

“Sift Out, Push Away”

The powerful results of delegating
Steve Alley

Children's ministry, as are all other ministries, is "addictive." You care deeply and begin to develop an "addictive" perspective as you wade into the "bottomless pit" of things to do. The more you give, the more you need to give. Somewhere in the middle of that cycle of devotion and work, you see the faces of children and you hear the Lord's command to "Feed my sheep."

There are terms given to the result of this passionate cycle: "burn out," "hit a wall," and even "depression." I want none of those for you!

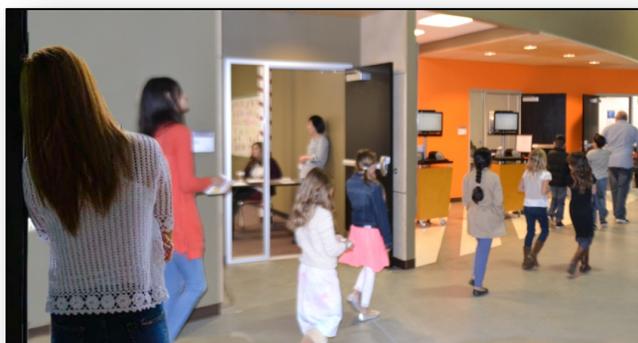
Your passion, energy, and dedication are all very high! God has "groomed" you over many years to prepare you for this ministry position. But, that doesn't mean that you are immune to the "dark side" of children's ministry.

You may have discovered, children's ministry gets "under your skin." Your eyes are open to the needs of the children's ministry, while also seeing the "crumbs" that these dear children are often "fed" by church leadership. In my opinion, no other ministry can affect church growth as the children's ministry. Because of this awareness, we desperately want to give more, work harder, and do all we can to see this ministry flourish.

In my early years of ministry, a church administrator took me aside and told me, "This is the Lord's church, we're not to get in the way." That simple statement has guided me in ministry since then. The perspective is that we have been called and placed to serve His work, and not ours alone. We are to be good stewards of what He has given us, but we are not to take the load of the ministry onto our own shoulders. It is His work. We're His hands and feet, but we are only carrying out His work.

I am a recovering "ministryholic." (I heard the others in the room say, "Hi, Steve!") I've "hit the wall," experienced "burn out," and had my spouse look at me and say, "If you don't stop this, our marriage will suffer." I've sat at my full desk and been depressed over the endless work. I've experienced Prostate Cancer, and an optic stroke that doctors told me were both caused by work-related stress. I quit the ministry at that particular church and told God that I would never do "that" again. Then, I was asked to come and "fix" another church's children's ministry. I reluctantly agreed, but it was like an alcoholic attending a reception with alcohol freely flowing. It terrified me, but it felt so good to be "back in the saddle." But, I have to be constantly aware of my "ministryholic" tendencies.

I've learned that the only way to survive children's ministry is to spread out the responsibilities and delegate. That's why the first thing I did when I came to this recent ministry is to develop coordinators. Then, I had to carefully "sift out" responsibilities to them. Within 4 or 5 months, the Lord had developed people who could help me bear the load of the ministry. For me, delegation is terrifying, but necessary. I have a bad case of the "if you want it done right, do it yourself" perspective. But, I've learned that this perspective is what almost killed me in previous ministries. So, I "sift out" responsibilities to others regularly. It isn't easy, but it is necessary.



God has more than likely used your ability to "jump in and get it done." You are probably fearless! Your ability to quickly analyze a situation and instantly do what needs to be done is a probably a beautiful thing to watch! This is who you are! But, this amazing "gift" can also be a deadly "curse." You may have reached the point in your ministry growth where the ministry needs are larger than your ability to "fix" alone. The only thing you can do is to work longer. This is a clear sign that it is time to "sift out" more things, and to use others.

I've learned (the hard way) to "push away" from my desk and walk away from the work when it is time to go home. There are times when you just can't finish, and you have to tell yourself, "Go home." Ministry gets inside you and follows you home. Your family may notice that you're home, but you aren't "there." This is not good. But how can you "push away" and leave the work at church, while also being a good steward of what God has called you to do? The only answer I've found is to realize that it is God's work, and not yours. When you "push away" before things are finished, I don't think God is in Heaven, saying, "What? What is she doing? It's not finished yet! Oh, this is bad! Now, what will we do?"



There is risk in delegating and "sifting out" responsibilities to others. The risk is that the tasks won't be done "right." BUT, along with the risk is a "nugget" of long-term goodness. When something is done by another person, that person grows! Even if you have to "correct" or "adjust" what he or she did, there is powerful positive goodness in the process of you "sifting out" tasks and the other person experiencing the joy of involvement. I can guarantee you that you will "taste" something very enjoyable when this happens.