

Growth And Stagnation In Children's Ministry

A simplified view of possible causes

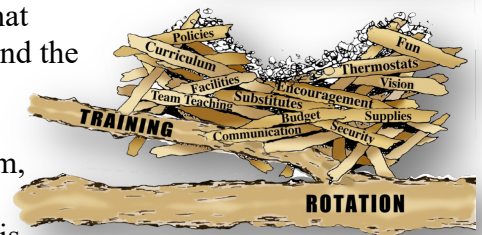
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In the scriptures, God's interaction with people has been all about "drawing them closer" to Himself. Ever since the fall in the Garden, God has been pursuing us! The story of God's work with people is filled with blessings and curses. These blessings and curses are all triggered by our decisions and our willingness to obey Him.

Ministry is much like the story of God's relationship with people. God will bless or withhold His blessing on a ministry based on many factors. When He withholds His blessing on a ministry, the ministry "stagnates" without growth. Eventually, that "stagnation" leads to the eventual "death" of a ministry. Here is a simple overview of the conditions that cause God to bless, or withhold His blessing from a ministry:

Conditions That Lead To God Blessing A Ministry

- 1. The leader of the church humbly submits to God's authority and obeys Him. The leader loves God with all his heart, soul, mind, and spirit; and loves his neighbor as himself.** This principle is clearly described in Psalm 1. The result of the leader submitting to God in this way is that he will be *"...like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither."* God then clearly identifies the result of this submission and obedience: *"Whatever they do, prospers."* Throughout the Bible, God will bless or withhold His blessing on the entire city or country based on the leader's stand for God. This is the same condition that applies to every ministry in the church.
- 2. The leader of the children's ministry submits to God's authority and obeys Him. The leader loves God with all his heart, soul, mind, and spirit; and loves his neighbor as himself.** God will bless the children's ministry (increase its growth, size, and "fruit" in children's lives) when the leader of the children's ministry is fully submitted to loving and obeying God, and loving others sacrificially. If the leader of the church is being honored by God, yet the leader of the children's ministry is not honoring God, then the children's ministry will not be blessed; even if other ministries are! (Joshua 7)
- 3. The entire ministry is consecrated to honoring God!** Throughout scripture, God blessed a work (small group of people or entire countries) when the people involved were led to their knees before Him. God responds to true, consistent, corporate worship! God is not "mocked," though. He does not respond to shallow "shows" of worship that are "designed" to get God's blessing! (Joshua 3:5; Isa. 1:19, 20; Numbers 11)
- 4. "The Nest" is ready to receive blessing.** Just like a warm nest that protects young birds, the structure of a ministry protects children and the volunteer team members. The structure of the ministry must be strong before God will bring new people into the ministry. The "structure" includes the leadership, policies, procedures, curriculum, schedules, team support, social interaction, financial support, and a clear ministry vision. Building the "structure" is something that is done by people who are led and blessed by God.



Conditions That Lead To God Withholding Blessing On A Ministry

1. **Leaders who don't honor the Lord.** As was mentioned above, God's blessing is withheld when the leadership (either church or ministry) is not wholly consecrated to God, or their motives are selfish. (The entire book of Hosea especially chapter 4; Matt. 25:31-46)



2. **A "black widow" in the hive.** For years, I kept bees. I had one hive that was not flourishing. I sought wisdom from fellow beekeepers, and was told to look for a black widow in the hive. (Black widow spiders are immune to bee stings, and will devour an entire hive of bees.) I found a black widow hiding in the hive, and killed it. After this, the hive thrived. If we permit a "black widow" to remain in the ministry, God will not bless the ministry. The concepts of "purging," or "cleaning" are consistent concepts in the Bible. If we don't totally "clean" a ministry, God views that as compromise and won't bless the ministry. (Proverbs 22:10; 2 Chron. 20: 31-37)



Final Note

One of the "conditions" that is not reflected in the above list is God's timing and will. We may be honoring Him "in all our ways," and yet still don't see the desired ministry "blessing." In situations as this, we can only assume that God's timing is different from ours.

We can't affect God's timing. That's none of our "business." Our only responsibility is to do what we can do to honor Him and obey Him. Once we do that, we leave the rest to Him!