

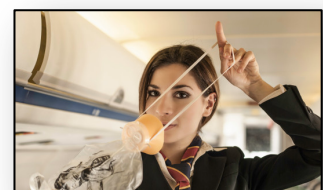
Making Our Ministry Relevant

Steve Alley

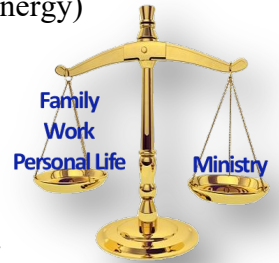
Today's parents and kids face a scary world of glittering temptations and threats! If we are to be effective, we have to "adjust" our ministry enough to deal with the new challenges, without watering down our vision and our core calling! We also have to look at the "big picture," and do all we can to build bridges of partnership between the children's and youth ministries!

"Put Your Own Masks On First" – Protecting / strengthening your own spiritual health.

1. Definition of "Relevant"
 - a. Closely connected or appropriate to what is being done or considered.
 - b. Appropriate to the current time, period, or circumstances; of contemporary interest.
2. People may be viewed as "relevant" if they
 - a. Are closely connected to the learners' lives, needs, interests, etc.
 - b. Have earned respect through sacrifice.
 - c. Use contemporary words, illustrations, etc.
 - d. Are excellent listeners – not just a speaker.
 - e. Adjust personal plans to suit the learners' needs or interests.
 - f. Show personal interest apart from class or lesson.
 - g. Are spiritually "real."
 - h. Offer personal prayers for individual learners.
3. Programs may be viewed as "relevant" if they
 - a. Have a balance of fun/enjoyment and personal/spiritual development.
 - b. Are interactive – letting the learners talk and invest into the experience.
 - c. Offer the learners challenges that inspire and empower them.
 - d. Are not punitive and controlling.
4. Being "relevant" takes spiritual and personal "work."
 - a. Spiritual "work"
 - Being totally submitted to Him!
 - Recognizing God's power, presence, and leading.
 - Setting your mind on God!
 - Luke 2: 52; Colossians 3: 1,2 ; Matthew 13: 58; 17: 19, 20
 - b. Our own personal "work"
 - Being "in the world, but not of it." (John 17: 14, 15)
 - Understanding your learners' lives and "culture."
 - Fashioning the lesson to suit the learners.
 - **Jesus to farmers** – "Parable of The Sower" (Matthew 13: 3-9)
 - **Jesus to fishermen** – "Cast your nets," and "fishers of men" (Luke 5:6; Matt. 4: 19)
 - **Jesus to a selfish, bigoted Sadducee** – "Parable of The Good Samaritan" (Luke 10: 25-37)
 - **Jesus to the prideful** – "Parable of The Pharisee And The Tax Collector" (Luke 18: 9-14)
 - Truly being interested in the learners.
 - Being a good listener.
5. Protect yourself spiritually, emotionally, and physically!
 - a. "Put your own mask on first"
 - b. "Gird your loins" (Jeremiah 1:17; 1Peter 1:13)
 - c. "Get on your knees and fight like a man" (2 Chronicles 20: 12)

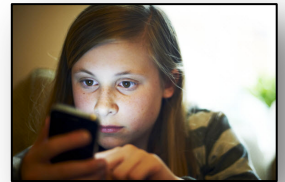


6. Balancing your life (ministry / personal)
 - a. You are not “Wonder Woman” or “Superman” – Realize your limitations and set priorities!
 - b. Balance between your personal / family life and your ministry (time, attention, energy)
 - Be responsible
 - Be faithful
 - Be dependable
 - c. An out of balanced person cannot care enough about others to be “relevant.”!



“Addressing Today’s Electronic Challenges” – Providing support to kids and parents.

1. Today’s kids spend up to 3 hours per day on media!
 - a. *“In a typical day, children consume just over three hours of media. This includes computer use, cell phone use, tablet use, music, and reading. Two thirds of this time is spent with “screen media” (TV, computers, the Internet, etc.) while reading is less than 20 minutes per day.”*
 - b. *“The time spent with on screen media dramatically increases from the toddler to preschool to school-age years. Children under two have a screen time average of 53 minutes per day. This increases to almost two and a half hours per day among two to four-year-old and almost three hours for kids in the five to eight-year-old range.”*
 By Dr. Brent Conrad
 From techaddiction.ca/media-statistics
 - c. *“Consumers aged 13-24 watch 12.1 hours of video per week on **YouTube**, social media and other free online sources, and another 8.8 hours weekly on **Netflix** and other subscription-video services, according to a survey fielded by digital-media firm **Defy Media**. That’s more than two and a half times the 8.2 hours weekly they spend watching television.”*
 By Todd Spangler
 From Variety.com
2. Protecting the innocence of the children – A definition of “innocence”
 - a. The state, quality, or fact of being innocent of a crime or offense.
 - b. Lack of guile or corruption; purity.
3. The beliefs of “innocence”
 - a. Everyone is good and kind.
 - b. I can trust everyone.
 - c. I will never die.
 - d. My parents are good, kind, and will always take care of me.
 - e. Everyone loves me.
 - f. Life is wonderful!
 - g. God will always protect me.
4. Innocence “killers”
 - a. Family fights – divorce.
 - b. Hatred in words or actions.
 - c. Being abused, or witnessing abuse.
 - d. Awareness of terrorism.
 - e. Death of a family member or friend.
 - f. Bullying.
 - g. Serious, prolonged sickness.
 - h. Feeling inadequate or unloved.



5. "Restoring innocence"
 - a. Only through Jesus!
 - b. Requires personal contact.
 - c. Requires mentoring and encouragement from a "relevant" person.

6. The "epidemic" of loneliness

- a. *"Loneliness is a growing health epidemic. We live in the most technologically connected age in the history of civilization, yet rates of loneliness have doubled since the 1980s."*

From Harvard Business Review

"Work And The Loneliness Epidemic"

- b. *"Being lonely isn't just a feeling. It is proven to be bad for you. Research shows loneliness is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic, that it's as harmful as not exercising and twice as harmful as being obese."* ("Loneliness Is Harming Our Society")

By Rachel Reeves

From The Guardian.com



7. Partnering with parents to protect the innocence of our kids.

- a. Understanding the "big questions" they are asking:

- How can we protect our kids?
- Should we take away the smart phone?
- Should we monitor every use of the smart phone?
- Every one of their friends have smart phones, what do we do?
- How do we teach our kids to discern "right" from "wrong," or "good" from "bad"?
- We want to trust our kids; but, can we?
- How do we protect our kids from predators?
- How do we keep from becoming "bad parents"?
- Is everything on the Internet or social media "bad"?



- b. Understanding the biblical principles

- **God's Word is inspired** by God and is powerful for directing our lives. (Psalm 119: 9-11; 2Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12)
- **Parents hold the responsibility** for raising their own children spiritually. (Deut. 6:4-9)
- **The "older" teach the "younger."** (Titus 2:1-5)
- **Believers are to be "set apart"** from "the world." (Rom. 12:2)
- We are to **train the young ones** how to follow the Lord. (Deut. 6:4-9; Prov. 22:6)
- We are cautioned to **not "exasperate" our children.** (Eph. 6:4)
- We are challenged to **"set our minds on God."** (Col. 3:1, 2)



- c. What can be done in order to be "relevant"?

- Stand strong on God's principles!
- Don't "bend" to social pressures.
- Balance firmness with kindness!
- Don't apologize for boundaries or principles.
- Talk with, and be approachable to parents!
- Provide much support to parents (electronic, printed, seminars, etc.)
- Provide strategic programming for kids.
- Provide strategic training for kids.



8. The dangers of social media
 - a. It is not “private.”
 - b. It is “addictive.”
 - c. It is not “safe.”
 - d. It does not produce close relationships.
 - e. It produces an increasing peer pressure.
 - f. It creates a “world” outside of the parent domain.



9. What’s in your hand?

“...And Moses answered, ‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you?’ Then the LORD said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ ‘A staff,’ he replied. The LORD said, ‘Throw it on the ground.’”

Exodus 4:1-3



- a. View the electronic tools as ministry tools!
- b. “Throw them down” and ask God to use them!

10. Using social media effectively – Taken from “7 Keys To An Effective Church Social Media Strategy” by Jonathan Howe as posted in “Lifeway Pastors”
lifeway.com/pastors:

- a. **Have a clearly designated point person.** If no one is responsible the social media communications of your church, the chances of being effective are low. Someone—whether paid or volunteer—should be responsible to see that schedules are followed, content is posted, and standards are being met. If your goals call for a daily tweet and nothing has been tweeted in two weeks, you need a structure of accountability in place to get back on track. Without a designated point person, church social media can be haphazard and will ultimately hurt the ministry and reputation of the church

- b. **Understand the differences in the channels.** Each social media channel has advantages and disadvantages and is best served with specific content for its audience and format. Twitter and Facebook are the most alike in that links and photos work well on these platforms. Quotes will fall flat on Facebook (but not on Twitter) and Twitter isn’t the best for photo galleries or events. Speaking of photos and links, on Instagram photos links aren’t active in the body of a post. When you post content online, remember what works best in each channel.



- c. **Integrate social media into your current communications plan.** One big mistake many churches make in social media is separating it from what they are already communicating. Use your church’s weekly newsletter or bulletin to shape the content in your social media channels. And while you match the type of content to the channel, always consider the “sharability” of the post. Think “if someone sees this, will they want to share it with their friends?” If the answer is no, consider a shift in content or the call to action.



- d. **Monitor channels for feedback and respond.** Social media is not a one-way street. The entire purpose is for social media to be social. This requires dialogue, listening, and responding to questions. While not every comment requires a response, if you find yourself getting asked the same questions time and again, consider adding an FAQ page to your church website or integrating those answers into existing content.

- e. **Have a clearly defined goal for each channel.** While it’s great to have an ever-growing number of followers online, having increased follower counts as goals isn’t the best way to measure effectiveness. Set measurable and timely goals for engagement and effectiveness rather than simply trying to increase your follower counts.

Relevance

- f. **Use tools for efficiency and analytics.** Once you've set your goals, you need to track them. Using tools like Buffer and Hootsuite allows you to monitor, engage, schedule, and analyze your social media accounts. Also, spend some time in the analytics areas of your social media accounts. You'll be amazed (and possibly frightened) at what they can tell you about your audience.
- g. **Promote the social media channels through traditional means when possible.** If you are going to use social media as a church, tell your members and guests about it. Put the logos and usernames for your accounts on bulletins, newsletters, and promotional materials. If you want your members and guests to engage with you online, they need to know where to find you.

11. Ministry is about relationships – being relevant to one person at a time!

- a. Active, personal, real listening.
- b. Personal eye-contact and face-to-face attention.
- c. Use of the student's name.
- d. Remembering aspects about their life (prayer requests, needs, fears, joys, etc.).
- e. Real caring vs. "preaching."
- f. Personal compliments (character, passion, actions, etc.).
- g. Appropriate physical contact (high 5's, fist bumps, etc.).
- h. Safe, limited, approved contact via social media (group vs. individual?).
- i. Awareness of, use of, their world (words, situations, interests, etc.).
- j. Real, unrehearsed connections to Jesus.
- k. Out of class connections (camp, outside games, online games, etc.)



"Unifying Children's and Youth Ministries" – Creating a ministry plan that spans the ages.

- 1. The collaboration between children and youth ministry is similar to an assembly line
 - a. Multiple minds and hands are more efficient!
 - b. Each person is trained in specific functions.
 - c. Each part is assembled in order.
 - d. The item moves, not the builders.
 - e. There is a process that ends in completion.



- 2. Developing unified plans/goals for
 - a. Bible study (curriculum).
 - b. Discipleship.
 - c. Serving others.
 - d. Evangelism.
 - e. Leading others.
 - f. "Cross age" programs

- 3. Building bridges between children and youth ministries
 - a. Unified graduation date in June so graduating children can participate in summer youth programs.
 - b. "Bridge" efforts to introduce children to youth ministry
 - 1.) **Visits to the fifth-grade classes** by junior high leaders or students. These would be simple greetings to "heighten" the awareness of the junior high ministry. It might be a good idea to include the fourth graders in these visits.



- 2.) **"Come and see" visits** to the junior high class by the fifth graders. This would have to be planned and advertised ahead of time to prepare the kids and their parents. The fifth graders would be checked into their regular class, but then be escorted across to the junior high room by CM team members or by Junior High team members. The fifth graders would enjoy the worship and study and then return to their class for check-in. (We could also let the parents "check-out" their fifth graders at the Junior High room to "draw" the parents across the "bridge" as well.
- 3.) **After service fun or social events.** These would be either held on the church campus, or at an off-campus location. The fifth graders would be taken to the event by their parents, and the parents would be welcomed to join in the fun or fellowship. The events could include: an ice cream party, a talent show, "minute to win it" games, picnic in the park with games, etc.
- 4.) **"Big brother / big sister" connections.** Each of our fifth graders would be connected up with a "big brother or sister" from the Junior High Ministry. These "big brothers or sisters" would connect with the fifth graders at the "bridge" events we plan. They would also correspond with each other via email, letter, text, etc. (we'd have to decide the appropriateness of this). These connections could grow into a "mentorship" or "discipleship" relationship!

c. A unique "Bridge" class / ministry.

- 1.) A new class / ministry of upper grade children (5th & 6th graders) to prepare them for middle school or junior high ministry.
- 2.) "Older" curriculum from elementary.
- 3.) Worship style that reflects the youth ministry style.

4. Developing a graduated plan to develop a servant's heart.

- a. Developing a heart for serving others.
- b. Offering increasing opportunities/challenges for service to others.

5. Unifying processes

- a. Policies
- b. Training
- c. Recruiting
- d. Team development
- e. Service projects

