going to make it work logistically. Questions like:

- How will we distribute the curriculum?
- Who will purchase and distribute the supplies for the curriculum?
- What will we do with left over curriculum and supplies at campuses?
- If we have a campus that is over 30 miles away or even in another state, how will we distribute the curriculum to them?
- How can we best serve the campuses and make it easy for them to get what they need?

These are the type of questions you will need to think through. The answers will depend on your structure and strategy. However you go about it, you will need to establish a clear process. And realize that every time your church adds another campus, you'll need to take another look and decide how you're going to distribute.

TRAINING

Another element to think through is training. We know that training is a vital part of children's ministry. You want to set your volunteers up for success. What does training look like in a multi-site church model?. Here is the model I have used after trying lots of different avenues.

Onboarding new volunteers. This should be the same across all campuses. Here's a process I use.

1. Fill out application.
2. Personal interview.
3. Background check & reference check calls.
4. Attend orientation.
5. Hands on training with experienced volunteer.

If you'd like a sample application, interview questions, etc., feel free to email me at dale@buildingchildrensministry.com.

Initial Training. As you see above, once a new volunteer is cleared to go into the classroom, you can place them with one of your experienced volunteers. They will shadow this person. How long they shadow is based on the role.

Ongoing training. It's important to invest in volunteers on a regular basis. Here is the training schedule I have followed for this.

- Weekly training in pre-service huddle.
- Monthly video training (3 to 5 minutes) sent out to all campuses. This video is used for motivation, encouragement and spiritual growth.

- February - training at each campus, same materials.
- August - all campuses come together for church-wide training.
- November - training at each campus, same materials.

For an in-depth look at volunteer training in a multi-site church, get my book *“The Formula for Building Great Volunteer Teams.”* It’s available at www.buildingchildrensministry.com.

EVALUATION

A great way to improve your ministry is through evaluating it. Preferably you want someone to do the evaluation that does not normally attend that campus. You need fresh eyes on each campus so they can identify what can make the campus better. I would set a goal for each campus to be evaluated once a quarter. Of course, this will also depend on how many campuses you have and how far away the campuses are.

When you go a campus to evaluate, I recommend you stay there for all the services (if they have more than one service) to get a well-rounded view of the campus. Take notes during your visit on what you observe. You can use the evaluation tool for this.

The following week meet with the director of that campus and go over the notes you took. This is a great strategy to continually improve the campuses and identify best practices. Be sure to mention the good things you observe when you visit as well. If you only mention the below par things you see, the director may get discouraged. Balance your evaluation with both encouragement and improvement ideas. This is a great time to use the feedback steps I shared with you in chapter 2.

Here are some examples of evaluation tools.

Guest Services:

Primary Wins: Families feel welcomed, comfortable and valued.

New Family Registration Area and Process:

- Was the environment welcoming or hectic?
- Were there greeters? Were they smiling and friendly?
- Was there adequate signage?
- Was the area sufficiently staffed?
- Did greeters walk new families to their environments?
- How long did it take to get a new family checked in?
- Were clear instructions given for child pick up and security?

Returning attendee check-in area/process:

- Was the environment welcoming or hectic?
- Was the area sufficiently staffed?
- How long did it take a family to check in?
- Were there greeters to welcome families and assist with check-in? Were they smiling and friendly?
- Did check-in stations work properly?
- Any cleaning or repairs needed?

Safety and Security:

Primary Wins: Environments are secure, safety processes are followed, families feel safe.

Did all children have a name tag?

Were name tags checked as kids entered the classroom to make sure they were entering the proper environment?

Were parent and children tags being thoroughly checked as they were leaving?

Test each environment by prearranging to try to take a child out without a name tags. Were you stopped when you tested the security system? How did the team respond?

Were children's names being recorded on a list as they entered the room?

Was there a police officer present?

Did two volunteers take children to the bathroom?

Were people without a name tag allowed to enter environments?

Was there a fire evacuation plan posted in the rooms?

Were any room capacity codes violated?

Were children's name tags checked as they left?

Were any room capacity codes violated?

Was someone on radio in each environment?

Volunteers:

Primary wins: Volunteers are prepared. Volunteers feel loved and cared for.

- Was there a place for volunteers to check-in and be greeted?
- Were the volunteers all wearing name tags?
- Were volunteers on time?
- Did volunteers gather for prayer and instructions before check-in began?
- Did volunteers know their roles and responsibilities?
- Were volunteers engaging with the kids?
- Were volunteers worshipping and singing during worship?

Nursery:

Primary wins: Parents feel secure about the safety and care of their kids in our EC environments. Children feel secure, cared for and loved.

- Leader/child ratios met or exceeded?
- Environment welcoming and appealing to new parents?
- How efficient was the drop off and pick up process?
- Were volunteers engaged with the kids?

- Were rooms clean and well maintained?
- Diapers changed before pick-up?
- Did volunteers share nursery lesson with children?
- Was take home piece passed out to parents?
- Any repairs or cleaning needed?

Preschool:

Primary wins: Parents feel secure about the safety and care of their kids in our environments and kids are engaged and growing.

- Leader/child ratios met or exceeded?
- Environment welcoming and appealing to new parents?
- Were the rooms clean and well maintained?
- How was the delivery and communication of the lesson?
Rank from 1 to 10 (10 being best)
- How efficient was the drop off and pick up process?
- Were the volunteers engaged with the kids?
- Were the preschoolers engaged in the class elements?
- Were there any behavioral issues? If so, how were they handled?
- Was curriculum followed?
- Was take home piece passed out to parents?

Lower Elementary:

Primary wins: Every child feels known, loved and accepted. Kids are actively engaged, learning and applying God's Word to their everyday life.

- How engaging was the pre-service environment and activities?
- Were volunteers engaged with the kids during the pre-service time?
- How efficient was the transition from pre-service to service start up?
- What was the makeup of the worship team? Boy vs. girl ratio?
- Were the kids engaged in the worship segment?
- How was the delivery and communication of the lesson? Rank from 1 to 10 (10 being best).
- Were the kids engaged in the teaching segment?
- How efficient was the transition from large group to small group?
- Leader/child ratios met or exceeded in small groups?
- Were the kids engaged during small groups?
- Were there any behavioral issues? If so, how were they handled?
- Were the kids engaged during the closing segment?

- Was the service fun and kid-friendly?
- Rate the energy level from 1 to 10 (10 being best).
- Were volunteers sitting among the children and engaging with them during large group time?
- Were service elements aligned with developed schedule/plan?
- What was the quality of the media?
- Was media team adequately staff?
- Were the media and lighting elements on cue?
- How efficient was parent pick-up?
- Was take home piece passed out to parents?
- Was room clean and well maintained?
- Any repairs or cleaning needed?

Upper Elementary/Pre-teens):

Primary wins: Every child feels known, loved and accepted. Kids are actively engaged, learning and applying God's Word to their every day life.

- How engaging was the pre-service environment and activities?
- Were volunteers engaged with the kids during the pre-service time?

- How efficient was the transition from pre-service to service start up?
- What was the makeup of the worship team? Boy vs. girl ratio? Student ratio?
- Were the kids engaged in the worship segment?
- How was the delivery and communication of the lesson? Rank from 1 to 10 (10 being best).
- Were volunteers sitting among the children and engaging with them during large group time?
- Were the kids engaged in the teaching segment?
- Were there any behavioral issues? If so, how was it handled?
- Were service elements aligned with developed schedule/plan?
- What was the quality of the media?
- Was the media team adequately staffed?
- Were the media and lighting elements on cue?
- How efficient was parent pick-up?
- Was the take home piece passed out to parents?
- Was room clean and well maintained?
- Any repairs or cleaning needed?

NOTEWORTHY MULTI-SITE TRENDS

There are some trends that are unique to the world of multi-site. If you currently lead in a multi-site church, you've probably already noticed these trends. In case you have been wondering if it was just your church experiencing these trends, don't worry, most multi-site churches have the same trends.

Trend #1 - New campuses bring growth. The largest churches in the country are multi-site. The majority of churches that go multi-site experience growth. If your church is preparing to go multi-site, be prepared and ready for the growth that's coming.

Trend #2 - You will have to be intentional about keeping the original campus exciting and growing. As the key volunteers and staff transition to help launch a new campus, it will affect the original campus. People like shiny and new. You'll have to continue to be creative and think of ideas that will keep people tuned in with you at the original campus.

When and if this happens to your ministry, just remember that you are not alone. Everyone is working through this trend. Will you be okay with most of the growth coming from a new campus? Is your role to grow your campus back to where it was before families and volunteers left to help at the new campus?

If you are going to be in a multi-site church, then you have to be able to see the big picture and realize that you are one church meeting in different places. When a new campus takes off and grows, it means your church as a whole is growing. And even though it can be challenging to replace those who left to help at the new campus, you can still see God fill your campus back up with new people. I've seen it happen time and time again.

Trend #3 - You will be stretched out of your comfort zone.

Whereas you used to help plan for one campus, now you have multiple campuses to plan with. Where you used to be able to just think about one campus, now you have to think about how a decision affects all the campuses. You'll have to think at a much deeper level and look at decisions through multiple lenses. Where you used to communicate with one or two people, now you have to over-communicate to make sure your message is heard. Be ready, as you're on a growth curve, to find yourself saying, "Oops, I should have included that person in the e-mail."

The fact that you will be pushed out of your comfort zone, is a good thing. You'll become a better leader because of it. You'll think at a deeper level because of multi-site. You'll have to innovate and strategize more. Just remember, as you're trying to get a handle on your new reality, that nothing grows in the comfort zone. Yes, you will be stretched. Yes, you will be stressed at times. And yes, you'll even feel like screaming a few times because of the complexity of it all. But you will be a better and more effective leader because of it.

Trend #4 - Families will jump between campuses. In today's fast-paced society, families are looking for convenience. And that includes going to church. Many families will base which campus they are going to attend week by week, depending on what else they have on their plate. If their son has a soccer game on Sunday morning, they may show up for the Saturday night service at a different campus. Other times, they'll go to the new campus for a few months and then decide the original campus has more to offer their family and they go back. For a variety of reasons, be prepared for it.

Trend #5 - Get ready to merge. More and more dying churches are contacting growing churches and are offering to merge with them. Usually it is a church that hasn't been able to reach the next generation and they only have a handful of people left in the church.

The dying church approaches the growing church and offers to give them their building, assets, etc. I have gone through this process.

There was a small dying church that contacted us and asked if they could merge with us. Before we said we said “yes”, we made it clear that if we merged, they would follow our ministry philosophies and methods. They wholeheartedly agreed and we brought it in as a new campus. Now there are hundreds of people attending there.

One thing to note, I mentioned they had to agree to follow our style of ministry. That included the children’s ministry as well. We brought in our curriculum, our schedule, our themes, our music, etc. It was a smooth transition and “they” became “us.” This same scenario could be in your future. To avoid misalignment, I encourage you to be up front about the children’s ministry there lining up with the other campuses.

If you are part of a multi-site church or you’re getting ready to be, I am pumped for you. It means you are part of a church that is committed to reaching people far from God. While other churches sit and slowly fade away, you and your church have decided to make an impact by stretching your borders, taking a risk and going the second mile to reach people. Each new campus you open represents more kids and families you will be able to reach for Jesus. It will be a lot of work, but it will be worth it a thousand times over, when you begin seeing kids and parents being impacted forever by the Gospel.

One of the campuses I helped launch was in New York City. It was the first campus outside of our South Florida area. The campus was in Manhattan, right across the street from Central Park. The building we rented had a historic, beautiful auditorium. Downstairs was a large open area where we set up children’s ministry.

The building was owned by an atheist church. Yes, you read that correctly, a group of atheists owned the building. They met on the 3rd floor above us. I’m not sure what you talk about in an atheist church, but they met up there every week. One week, an

atheist that who had never been to their meeting before, walked into the foyer. Not knowing exactly which room the atheists were in, he walked into our church service, wondering what was happening.

Before he could turn around to leave and find the atheists' group, the Holy Spirit grabbed hold of his heart and keep him in the seat. He heard the Gospel and when the invitation was given, he came and gave His life to Christ!

That's why I get excited about multi-site ministry. When you go, you can go with the confidence that God is at work and lives will be changed for eternity. And that makes it all worth it.

Personal Reflection:

Which multi-site model is our ministry the most like? (or) If I was leading a multi-site ministry, which model would I use?

Which budget model are we using now? Is it effective for our ministry culture? (or) Which budget model would I use if we went to multi-site? Why?

When was the last time I was pushed out of my comfort zone? What did I learn? How did it help me grow?

How often do I or someone else evaluate the ministry? How can I improve in this area?

How is our staff to child ratio based on the 1 staff person for every 100-125 children? What can I do to improve this if needed?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Team Discussion Questions:

How aligned is our ministry? If that is one of our goals, how can we improve this?

Do our volunteers know what the wins are for their area of service? How can we improve in this?

How can we keep the original campus fresh and exciting with new campuses being a priority? (if multi-site)

Are we trying to do too much? What are some things we should stop doing so we can see something else become excellent?

Which of the trends mentioned are we experiencing? Is there anything we need to change or adjust because of these trends?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.

THE BRIDGE BUILDER

An old man going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
Through which was flowing a sullen tide
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.
“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting your strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way;
You’ve crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at evening tide?”
The builder lifted his old gray head;
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,
“There followed after me to-day
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!”

Will Allen Dromgoole³⁷



“If we don’t want to see the next generation drop the faith baton, then we must make sure we are handing it off properly.”

Do you like watching the relay races during the Olympics? One of the keys to winning the race is the baton handoff. The runners have a short window of time to pass the baton to the next runner.

The next generation has had several labels placed upon them, but the most popular is Gen Z.¹ By the end of 2019, Gen Z will be 32% of the world population.² There are over 73 million Gen Z kids in America³ and over 2 billion world-wide.⁴ The age range varies from study to study, but the most common age range has Gen Z as people born between 1996-2010.

The generation that will follow Gen Z has been named the Alpha Generation. The Alpha Generation is comprised of children born from 2010 and after.⁵ Since it's very early on for the Alpha Generation, we will focus on Gen Z for this chapter.

LEAD WELL BY HELPING GEN Z KNOW JESUS

Last weekend, I was consulting with a church and after the service, we went to a pizza place, where you make your own pizza. Everyone went down the “assembly line” and picked out the items they wanted on their pizza. Different kinds of sauces. Meat or no meat? What kind of meat? Different kinds of cheese. Lots of other choices when it came to toppings.

The end result? Everyone had their own personal, unique pizza that they had formed from their own tastes. It's a great idea when you're making a pizza, but it's not a great idea when it comes to a person's view of God.

A recent report from Pew Research found that 80% of Americans say they believe in God.⁶ But...for many in that group...it's a “god” they have formed using their own preferences. The “god” they believe in is not the God of the Bible. According to the report, only 56% believe in God as described in the Bible.⁷

As the next generation grows up, there is a danger that they are being led down a path that says “God is whoever you want Him to be for you.” You also see this in more and more people choosing which parts of the Bible they want to believe and not believe. For many, if their lifestyle does not line up with God’s Word, rather than changing their lifestyle, they ignore or explain away that part of God’s Word.

The end result is we are teaching the next generation, by example, that they can go down the “God assembly line” and choose whatever they want His attributes and commandments to be. In other words, they can “build their own God.”

In the book, *“The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers,”* sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, coined the phrase *“moralistic therapeutic deism”* to describe how many kids view God.

Moralistic therapeutic deism says this...⁸

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when He is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

From our view of God, comes our morality. Out of a watered down, self-formed view of God has emerged a “new morality”

that George Barna says can be summed up in these 6 statements...¹⁰

1. The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself.
2. People should not criticize another person's life choices.
3. To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire the most.
4. The highest goal in life is to enjoy it as much as possible.
5. People can believe whatever they want, as long as it doesn't affect society.
6. Any kind of sexual expression between two consenting adults is acceptable.

The slippery slope of postmodernism has led us to this.

Postmodernism says...

- There is no absolute truth.
- Truth is created in each person's mind.
- We must be tolerant and "non-judgmental."
- There is no fixed moral code. What is right for you is right for you and what is right for me is right for me.

Sound Familiar?

This is the culture that the next generation is being raised in. It's easy to see why it's leading them to "build their own "god."

Down the assembly line they go. Don't want God to bring judgment? Fine. Just leave that off. Want there to be many ways to heaven? Fine. Add that to your view of God. Don't want God telling you to be part of a local church? No problem. Just leave that off. Only want a God of 6 commandments? That's okay if it works for you. You get the point.

More than ever, we must teach kids a Biblical view of God. In a "make your own version of God culture," we must help them see that our morality must come from God rather than making a god, based on our own morals and lifestyle choices.

We must help the next generation understand that our view of God must be grounded in the Scriptures and the scriptures alone. The next generation is under tremendous pressure to forsake the God of the Bible and embrace a false god of their own making. It's a replay of the children of Israel forming their own god out of a golden calf. Which God wasn't very happy about, by the way.

May we take kids back to the true nature and attributes of God. When they see who God really is, they will have to make a choice. Surrender and worship Him with their lives or turn to a false god of their own making. **Rather than just helping kids know about God, we must help them know God.** There's a big difference. I can say I know about Lebron James. But I don't know Lebron James personally. See the difference? So, how can we help children move beyond just knowing about God to really knowing God?

The first step is to help kids understand what it means to become a follower of Jesus. They must understand what sin is and that they have sinned. They must understand next that there is a penalty for sin. If we do not accept Jesus into our lives, we will be separated from God when we die.

"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus our Lord." -Romans 6:23⁹

Next, kids must understand that Jesus came to the earth, lived a perfect life, died on the cross in our place, was buried and three days later rose from the dead.

“But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

Romans 5:8¹⁰

Then kids must understand that beginning a relationship with Jesus is like a free gift. You can't work for it or earn it. You receive it by calling on Jesus in prayer and asking Him to be three things in your life.

“Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 10:13¹¹

The first thing is asking Him to be their FORGIVER. This means you are sorry for your sins and you ask Jesus to forgive you. You trust Him and Him alone as your way to heaven.

“He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins.”

Ephesians 1:7¹²

Secondly, we must ask Jesus to be our LEADER. This means you ask Jesus to be your “Lord.” You are asking Jesus to be in charge of your life. He is your “boss” or “coach.” This doesn't mean you will be perfect, but it does mean you will do your best to follow Him and when you blow it, you ask for His forgiveness.

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:9¹³

Thirdly, we must ask Jesus to be our **FRIEND**. This means you are entering a relationship with Him. You spend time talking with Him each day. You read his “text message” (the Bible) each day. Before you make a decision, you talk with Him about it.

“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”
Proverbs 18:24¹⁴

When equipping parents to lead their child to Jesus, you will often hear the questions, “How do I know if my child is ready or not?” There are some key signs to look for. These are signs that God is working in their life and they are being drawn to Jesus.

#1 - The child continues to bring up the topic on a regular basis. If the child keeps coming back to you and asking about following Jesus, that’s a good sign God is working in the child’s life.

#2 - You sense the child feels this something they NEED to do rather than something they just WANT to do. An example would be a child who wants to begin a relationship with Jesus just because the other kids in his/her class are doing this as well and it looks like a “fun” thing to do. Versus a child who knows they need Jesus.

#3 - They have a clear understanding of what sin is and they acknowledge they have sinned. Before you can be saved, you must first be lost.

What age should the child be to enter a relationship with Jesus? There is not a specific age. Each child is different. But I have found that around age 7-8, children begin understanding what it means to follow Jesus. The Starting Point class is normally offered for grades K - 5th.

“Children are the greatest mission field in the world.”



But we must get there quickly. We only have a short window of time to reach children before they grow up. And we know once a child is grown up, the likelihood that they will come to Jesus is very slim. I am reminded of this each time I see wet cement. The statement that comes to my mind is, “Children are like wet cement.” Think about it -when wet cement is first poured, it is flexible and can be written on, molded and crafted. But soon it becomes concrete, doesn’t it? It gets hard. It gets set. And you know how hard it is to write on or shape concrete. See the difference?

A recent study was released that says 13% of Gen Z are atheists. This means there are twice as many children who are atheists compared to adult atheists (6%).¹⁵ The window of time is short. We must reach the next generation with the Gospel. We must get there before their hearts turn to concrete. I am reminded of this quote by George Barna.

**“In the race to a child’s heart,
the first one there wins.”¹⁶
George Barna**

If we can get there first and share the Gospel with them, we can reach them. Let’s get there with God’s way of forgiveness, His wisdom and His Word. We must reach the next generation while we can. The clock is ticking. Can you hear it?

LEAD WELL BY HELPING GEN Z FIND THEIR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Gen Z is growing up immersed in technology. They have never known a world without smart phones and it’s an integral part of their lives. How integral? Consider these stats.

- 97% own a smartphone. They are the first generation who will spend their entire adolescence with a smart phone.¹⁷

- 78% own a tablet.¹⁸
- 50% will be connected online for 10 hours a day.¹⁹
- They interact with up to 5 screens a day.²⁰
- 70% watch at least 2 hours of online video each day.²¹

You could go as far as to say Gen Z is addicted to technology. 80% feel distressed when kept away from their personal electronic devices.²² Try asking Gen Z to pull away from their smartphone for an extended time and they will become anxious and upset. Some researchers have even called them Generation Glued, because they are always glued to their smart phone. They check their social media, in many cases non-stop throughout the day. It's the first thing they look at in the morning and the last thing they see before they go to sleep at that night.

Paradigm Malibu is a treatment facility on the Pacific Coast. It started out treating people with classic drug and alcohol addictions. Now it has developed a program specifically for Gen Z kids who have device use disorders.²³ Kids have threatened to kill themselves when told their internet may be cut off. There are many positive things about technology. It can be a tremendous resource that helps the next generation learn, explore, create and communicate. But Gen Z is also being exposed to the dark side of technology. Pornography. Abuse. Predators. Drugs. Bullying.

Let's talk specifically about bullying. Yes, kids in previous generations experienced bullying in person. But when they got home, it was a safe place where they could relax, play and enjoy being with their family. Not today. Social media has made bullying much more common. Online bullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A child can be bullied at school, go home and be

bullied for hours more on social media. Kids can already be cruel with their words in person. But they are much crueler online.

The constant bullying has caused many Gen Z kids to experience anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and even suicide. Today's kids are much more likely to have anxiety than their grandparents did at their age. Anxiety is the leading mental health issue among children and continues to rise.²⁶ And then there are selfies. Gen Z loves to take them and then put them out there for the world to see. Anxiously waiting to see who is liking them. Who is following them? How many followers do they have? What comments are being made? Who is clicking on their posts. Gen Z feels the pressure to portray themselves as living in a world of glamour. Their social media feed is full of the amazing things they are experiencing. The highlight reel of their days. They want everyone to see how wonderful and exciting their life is.

But for many Gen Zers, their self-esteem is directly correlated to how many likes and good comments they get when they post something. One negative comment can ruin their self-esteem for a week. And the hurtful words, verbal and written, that come at them, can make them feel worthless.

As we transfer the baton of faith to Gen Z, we have a great opportunity to lead well and show **Gen Z that first and foremost, they are valuable to God and He cares for them immensely.**

We can help them untie their self-worth from social media and the opinions of others and instead, link it to how God feels about them. We can show them how much God cares for them by sharing verses like Matthew 6:26 with them.

“Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to Him than they are?”²⁴

Matthew 6:26²⁰

LEAD WELL BY HELPING GEN Z SEE THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL

There's something else that Gen Z faces each day. **They live in a culture of volatility. Terrorism and violence can happen at any time and at any place.** On an airplane. At the store. At the movie theater. Walking down the street. It can even happen at church. In big cities and in small, rural towns. Nowhere seems to be safe. Whereas previous generations walked into school anticipating learning, Gen Z walks in to school anticipating potential violence.

As we are in the transfer zone, carefully handing them the faith baton, **we can share with them that God is in control.** We don't have to live with fear and timidity. We can walk in His power, love and self-discipline.

**“For God has not given us a spirit of fear
and timidity, but of power, love, and
self-discipline.”
2 Timothy 1:7 ²⁵**

We can lead well by helping Gen Z see that God controls the future. Their fear may say “will I be able to secure a good job when I finish college one day?” Fear says, “will I even be able to go to college?” Fear says, “will I even survive high school without being shot? Fear says, “do I have any kind of future?”

Lead well by taking them to God's Word and showing them His promises. Promises like these.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”
Jeremiah 29:11 ²⁶*

*“I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”
Philippians 4:13 ²⁷*

When we share God’s promises with Gen Z and encourage them to walk in His power, we are setting them up for true success.

LEAD WELL BY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GEN Z

*“Gen Z doesn’t care how much you know, until they know
how much you _____?”*

You know the answer. It’s the word “care.” And it’s true. If you want to lead Gen Z, then you must first show Gen Z that you care about them. When you make the time to build a relationship with them, then they will open their hearts to listen to what you have to say. Children aren’t motivated by rules...they are motivated by relationship. Let’s look at some ways you can build a relationship at church with Gen Z kids. The first thing sounds simple, and it is, but it is very powerful when put into action.

Use their name. Look what John the apostle says.

*“Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings.
Greet the **friends there, each by name.**”
3 John 14 ²⁸*

John, who wrote this book of the Bible, asked the believers to be personally greeted by name. You see...**names matter.** Especially in children’s ministry. It makes a big difference in a child’s life when he or she is personally known by name at church. **The sweetest sound to a child’s ears is his or her name.**

It should be our goal that every single child who attends our church is known by name. We should strive for every child to

hear their name being used by a caring volunteer every time he or she is at church. Take another look at the verse. Notice John calls the believers “**friends.**” **The reason names matter is because relationships matter.** If we want to see kids grow up to love Jesus, we must ensure they have significant relationships with volunteers and staff.

Discipleship happens through relationship.

Spiritual growth happens through relationship.

Care happens through relationship.

Personal prayer happens through relationship.

Mentoring happens through relationship.

Influence in a child’s life happens through relationship.

How can this happen in a growing church? **Name tags are a good start.** You should already have this in place for safety and security purposes. Encourage your volunteers to look at kids’ name tags and use their names as much as possible when interacting with them.

Place kids in small groups where they are called by name and prayed for by name each week. The larger your ministry becomes, the smaller it must become. Kids don’t come back because of amazing facilities, cool music or fun videos. They come back because someone knows their name and cares about them.

Help kids strengthen their relationships. Younger kids are all about connecting with their family. As kids grow, this shifts more to connecting with their friends. Kids don’t call it “relationships.” They call it “being friends” with someone or “my best friend.” Though the terminology may be different for kids, the bottom line is this. Relationships are a big deal for kids.

Help kids discover and use their gifts and talents. We

know a huge part of discipleship is using your gifts and talents to actively live out your faith through works and acts of service. The Bible tells us faith without works is dead. There is something about using your gifts and talents for the Kingdom that activates your faith and makes it come alive. This has been proven to be true in the stats that show kids who continue in their faith after high school are the kids who are actively involved in serving.

LEAD WELL BY PUTTING KIDS IN CIRCLES

What does your ministry environment look like on Sunday mornings? Kids in rows of chairs? Kids in circles? Both? I believe circles are better than rows in children's ministry. Here are some reasons why.

Circles are more conducive to relationships. Kids want to be personally known. It's hard to be known when you're just another kid sitting in rows of chairs. But when you are part of a small circle of 6 to 8 kids, you can be known and build relationships with the other kids in your group. Kids may walk in your doors because of a cool building, fun games and high-energy music, but they will stick around because of relationships they establish. In a row, you're looking ahead at the person up front or at the back of someone's head. But in a circle, you are looking into the eyes of other kids and a leader. This is where connections can be made and relationships can be formed.

Circles create more effective learning environments. Rows of chairs stem from the bygone industrial age where teachers prepared kids to work in factories. Everyone was taught the same way. Sit down and be quiet while I download information into your brain by lecturing you. Problem is...that's the least effective way to teach kids. But that's what you do when you've got kids in rows of chairs.

But when you place kids in circles, you open up an endless world of teaching possibilities. You are able to replace lecturing with

collaboration, engage all learning styles, do activities/crafts and get kids involved in hands-on, active learning.

Circles compel you to keep proper ratios. For kids to be personally known you have to have the proper volunteer to child ratio. Ideally, for elementary, this should be 8 to 10 kids for every volunteer. When you have kids in rows of chairs, you can skimp on your ratios and get by with it...but the kids are shortchanged. When you have circles of 8 or 10 kids, it forces you to make sure you have enough volunteers. Is it more work? Yes, but the return is exponential.

Circles are more conducive to intercessory prayer. When kids are in a small circle with other kids and a leader, they can share real prayer requests and be personally prayed for. In the ministries I have led, we even take time for kids to write down their prayer requests. The leaders can then take the requests home and pray for the kids during the week.

Circles encourage conversation. When you're in a row, you are facing one person. And as stated before, the conversation is usually one-sided, a teacher up front lecturing. In fact, if kids try to have a conversation, they are told to be quiet and turn their attention back up front. Conversation is discouraged in this format. But when kids are in a circle, they are facing each other and conversation can flow naturally. Questions can be discussed, ideas can be shared and deeper dives can happen.

Circles make guests feel welcome. When kids are in rows of chairs, a new guest can come in, sit down and never be introduced to the other kids. But in a circle, guests can get to know other kids and establish friendships.

Circles help kids attend more frequently. When a child is part of a circle, they are missed when they are absent. When a child is part of a circle, they are held accountable. When a child is part of a circle, the leader can encourage the child to be faithful. When a child is part of a circle, they develop friends who they look forward to seeing.

Here are a few more ideas that are simple, yet will help you

lead well and make an impact in the lives of the next generation.

When you are talking with kids, enter their world.

Talk with them instead of at them. This will show them that you are really interested in helping them. What's their favorite movie? What did they do this week? How's school going? What's their favorite sport's team? What's going on in their life? What's something fun you've done recently?

I remember the time I stopped in to check on one of our kids' services. It was during large group time and everyone was up front worshipping. Everyone except for one boy in the back who was sitting on the floor with his back against the wall. He had a frown on his face that said, "I hate being here today. Somebody rescue me!"

I went and sat down next to him on the floor. I tried talking him in to joining the other kids, but he wanted nothing to do with it...or me. He just grunted and turned away from me. I tried several things, but nothing was working.

Finally, I started asking him about video games. What game system did he have? What were his favorite games? Suddenly, the frown left and he cracked a smile. He began to tell me about his game system and what his favorite games were. His whole attitude changed. I talked with him a few more minutes and then said, "I'm going to go and join the other kids. It looks like a lot of fun. You're welcome to come and join me if you'd like." I went up and started worshipping with the other kids. And a minute later, guess who was tugging on my coat? Yes. It was the boy from the back of the room. He participated for the rest of the service and was engaged. What changed his attitude was when I entered his world and started talking about video games. That was the bridge I built to his heart, which enabled me to bring him back to a place of worship.

Impact happens in the free times. Rather than standing in the back texting before service, get involved and play games with kids, do activities with kids, etc. Don't just watch kids have fun, have fun with them. When you take an interest in their activities, you'll

Be real. When you talk with kids and get involved in their lives, you become a real person that they will look up to and care about. You become not just a “teacher”...but a friend. Kids will listen to someone who is their friend. Kids will participate with someone who is their friend. Kids will come back to church to see someone who is their friend.

Circles give volunteers an opportunity to make a significant impact. Long-term impact happens when leaders have the ability to invest in children individually. This can't happen in rows, but it can happen in circles. Volunteers want to know they are making a difference. If they find themselves standing behind a row of chairs just helping with crowd-control, they will grow discouraged and not feel needed. But place them in a circle, face-to-face with a small group of kids and they will embrace the challenge. Kids will begin to call their name in the hallway and parents will know them on a first name basis. They can truly become a champion in the life of a child.

Circles allow volunteers to know when someone is missing and the opportunity to send personal correspondence. Provide your volunteers with miss you cards. When a child is not there, they can write out a note and leave it with you to mail that week. A key part of the communication piece you send is to **make it personal**. Think about how you feel when you get a generic email, note or letter that's not personally addressed to you? It's very cold and impersonal, isn't it? And normally it's quickly discarded. But when you receive a personal, handwritten note it's different, isn't it? It makes you feel valued.

Several years ago, the ministry I led had the typical large group/small group format. For 30-40 minutes, the kids sat in rows of chairs and then moved into circles of small groups for the remaining time. This was okay, but we found we lost precious time transitioning the kids from large group to small group. And we wanted to make sure each group had a quality experience.

So, we decided to remove the rows completely and bring in round tables (circles) and put the chairs around the tables. When kids

arrive, they're connected with their group (6 to 8 kids) tables. When kids arrive, they're connected with their group (6 to 8 kids) and a volunteer leader at their table. There are times when they leave the table for things like games, worship and other activities that need more space to do. A facilitator up front gives verbal instructions for the entire service and keeps everyone on schedule. The volunteers follow along and lead the kids at their table in the games, discussions, activities, prayer time, memory verse segments and other parts of the lesson per the facilitator's instructions. The results have been outstanding as kids are connecting, engaging and learning together.

You can see the curriculum that is written for this format at www.buildingchildrensministry.com. There is a year's worth of the curriculum available and it teaches kids 12 foundational truths from salvation all the way to spiritual leadership.

LEAD WELL BY TEACHING GEN Z DOCTRINE

WHAT you teach kids matters. The **CONTENT** of the discipleship tools you create for parents matters. Why? Because if kids do not understand the foundational doctrines of the faith, they will have a very difficult time defending their faith. As I shared earlier, 13% of Gen Z claim to be atheists. This is over double the amount of adults who say they are atheists.

More than ever, kids need to know why they believe what they believe.

Their faith must be built on a solid foundation or it will crumble when they are challenged on a significant level. Here are 6 key doctrines that are foundational. As you look through these, I would encourage you to get the scope and sequence of the curriculum you are currently using and see if it is teaching these doctrines.

God - God is a Spirit, life, self-existent, unchanging, unlimited by time and space. God consistently works out His eternal plan by guiding and overseeing all things by His wise and holy purpose.

The Bible is the Word of God - the Holy Spirit guided human authors so that what they wrote in Scripture is accurate and without error.

Christ - Jesus was, in fact, God incarnate in human form. He is the second person in the Trinity who came to live among us, die for us, and resurrect that someday we might be able to live with Him forever.

Holy Spirit - the Holy Spirit is not merely a force, but has all the attributes of personality and is also God as the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit's work brings us to Christ and salvation, equips us for ministry, empowers us for impact and produces spiritual fruit in our life.

Salvation - The single most significant experience in life is receiving the salvation provided by Christ's death on the cross. When we invite Jesus to be our Forgiver, Leader and Friend, our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life.

Church - Jesus gave us the church as a means of Christians assembling together to encourage and help one another in the Christian life and to enable them to be more effective in reaching out to others. The church exists for worship, instruction, fellowship and evangelism.

Some people hear the word "doctrine" and assume that means you have to teach the kids these doctrines in a boring, lecture-style lesson. Not at all, this is not about how you teach, but about what you teach. You can teach Bible doctrine to the kids in a fun,

engaging and relevant way. In fact, if you teach the doctrines in a fun, engaging, hands on, learner-based way, kids will actually be able to remember them better.

Others might suggest that you can wait until kids are in middle school or high school to teach them doctrine. But stats show us that the front lines for the next generation are now in elementary school. I believe we must start teaching doctrine in age-appropriate ways beginning as early as preschool.

When we teach kids doctrine, I believe we must also take them on a deeper dive so they can defend their beliefs when they are challenged. And trust me, they will be challenged. We must equip them so they don't just survive these attacks, but thrive and win others to Christ. We must lead kids in asking the type of questions you see below so they can discover the answers and be prepared to give a defense of what they believe.

The Bible is the Word of God:

How do you know it's true?

Wasn't it just written by men?

The Bible contains errors, doesn't it?

God:

How do you know God is real?

Why would a good God allow bad things to happen?

How do you know God created everything?

Christ:

How do you know Jesus was the Son of God?

How do you know Jesus rose from the dead?

Why do you believe Jesus is the only way to heaven?

Holy Spirit:

How can the Holy Spirit be everywhere at once?

Why do you think the Holy Spirit is God?

Why doesn't the Holy Spirit stop people from being hurt?

Salvation:

Why would God send people to hell?

Don't all religions lead to heaven?

Won't I go to heaven if I do good things?

Church:

Is the church full of hypocrites?

Do churches just want peoples' money?

Is the church judgmental?

Questions like these are why we must teach kids Bible doctrine and equip them to defend their faith. The next generation is at stake. Every Sunday matters. You matter. Your ministry matters.

**LEAD WELL BY HELPING GEN Z DISCOVER
THE JOY OF SERVING OTHERS**

We often say that kids are the church of tomorrow. While that's true, I believe we must remember that kids are also the

church of today. For too long, we've said "they're just kids" and hindered them from making the huge impact they are capable of. It is amazing what kids can do when we release them to use their gifts and talents now. Here are some examples of kids who are doing big stuff at a young age.

Evan from EvanTube, at the time of this writing, is a 9-year-old toy reviewer from Pennsylvania. He has more than 2.8 million subscribers on YouTube and is making \$1.3 million a year, according to Fast Company.²⁹

Baby Yebin, a Korean YouTube star, has over 1.9 million views. She also has over 825,000 followers on Facebook.³⁰

Addie, 8, and Jillian, 10, are the stars of BabyTeeth4. They have over 1.2 million YouTube subscribers at the time of this writing. Their video, Fast Cars, Bad Kids, has over 1.1 billion views at the time of this writing. They have made over 650 videos and produce 5 days a week.³¹

Christian Lalama began playing the piano at 4. He has 500,000 fans on Tic Tok and his YouTube videos have had more than 5 million views.³²

Ryan toy's review is the top earner this year on YouTube. His toy reviews brought in over 22 million dollars. Ryan is 7-years-old.³³

These are just a few examples of the impact kids can have when adults believe in them and give them the opportunity to use their gifts and talents. How can we let kids be the church of today?

Show them that God uses kids for His glory. Take kids to the Scripture and show them the examples of how God has used kids in a great way. Show them the boy whose lunch Jesus used to feed the 5,000. Show them the little girl who God used to bring healing to a mighty man named Naaman. Show them how God used a young boy named David to defeat the Philistines and secure victory for the nation of Israel. Show them how children led the way in surrounding Jesus with praise in the temple. Show them how Joash was anointed king at age 7. Show them how Josiah was anointed king at age 8. When we teach kids that God can use them right now, they will be inspired to be the church now.

Help kids discover the gifts and talents God has placed inside them. Each child has God-given gifts and talents. As we help kids move into those gifts and talents, they will begin walking in confidence and effectiveness. This can be done by helping kids find out what their spiritual gifts are as well as what they are naturally drawn to and enjoy doing in relation to serving others.

A huge benefit of kids serving is spiritual growth. If you really want to see the kids in your ministry grow spiritually, get them serving. There is something about serving that ignites a child's faith and causes exponential growth. Looking back at my own journey, it was when I began serving as a teen that my spiritual life was changed. Here are some examples of how you can involve kids in serving. Some of these I mentioned in a previous chapter, but I wanted to hit them again as we talk about leading the next generation well.

Pre-service projects. Some kids arrive for church early. Often we just have them hang out, play games, interact with the leaders, etc. Nothing wrong with that. But what if you had service projects waiting that they could do? Things like writing a note to a soldier who is serving overseas. Putting together a care package for senior adults who are in a retirement home. Making cards for local firemen. Kids love doing these type of things.

Serving in key roles. Kids can be greeters at room doors. Kids can help new children feel welcome. Kids can serve on the worship team. Kids can help run audio, video, etc. with someone overseeing them. Kids can help take the offering. Kids can pray for other kids.

Serving with their parents at church. It is awesome to see a father and son serving together on the parking lot team. Or mothers with their daughters greeting at the doors. Or a mother and her teenage daughter serving together in a preschool room.

After church projects. The pastor can teach about serving others and then dismiss service 20 minutes early. You can have assembly lines set up where families can work together to assemble food packages for needy families.

Deliver meals. At Thanksgiving or Christmas, families can assemble and then deliver a meal to a needy family.

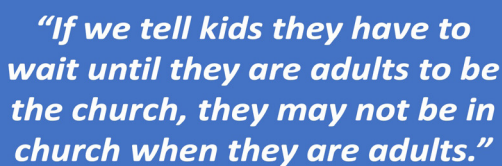
Summer serving projects. Instead of taking kids on a trip to an amusement park or other big activity, take them to an all-day service project. Charge them registration which will cover a t-shirt, food, transportation, supplies, etc. I can tell you from experience that it will change their life.

Celebrate how God is using the kids to make an impact. You can be sure when you give kids the opportunity to be the church of today, God will work in them and through them. Celebrate this. Share the stories of the impact God is using them to make. Make a big deal about it, because it is a big deal.

Remember that kids who start serving God young in life have a far greater probability of serving Him for a lifetime. Kids who engage in being the church, rather than just attending the church, will continue being actively involved in the church when they are adults. We tell kids to “sit still and be quiet” and then we wonder why we can’t get them to serve as adults. It’s because we told them not to! It’s time we let kids be the church...today ...right now...they can serve...they can be used by God...they can make

an impact...they can change the serving temperature of your church

When we let kids be the church of today, it helps activate their faith and makes it come alive! Kids serving as greeters are more likely to grow up to be adults greeting. Kids leading worship are more likely to grow up to be adults leading worship. Kids having a part in teaching the lesson are more likely to grow up to be adults teaching the lesson. Kids spreading the Gospel are more likely to grow up to be adults spreading the Gospel. Kids serving as ushers are more likely to grow up to be adults serving as ushers. Kids involved in missions are more likely to grow up to be adults involved in missions. Will you let the kids in your church be the church of today?



“If we tell kids they have to wait until they are adults to be the church, they may not be in church when they are adults.”

LEAD WELL BY CALLING GEN Z UP

Most Gen Z kids get “called out” all the time. They get called out for not doing their homework. They get called out for not completing their chores. They get called out for not cleaning their room. They get called out for failing a test at school. They get called out for lying. They get called out for spending too much time online. They get called out for disobeying their parents. They get called out for making a mess and not straightening it up. They get called out for arguing with their brother or sister. They are used to being called out.

I believe it is time that we start calling kids up rather than out. It’s time we start calling them up to a life of integrity. It’s time we start calling them up to honesty. It’s time we start calling

them up to making wise choices. It's time we start calling them up to using their gifts and talents for the Kingdom. It's time we start calling them up to be the best version of themselves they can be.

Here's an example. At summer camp, one of the boys steals another boy's shirt out of his suitcase. It is discovered who took it and so now the boy who stole is standing in front of you. Rather than berating him and calling him out for stealing, you call him up. You say, "Alex, I was told you stole something from another camper's suitcase. I want you to know that I believe you are better than that. I believe God has a great plan for your life. And He wants you to be prepared for that plan by living a life of integrity and honesty. You see, God is a God of integrity and honesty. And He wants you to grow up to be a man of integrity and honesty. I'm calling you up to live like that so you can walk in His blessings."

I believe there is a big difference between being called out and being called up. A good analogy is a minor league baseball player being called up to play in the big league. It's a step up and requires total commitment. We have a lot of Gen Z kids who are stuck in the "minor leagues" of following Jesus. He is calling them up to walk in the adventure of going all in to serve Him. Oh, the blessings and impact He wants to bestow in Gen Z and through Gen Z. And He wants to use you to call them up to that place. Call Gen Z up and watch God use them in a mighty way.

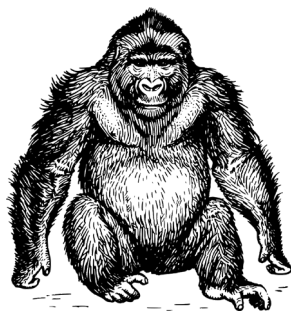
Invest in Gen Z
Mentor Gen Z
Challenge Gen Z
Disciple Gen Z

LEAD WELL BY WALKING YOUR TALK

Leading well means leading with integrity, honesty and character. Especially when you are leading Gen Z. They can quickly see hypocrisy, dishonesty and selfishness. One of the reasons so many of Gen Z's parents, the Millennials, have dropped out of church is because they got tired of church politics, church splits and leaders who didn't walk the talk.

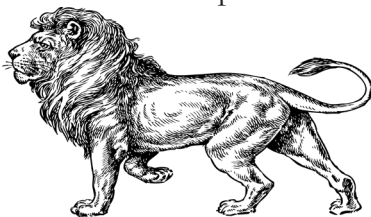
Did you hear about the man who applied for a job at the zoo? He got a call to come in for an interview. He did well at the interview and was informed he was hired. He was to be at the zoo bright and early. He arrived the next day at 8:00 am. An hour before the zoo opened. He was taken into the zoo director's office. The zoo director said, "Our gorilla died last night. Lots of people are going to be disappointed if they don't get to see the gorilla today. So, here's what we are going to do. I have another gorilla being transferred over from the zoo in Suffolk. But for today, here's what we are going to do. I'd like you to put on the gorilla costume and sit in the back of the cage. Just act like a gorilla. Move around some. Eat some bananas. You know...gorilla type stuff."

The man wasn't thrilled with this. He thought he'd probably just be asked to walk around with a broom and pan and sweep up. But he agreed and put on the costume and sat at the back of the cage all day. Kids pointed at him. Parents took pictures of him. Another employee came through and tossed some bananas into the cage which he ate. Finally, the zoo closed and the new employee took off the costume and went home. The man showed up again the next day and once again was asked to go into the director's office. The director said, "The plane that was supposed to fly in the new gorilla was having some



safety issues this morning so the flight has been delayed for a day. The new gorilla won't get here until tomorrow. So...we need you to play the part of the gorilla one more day." What could the man say? He put on the costume again and went and got in place inside the cage.

The zoo opened and kids and their parents came by to see the "gorilla." Mid-morning he looked over and to his utter horror, he notice that the gate between his cage and the next cage had been accidentally left unlocked. And inside the next cage was...a huge lion. But it got worse! The lion pushed the gate open and started walking toward him. Oh no...he was going to be eaten by the lion! He started yelling for help! As the lion got right up beside him, he heard the lion whisper something. The lion said, "Don't yell or you're going to give both of us away. I was talked into putting on this lion costume this morning. Apparently, the lion is sick, so I took its place. Calm down and relax or we will both lose our jobs!



The truth is Gen Z can see right through our "masks" when we are faking it or being hypocritical. They don't expect us to be perfect, but they do want us to have a sincere, dedicated faith in God. And they are watching when we blow it. But if we humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness, their respect for us will increase. Think about this...

**"Children won't always do what you say,
but they never fail to imitate who you are."**

As you lead Gen Z, remember this as well...

**"You teach what you know,
you reproduce who you are."**

There is a great example of this found in 2 Timothy 1:5.

“I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same continues strong in you.”³⁴

Growing up, Timothy saw the faith of his grandmother and mother. Notice what kind of faith it was. It was a sincere, genuine faith. Because of Lois’ and Eunice’s sincere faith, Timothy made the decision to follow Jesus as well.

May the children and parents in our ministries look at our faith and see that is sincere. May the children and parents in our ministries look at our faith and see it is real. May the children and parents in our ministries look at our faith and be inspired to serve and follow Jesus.

Personal Reflection:

Am I helping kids discover the gifts and talents God has given them? How can I improve this?

Am I leveraging the family relationships in a kid’s life to help them grow spiritually? How can I improve in this?

Is each child hearing their name spoken each week? Is each child being prayed for by name? How can we improve in this?

Am I helping kids discover the gifts and talents God has given them? How can I improve this?

What are some ways I can help kids see who they are in Christ? How can I help them find their identity in Him instead of other kids?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.

Team Discussion Questions:

How can we help the next generation grasp a Biblical view of who God is?

How can we get Gen Z more involved in serving? Inside the church? Outside the church?

Are we helping kids understand and be committed to the doctrines of the faith? How can we improve this?

How can we inform and equip parents to protect their children online?

What are some ways we can call kids up to God's best?

Action Steps:

1.

2.

3.

May the truth and commandments of Psalm 78
be true in our lives.

O my people, listen to my instructions.
Open your ears to what I am saying,
for I will speak to you in a parable.
I will teach you hidden lessons from our past -
stories we have heard and known,
stories our ancestors handed down to us.
**We will not hide these truths from our children;
we will tell the next generation**
about the glorious deeds of the Lord,
about His power and His mighty wonders.
For He issued his laws to Jacob;
He gave his instructions to Israel.
**He commanded our ancestors
to teach them to their children,
so the next generation might know them -
even the children not yet born -
and they in turn will teach their own children.**
So each generation should set its hope anew on God,
not forgetting His glorious miracles.

Psalm 78: 1-7 ³⁵

“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God,
the Lord alone.

And you must love the Lord
your God with all your heart,
all your soul, and all your strength.
And you must commit yourselves
wholeheartedly to these commands
that I am giving you today.

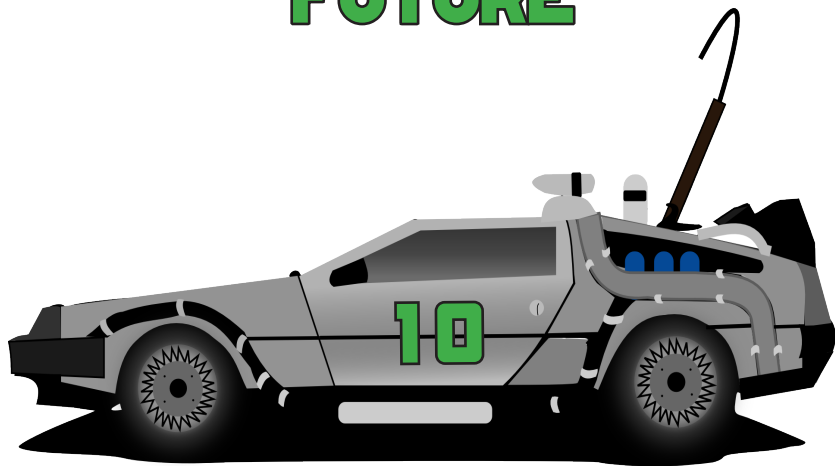
**Repeat them again and again
to your children. Talk
about them when you are
at home and when you are on the road,
when you are going to bed
and when you are getting up.**

Tie them to your hands
and wear them on your forehead
as reminders. Write them on the doorposts
of your house and on your gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:4-9³⁶



LEAD WELL FOR THE FUTURE



“The message is timeless...but our methods must be timely.”

All across the nation there are churches that are on the verge of extinction. The reason? They have few, if any children in their congregation. Show me an empty nursery and I'll show you a church that will go extinct in a few years. If there is no crying, then your church is dying. If we are going to lead well in the future, then we must be willing to let go of the past and focus on the future.

“If you spend more time talking about what God did 20 or even 10 years ago, than about what He is doing now, you’re looking in the rear-view mirror instead of preparing for the future.”

Be thankful for the past. Honor the past. But don't worship the past. And don't let the past dictate your future. Don't miss the new adventure God has in front of you because you're keeping looking through the murky lens of the past. What worked 10 years ago, may not be what your church needs today. Always be striving to get better. The natural pathway is to get lulled into complacency by your past ministry success. Once you become satisfied with where you are, you stop growing as a leader. Once a ministry becomes okay with where it is, it stops making progress. **Downhill is the only direction you can roll when you've got it in neutral.**

Your next adventure is waiting for you outside your comfort zone. To keep your edge and avoid this danger, you must never be okay with things being “okay.” You must remain obsessed with making things better. If you want to avoid slipping into complacency, then...

Question everything you do on a regular basis. Is it still effective? Is it relevant? Is it the best use of our time and resources?

Always look for ways to make what you do better. Evaluate. Debrief. Tweak. Change.

Hold everything except the message with open hands. Don't let past accomplishments cause you to miss future opportunities.

MAKE TIME TO UPDATE

Are you like me? Sometimes I don't take time to update the operating system and apps on my mobile devices. It's easy to ignore updates for a variety of reasons such as being too busy... procrastination...being satisfied with the way things are. I can get by with this for a while, but eventually it catches up with me. One of my devices is an iPad 1. Yes...it's ancient. There are many apps and games that won't work on this iPad because the operating system is out of date and the new stuff isn't compatible with it. The result...I am limited on what I can do with this device. If I want to have access to the latest apps, I must replace it with a newer one.

There's a principle in this for us. If we're going to stay relevant and operating at peak level, we must constantly update our ministries and when needed, replace what's not working with something newer. I know it's not always convenient to update. Ministry is like a moving train, isn't it? Sunday always returns...and you've got to be ready. Always looking ahead, preparing for the next Sunday, event or program. But it's vital to take time to evaluate and update. It takes intentionality. Look what Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, had to say about this.

"The biggest room in your ministry should be room for improvement."

"We change every day. We changed every day when he was here, and we've been changing every day since he's not been here. I don't think the values should change. But everything else can change. Yes, there will be

things where we say something and two years later we'll feel totally different. Actually, there may be things we say that we may feel totally different about in a week. We're okay with that. Actually, we think it's good that we have the courage to admit it.”¹

If you are going to lead your children's ministry into the future, it's vital that you have this same mind-set. I personally know ministries that were once thriving, but are now dead because they either weren't prepared or willing to change.

After every weekend, ask yourself and a few other key leaders in the ministry, these three questions.

What is one thing that went well this past weekend?

(Ask this question to find out what is working well.)

What is one thing you noticed that we can improve?

(Ask this question to find out what needs to be tweaked, changed or dropped.)

Is there a story about a kid's or family's life that was impacted? (Ask this question to find out what's bearing fruit and to remind us “why” we do what we do and to celebrate life change and spiritual growth.)

Children's ministries must be willing to change if they are going to continue to reach kids and families at an optimal level. You can't go forward if you keep going back to the past and allowing it to dictate what you do now. You must be willing to loosen the grip you have on the past before you can grab what's before you. Show me a ministry that is thriving and I'll show you a ministry that is willing to update for the next generation.

You can lead well and take your ministry into the future by doing three things. Let's jump in and talk about it.

Step 1 - REIMAGINE. This means asking “why?”

“After you’ve done a thing the same way for two years, look it over carefully. After five years, look at it with suspicion. And after ten years, throw it away and start all over.”

Alfred Edward Perlman²

Why are we doing this program? Is it because we’ve always done it?

Why should we make some changes?

Why aren’t we accomplishing the goals we’ve set?

Why are we hesitant to move the ministry out of our comfort zones?

Step 2 - REINVENT. This means asking “what if?”

What if we switched curriculums?

What if we stopped our events that aren’t effective?

What if we made our kids’ environments more kid-friendly by redecorating?

What if we used social media to connect with parents?

What if we changed the old tired name of our children’s ministry to something new and fresh?

What if we gave our ministry logo a fresh, updated look?

What if we dropped some tired, old programs and replaced them with something fresh and new?

McDonald's is a great example of being willing to change to stay relevant. Think about it for a few minutes with me. They introduced the Happy Meal (kids' meal) in 1979³. It contained a hamburger, french fries, cookies and other "healthy" items. Fast forward to today. Happy Meals are still very popular with kids. Here's why. It's not necessarily the food. It's the box's theming and toys that come with the meal, that kids want. While the food remains the same, the theming and toys change to stay relevant with what's popular in the culture.

If *Superman* is popular, they will wrap the happy meal box in that theme and make the toy, Superman related. If a *Despicable Me* movie comes out, they will switch to that theme and toys.

What if they had decided to not change? What if they had decided to leave Captain Kangaroo (I'm aging myself) for the box theming. Today's kids would be saying, "Who is that? Look at his funny clothes! His hair-style - it went out of style 30 years ago!"

Sadly, there are churches who still do children's ministry like it's 1979. And kids come in and say "Look at those VHS videos they're playing. I've seen those on the shelf at my grandmother's house. Apparently, they used to have to go to a store to rent them and then make sure they rewound them or the next person." Or they say, "Can you believe these old songs they are trying to get us to sing? Who listens to music that old?" It is crucial that we stay relevant so we can continue to lead well in the future.

Step 3 - REVAMP. This means asking "how?"

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking

forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.
*Philippians 3:12-14*⁴

Paul was always pressing forward. His calling kept Him looking forward. Just like you have a large windshield on your car, so you can look ahead, and a tiny review mirror, is because where you are going is more important than where you have been in the past. **Don't waste your energy fighting against where you are. Spend your energy getting to where you want to be.**

At the time of this writing, there are several major store chains that are closing. In a day where online purchasing appears to be taking over, brick and mortar stores like Claires, The Limited, Barne's and Nobles, K-Mart are closing by the hundreds.

Toys R Us has recently gone out of business. I guess you can say they are changing the name of their stores to Toy's Were Us. But what caused Toys R Us to become irrelevant to kids and families? The first Toys R' Us store opened in June of 1957⁵. For over 60 years, the toy giant sold toys, dolls, nursery supplies, clothes, bikes, video games, birthday presents and more to kids and families across America. The mascot for the company was Geoffrey, a giraffe. Millions of kids grew up with Toys R' Us and now as adults can still whistle the theme song, "I'm a Toys R' Us kid." Back in September of 2017, they had filed for bankruptcy and tried to restructure. But the effort was not successful. This past quarter (which included Christmas shopping season), they only earned \$81 million, which was \$250 million below their target and 25% less than what they earned the same period the previous year.⁶

So, what caused the demise? And are there lessons we can learn from this as the church? Let's look at what happened and 5 lessons we can take away from it.

Lesson 1 - You cannot allow past success to dictate future strategy. Toy's R' Us hadn't made a full-year profit since 2012 and had lost \$2.5 billion since then. If something is not working, the answer is not to continue trying to work it, but to adopt a new model. Not changing, tweaking and adjusting with the changing times has led to the company's closing.

All across the country, there are churches that are slowly declining. They see less and less people attend each year. What they are doing is clearly not working, but they refuse to change. They are clinging to traditions that worked in 1980, but are irrelevant today. When you do this, you are sealing your demise. Churches that will continue to thrive are the ones that will be anchored to the truth, but will be geared for the changing times.

Churches must be willing to let go of tradition when needed and shift to new ways of doing ministry. Our message must remain the same, but our methods must change to stay relevant for the day in which we share the message.

Lesson 2 - The big box is being replaced with smaller venues. As I mentioned in the multi-site chapter, in past decades, big box stores like Toys R' Us popped up as families moved to the suburbs. These big box stores focused on a product category and offered lower prices than the small mom and pops stores found in urban, downtown locations.

But there are shifts happening again. Although stores like Target are still big box locations, the trend back toward smaller venues is on the rise. An example is the Apple stores, which are normally smaller and offer limited product displays. And Walmart's smaller, neighborhood grocery stores are being built across the country.

As I mentioned in the multi-site chapter, this trend is also being seen in the church world. Churches that are growing, are doing so, not by building giant auditoriums in one location, but rather by building smaller venues in multiple locations. The massive

auditoriums of 7,000 are being replaced by seven 1,000 seat auditoriums in seven different locations. Churches that want to experience growth and impact an entire region should take note of this and make it a key part of their strategy.

Lesson 3 - Online and on demand. Companies like Amazon and Ebay have changed how people shop. They offer amazing selection, fast shipping and lower prices. Customers are opting to browse online from the comfort of their home rather than having to wander up and down the aisles of a store. And with the rise of mobile phones, people can shop anytime and from anywhere. That's a hard combo to compete with. The ease of online is also affecting church attendance and is one of the reasons why families are attending church in person less frequently. You often hear someone say they decided to stay home and watch online rather than driving to the physical church building.

A few things to keep in mind about this. If churches want people to show up in person, they will have to create in-person experiences that simply can't be matched online. This includes meaningful worship, community in a group, powerful prayer, etc.

Lesson 4 - One key element to seeing families attend church in person is children's programming. While a few churches are trying to offer online children's ministry, no one has cracked the code yet by creating online children's ministry that can be an ample substitute for in-person children's ministry. Churches that want to grow and see families attend more often in person, would be wise to make children's ministry a top priority.

Lesson 5 - Families are not just looking for products - they are looking for a shopping experience. While Toys R' Us offered toys, what they did not offer was an experience while you were shopping for the toys. If today's families are going to walk into a physical store, they want an experience while they are there that makes it worth the trip.

The Lego company is a great example of this. They set up building things with Legos. Disney is another great example of

creating a shopping experience for families. Their stores are not just retail stores, but are fully interactive experiences for families. They incorporate a movie area, dress-up area, a clubhouse area and more.

Churches that want to grow should take note of this. Parents are always looking for opportunities to create shared memories with their children. Providing experiences will draw families to your church.

Some examples are...

A family worship experience.

Live animals and petting areas at Christmas and Easter.

Photo spots for families.

Characters at the above photo spots that kids can take pictures with.

Cookie decorating stations.

“When you create great environments and experiences for families, you will see them show up.”

Lesson 6 - Customer service is a critical component of success. Toys R' Us was not known for its customer service. While it was not bad, it was certainly not exceptional. And in today's culture, your customer service must be exceptional if you are going to succeed. When you went into a store, you were met with aisles and aisles of merchandise in an arrangement that made it hard to find the specific item you were looking for. And then when you looked for help, it was hard to find at times. This often led to frustration.

Here's what churches must remember. When families are walking into your ministry, they are not comparing your customer service to the church down the street. They are comparing it to what they experienced that week at the grocery store, the restaurant where they ate, the car dealership where they had their oil changed and the retail store where they bought a new pair of pants.

Churches that want to grow must, must, must, must provide families with great customer service. This includes things like great parking, clear signage, friendly greeters, easy check-in, etc.

Is your church plateaued or declining?

Will your church one day be known as the church that used to be?

Your ministry doesn't have to become irrelevant or just a memory.

Now is the time to evaluate, step out in faith and make the changes needed to continue to thrive in the days and years ahead. In the midst of all the store closings, there is a store that is thriving. Build-a-Bear Workshop was founded in 1997. Its first store was in the St. Louis Galleria mall. By 2010, the company had grown to over 400 stores worldwide. And in February, they announced their 4th straight year of profitability. In the last five years, Build-A-Bear has expanded its physical footprint by 12%. By-the-way, they are debt free.⁷

So what does Build-a-Bear have that their competition didn't have? I believe they decided to think outside the box and try a new approach. Rather than having a strategy of "Build it and they will come," they decided to have a strategy that says... "Let them build it and they will come."

There's a big difference between the two. Let's take a closer look at why Build-A-Bear is thriving, while other kid and family-targeted retailers are sinking.

Build-A-Bear offers kids and families a hands-on, interactive, learner-based experience. Today's kids and families don't want to sit passively while you try to "entertain" them or "sell them a product." They want to be involved. They want active entertainment rather than passive entertainment.

At Build-A-Bear, there is a large container in the middle of the store, that contains the "stuffing" kids and families can use to build their own stuffed animal. Kids and families go through an interactive process in which they assemble and customize their stuffed animal.

"If you want to attract kids and families to your church, then you need to offer them hands-on, active learning opportunities."

Bring this into your lessons, events, activities, programs, etc. and they will come. There are lots of ways you can do this. Here are a couple of examples. At one of our Christmas events, we set up tables where kids and their parents could decorate and customize their very own Christmas ornaments. The response was overwhelming. Another time, we told families they would have the opportunity to assemble food packages together after the service that would be sent to a needy country. Attendance spiked that weekend. Why? Kids and families are looking for hands-on, interactive opportunities.

Build-A-Bear gives kids and families the opportunity to unleash their creativity and customize. Kids and families resonate with their tag line - "The Most Fun You'll Ever Make." They

resonate with the unique opportunity to create their own, personalized stuffed animals. Kids can choose their favorite bear, elephant, rabbit, pony, etc. from a bin and then continue down row after row of accessories, customizing everything from sunglasses to clothes to light saber color to hair texture to backpack design to smell. If you want kids and families to love your church, give them opportunities to be creative. Crafts. Art. Video. Building things.

Build-A-Bear gives kids and families the opportunity to contribute to a cause. They have been engaged in numerous charities, including giving over \$1 million dollars to the World Wildlife Fund. As part of their 10th anniversary celebration, they built 11 playgrounds. They have donated over \$11 million dollars to child and family causes.⁸

Millennial parents and their Gen Z kids are drawn toward organizations that have a clear mission to make a difference in the world. Giving them the opportunity to be part of your mission will engage them with your ministry.

Build-A-Bear stays current with kid and family culture. They tie into the culture by offering kids the opportunity to make stuffed animals based on movies and themes that are popular at the time. A few examples of themes they have done are The Cat in the Hat, Shrek, a Cody Maverick penguin from Surf's Up, a toy Mumble from Happy Feet, a toy E.B from Hop, both Alvin and Brittany from Alvin and the Chipmunks, a Jonas dog, a Wizards of Waverly Place bear, My Little Pony, Hello Kitty and Zhu Zhu pets.

While their staple is the traditional teddy bear, they have also been willing to change and adapt to stay relevant to the culture. The stuffing inside stays the same, but the packaging and theming that contains the stuffing changes as needed.

Churches that want to attract kids and families must be willing to change and adapt how they present God's Word to stay connected to today's kids and families. The "inside" (God's Word) doesn't change, but how we package it must change to stay relevant

and reach today's kids and families.

Build-A-Bear gives kids and families the opportunity to build relationships. Another one of their tag lines has been “Where Best Friends Are Made.” Kids often go with a friend to the store to experience Build-a-Bear together.

Churches that want to reach kids and families should make fostering relationships a top priority. This means giving kids and parents the opportunity to be part of a small group where they are known, cared for and find community.

Build-A-Bear celebrates family milestones. With their “Build-A-Party,” they offer a “cele-bear-ation” for special occasions like birthdays, gender reveals, graduations, engagements, anniversaries and more. Families can pick their own celebration theme and then Build-A-Bear helps them plan their celebration.

This is so valuable for churches to know. **Churches that celebrate family milestones like baby dedication, baptism, graduations, etc. will make a big impact in their lives.**

Build-A-Bear helps families make memories. If you want to attract today's families, then you've got to give them the opportunity to make a memory together. What you do has to be something special that they can't get if they stay home or watch online.

When kids and families leave Build-A-Bear, they leave with a memory. A memory that has an emotional attachment. The memory is what grabs them and keeps them coming back.

Build-A-Bear is cross-generational. They don't just target kids, but their parents as well. There are accessories for parents like motorcycles clothes and sports teams. Churches that want to reach entire families must target not just kids, but their parents and grandparents as well. Always be thinking not just about kids, but parents as well.

Let's recap. If you want to attract and reach kids and their families in the days ahead, the following list will help you lead well.

- offer a hands-on, interactive, learner-based experience

- give kids and families the opportunity to create things
- provide families with the opportunity to contribute to a cause
- stay current with kid and family culture
- structure your ministry so relationships can be fostered
- celebrate family milestones
- help families make memories
- target all generations

Often we let fear stop us from making the changes we need to lead well in the future. A few years ago, I took my son to a camp in Northern California. The camp was for parents and their children. We had a blast. One day they took us to a ropes course. One of the rope challenges was to climb up a 30-foot pole. And then you had to stand up on the top of the pole and jump out 4-5 feet and grab a rope swing.

It was not an easy thing to do. Especially when you got to the very top and had to stand up on top of the pole which was only 20 inches around. There was a man at the challenge that climbed all the way up to the top of the pole and stood up okay. But he got scared when he looked at the rope swing he had to jump out and grab.

Everyone on the ground was cheering for him. But he stood there paralyzed. So we told him to countdown from three and then jump out and go for it. He agreed. He focused his attention on the rope swing and started counting. One. Two. And he stopped at two. “Try it again, you can do it!” we shouted up to him. So he tried again. One. Two. And he stopped at two again. He was too afraid to jump.

Even with the safety harness he was wearing that would catch him if he missed the rope swing. We watched as he said, “One...Two” and then stopped before three time after time. Finally, after stopping before three at least a dozen times, he got the courage to jump to grab the rope swing.

Here’s what I want to leave with you. As you’ve read this book, hopefully it has stirred up in you some things you know you need to change or update. You’re standing at the top of the pole, pondering if you want to jump out in faith and grab hold of the future God has for you and the ministry you lead. Fear is telling you not to jump because you will fail. Negative people are telling you everything is fine the way it is. You’re even telling yourself that it’s too big a risk.

But deep down inside you, faith is rising. Deep down inside, God is whispering to you. Telling you to be strong and of good courage. Telling you that if He is with you, who can be against you. It’s time. Jump! Jump out in faith! God has you! Jump out and lead well. God’s ready to take your ministry to a whole new level. He’s waiting for you to say “three” and go for it. If you wait until you are 100% ready, you’ll never jump!

He is preparing the way for you. Jump and discover the amazing things God has prepared for you and the ministry you lead.

Your next great adventure

is waiting for you - right outside your

comfort zone. Go for it!

Lead well in children’s ministry!

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Dale Hudson founded BCM to help churches build thriving, growing children and family ministries. With over 30 years of experience, Dale's passion and calling is to equip, encourage and empower churches to reach and disciple kids and families. He is a wealth of knowledge in children's and family ministry in the local church.



Churches and ministries both nationally and internationally look to him for children and family ministry ideas, insight and strategies. He invests in thousands of ministry leaders each year.

Dale is a ministry builder. As a Children's Pastor, he has helped build some of the largest and fastest growing children's ministries in the country. At Cross Church, he led the children's ministry to great growth. At Central Church in Las Vegas, he helped the church grow from 8,000 to 16,000 in 4 years with the majority of the growth coming from reaching unchurched families. At Christ Fellowship Church in South Florida, Dale helped the church grow from 12,000 to 28,000 in eight years, where once again, much of the growth came from reaching unchurched families. Dale and his team saw 460 kids and hundreds of parents baptized in one year. During those eight years, he also built the children's ministry volunteer team from 300 to 2,600 and helped the children's ministry expand from 3 campuses to 9 campuses. He personally invested in many of the volunteers and saw them step into staff roles. He led a children's ministry staff team of over 70.

Dale is the author and co-author of 11 books. He is a much in demand speaker for conferences and training. He shares with passion and enthusiasm, inspiring leaders to reach their full potential and see their ministries go to the next level. If you'd like to Dale come to your church or ministry, you can contact him at dale@buildingchildrensministry.com or at his website - buildingchildrensministry.com.



More great resources to help you build your ministry.

Curriculum

Growth Tools

Consulting

Coaching

Ministry Evaluation

Volunteer Enlistment and Training

Leadership Development

Media

Parent & Child Dedication Class

New Believer's Class

and much more

available at

www.buildingchildrensministry.com

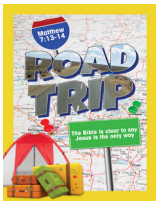
Take kids on a one-year curriculum journey that will deepen their faith and prepare them to follow Jesus for a lifetime.

CONNECT

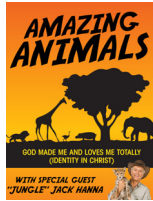
Connect 12 curriculum focuses on 12 key truths that kids need to follow Jesus. From salvation to spiritual leadership, it's a core pathway they will never forget.

Each lesson is designed with methods and strategies that keep kids engaged and excited. Lessons were created using learning styles, 5 senses, captivating videos, deep Bible teaching, games and much more. These lessons have been proven to be effective in helping place the 12 key truths deep into children's long-term memory. Can be used for large group, small group, traditional Sunday School, mid-week programming, Bible clubs and much more.

12 Series / 1 Series Per Month / 52 Lessons plus 2 bonus lessons



SALVATION



IDENTITY



WORSHIP



GROWTH



OBEDIENCE



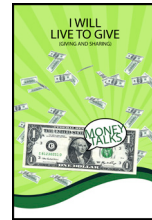
APOLOGETICS



PURPOSE



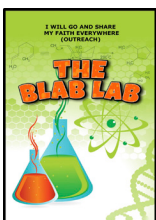
RELATIONSHIPS



GIVING



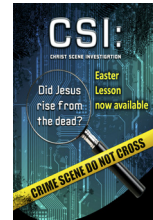
WISDOM



SHARING FAITH



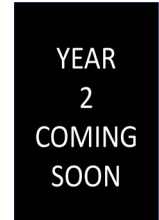
LEADERSHIP



EASTER



CHRISTMAS

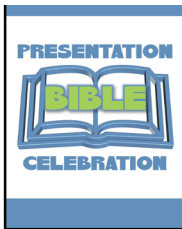


FAMILY MILESTONE CURRICULUM

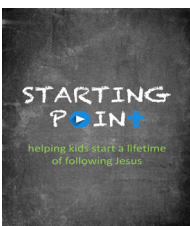
There are certain times in a family's life when you have an unique opportunity to impact them in a huge way. These curriculum kits are proven resources for impacting families at these times in their life. They are designed to be experienced with children and their parents together.



A comprehensive class that not only helps you teach parents what the dedication is all about, but also gives them insight into how to raise their children to love and follow Jesus. By doing this, you can help them prioritize their lives and have a Christ-centered approach to parenting.



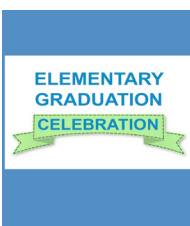
A class where kids and parents they learn how we got the Bible, foundational truths about the Bible and how to make it an important part of their life. A life-changing experience as parents present their child with a Bible, speak a blessing over them and pray with them.



Starting Point is a one-session class designed for kids who are interested in starting a relationship with Jesus. The class provides tools that parents can use to follow up with their children at home. This is a proven curriculum that has been used to lead thousands of kids and parents to Christ.



This class is for children and their parents that want to be baptized. A clear explanation is shared that helps children learn what baptism is. This class has been used to see thousands of kids and parents baptized. Follow-up materials are included for parents so they can talk with their children at home about baptism as well.



This resource was created to help you encourage and equip kids and families as they prepare for the move into middle school ministry. It creates a solid bridge between your children's ministry and middle school ministry.

ADVANCE

children's ministry leadership coaching

Do you want to have more **LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE** with the team you lead?

Do you want to see the ministry you lead **GROW** and **FLOURISH**?

Are you looking for someone who can help you **GET TO THE NEXT LEVEL** as a children's ministry leader?

Do you want someone who will **PERSONALLY INVEST** in you and your ministry?

Are you looking for some who can help you **NAVIGATE THE CHALLENGES AND STRUGGLES** you are facing?

Dale Hudson, one of the leading voices and leaders in children's ministry, can help you grow as a children's ministry leader. Whether it's your first year or fifteenth year in ministry, he can help you and your ministry get to the next level. Much, if not, most of ministry wisdom and knowledge cannot be learned in a college classroom. Dale's coaching is grounded not in theory alone, but in proven, hands-on leadership experience. For the past 30 years, he has personally helped build and lead some of the fastest growing and largest children's ministries in the country.

ADVANCE Children's Ministry Coaching includes...

- 6 months of coaching
- Personalized growth plan
- Copy of Dale's books
- Online support and more...

Apply at www.buildingchildrensministry and make an investment in yourself and your ministry.



Would you like to have Dale speak at your church or ministry?

Passion. Inspiration. Encouragement. Practical Wisdom.

Growth Strategies. Challenging. Relevant Insight. Equipping.

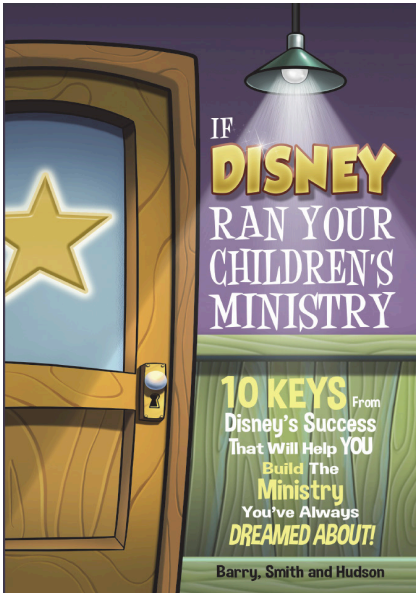
This is what Dale brings when he shares with people both nationally and internationally each year. From keynotes at large conferences with thousands in attendance to regional workshops to gatherings of a few volunteers, people walk away with a fresh vision to reach and disciple kids and families.

Here are some ways he can add value to your conference, training event or church.

- Keynotes at conferences.
- Breakout and seminars at conferences.
- Teaching in church services.
- Regional volunteer training events.
- Webinars.
- Live online training.

You can contact Dale at dale@buildingchildrensministry.com.

If you enjoyed this book, you'll enjoy these other books from Dale as well.



Available in ebook and paperback at www.buildingchildrensministry.com.

Discounts available for orders of 10 or more books.

Children's ministry is one of the most challenging areas to lead in the church. You lead not only children, but parents and volunteers as well.

Drawing from over three decades of experience, Dale shares how to lead well in 10 key areas of children's ministry. No matter what your role is, this book will encourage, equip and empower you to lead well.

God is looking for yielded, passionate, committed, faithful leaders to do His work through. You can be that person! Ready to learn how? Awesome! Join me in chapter 1 and let's get started!



Dale Hudson has led in children's ministry for over three decades. He has helped build and lead some of the largest and fastest growing children's ministries in the nation. He is the founder and president of Building Children's Ministry.

buildingchildrensministry.com

