

Taking Your Children's Ministry To The Spa

Steve Alley

No matter how blessed a children's ministry is, there are still conditions that "creep in" over time to slow the ministry down, or even disable it. A strong ministry to children is affected by many outside factors that slowly begin to affect the passion and vision.

Since we live in a changing world, and we, ourselves, are not perfect; we have to regularly do a "systems check," and make "mid-course corrections" in our progress. Spacecraft, on their way to the Moon or to Mars, must make regular corrections and adjustments in their direction to successfully hit their target. Of course, this process, when applied to ministry, is something that should involve prayer and reliance on God.

Every so often you need to "refresh" your ministry to children. This periodic "refreshing" is like taking your children's ministry (CM) to the spa. At the spa, you clean, massage, relax and restore. You also do all you can to remove any impurities and prepare yourself to reenter the "real world" with a new perspective. You can take your ministry to children to "the spa" on a regular basis if you are willing to follow God's leading and make changes when needed. This concept of periodically "freshening up" is expressed in many ways in our lives. Here are some examples:



- **Yard Sale** – Getting rid of things you don't use or are tired of. Making room for new things. Cleaning out the clutter.
- **"Freshening Up"** – After a day of being "sticky" or tired, washing your face, putting something new on, touching up your hair, or reapplying your makeup.
- **Restarting Your Computer** – After a long time of working on multiple programs, your computer becomes "sluggish." Restarting your computer resets all of the programs and cleans out the "clutter" in your system.
- **Having A "Good Cry"** – After dealing with multiple layers of emotions for an extending period of time, having a "good cry" can stabilize the emotions and "clear" your perspective. For men, it might be participating in sports, or blowing something up.
- **Bankruptcy** – The process of ending all financial problems and "starting over" (of course your financial future is greatly affected for a long time) is something of which we are becoming more and more aware.
- **Working Out** – There is a sense of relaxation and composure that comes after strenuous exercise. The challenges of your life are still present, but you are more able to deal with them.
- **Washing Your Car** – There's something refreshing about taking the time to throw away the trash and half-eaten Big Macs in your car, and having it washed. The fresh smell, and shiny exterior seems to remind you that you are still in control of your life.

The Spa Treatment

When you go to the spa to refresh, you usually meet with a spa therapist who takes you through a process to evaluate your condition and to design a relaxation therapy that is suited to your needs. This is the same process that the CM spa treatment will use. Enjoy the therapy!

The Evaluation (consider your condition)

1. Your ministry's "energy level"

- Are you, your ministry efforts, or lessons tired?
- Do you find your efforts focused on problems and "draining"?
- Are you discouraged?
- Is your ministry team dwindling instead of growing?
- Are your programs or lessons boring and non-effective?



2. Your ministry's "nutrition"

- Is your ministry living on "junk food" of thrills and attractions?
- Do your children feed on the Word, or are they "fat" and "lazy"?
- Is your ministry team comprised of compromisers?
- Does your ministry team "stir up one another to love and good works"?
- Are you spiritually full, or are you feeding on a few "goodies" now and then?

3. Your ministry's "exercise routine"

- Is your ministry filled with new challenges, or simply maintaining the "status quo"?
- Are your children and families challenged with new service opportunities?
- Do you simply operate a "Sunday morning-focused" ministry?
- Are you learning new things, and passing them on to your ministry team?
- Are you afraid of "rocking the boat," and therefore, not risking new ideas?



4. Your ministry's "toxicity"

- A. Does your ministry have the "toxin" of compromise within it?
 - Team member disunity
 - Spiritual deadness
 - Ignored "sin" (in the team or in fellow teachers)
 - "Ladder-climbing" or "game-playing" rather than conviction or passion
- B. Does your ministry have the "toxin" of entertainment within it?
 - Focus on "thrills" for the sake of boosting attendance
 - Willingness to sacrifice spiritual "meat" if necessary
- C. Does your ministry have the "toxin" of poor communication within it?
 - Is your senior pastor "out of the loop" or disconnected?
 - Are your team members simply "room fillers"?
 - Is the "fruit" of your ministry enjoyed by all, or kept "protected"?
 - Are the parents of the children empowered to "team" with you?



5. Your ministry's "aches and pains"

- Are there "aches and pains" that indicate a deeper problem that is being ignored?
- Are the "aches and pains" connected?
- What are you afraid of, and why aren't the problems being dealt with?
- Are you getting support from your superiors, or are they "in the dark" as well?
- Is God trying to "heal" your ministry problems and you're not willing to act?



6. Your ministry's goals

- Do you remember what you first dreamed of when you joined the ministry?
- Have your ministry goals "evolved" into a "safe zone" of maintenance?
- Do your ministry goals require you to do something that you are afraid of?
- What is your view of God? He gave you the vision and the goals, will He provide?
- Are people standing in the way of your ministry goals? Who? Why?

Treatment Options (procedures to help you clean, refresh, and restore)

1. Increase your ministry "energy level"

- A. **Pull away, withdraw, and retreat.** The consistency of work forces you to become a "machine" and lose track of who you are, what you're doing, and where you're going. This doesn't have to be a long withdrawal. It can be as simple as a trip to Starbucks, or as long as a couple days in the mountains. During this time, remember who God is, what He's called you to do, and reconnect with Him and His power. Jesus was an example of this. He had to "withdraw" to focus and to restore.

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Luke 5:16

- B. **Spend time with encouraging people.** If your days are filled with "putting out fires," it would be good to spend more time with positive, godly, encouraging people. Ask God to bring these people into your life. Soak up their influence. Learn from them. Let them be an "oasis" to you. Let them remind you of all that God has done for you. Paul was an example of this. He was consistently "drained" by the challenges of ministry. He needed to be surrounded by people who would encourage him and refocus him.

"Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith." 1Thes. 3:7

- C. **Invest in your ministry team.** The "sickness" of a dwindling team spreads quickly. You have to change the perception and reputation. Even in a small team, there are strong, godly, committed, faithful servants. Do you know who those people are on your team? If not, ask God to point them out to you. Find them and empower them. Encourage them, reward them, and do all you can to say, "thank you" to them. If they are tired, give them some time off. If they feel neglected, give them attention in a way that they appreciate. Once they are empowered, "bubble" them up to a higher level of leadership or influence. Shine the light on them and let them become the "standard." Paul, once again, was an expert at developing leaders, as was Jesus.



"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ... But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ... I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, ... so that when you see him again you may be glad, and I may have less anxiety." Philippians 2: 19-28

- D. Evaluate and improve your programs.** If there are programs that you are doing just because you've done them before, or because other churches do them, end them! It is better to end a non-fruitful program than to perpetuate it. It is also better to offer fewer high-fruit programs than many "bland" ones. Reacquaint yourself with the needs of your community and the families in your fellowship. Ask God to open your eyes to what the critical needs are, and then seek His guidance in creating programs that would address those needs. Remember that children's needs aren't always what is "fun" or "wild" in their minds.



2. Balance your ministry "nutrition"

- A. Ask God to help you create a balance between "thrill" and "depth."** Today's children need to be excited about what we offer them. The parents want their children to view "church" as "fun," but we must also assure the parents that the time their children spend with us will also be spiritually deep. A ministry that is purely "fun" without any spiritual depth can create an unsatisfied group of children, and team members. A ministry that is fun while also being spiritually challenging is deeply rewarding and captivating for both the children and the team members. How would you rate your ministry? Are the children learning new things and are they challenged to greater depths of commitment to the Lord?

- B. Purify your ministry team.** Having enough screened, trained, and supervised adults to run the children's ministry is always a challenge. At times it might be tempting to let an adult "slide" into the ministry to simply "fill a hole" in the teaching staff. We might also not confront, and possibly remove, a team member whose actions are inappropriate simply because we need that person on the team. If you are eating "junk food" because you don't want to cook a healthy meal, you will soon show the negative effects of that choice. When we compromise the integrity of our ministry for the sake of keeping an adult on the team, we are compromising in a way that God will not bless. Ask God to show you who should, or should not, be a part of the team. If there are people on the team who aren't good with children, or whose Christian lifestyle is not exemplary, remove them. It is better to run a "lean" team with strong, godly, faithful adults than to have a team made up of compromisers.



- C. Create an environment of encouragement and inspiration.** Create regular team meetings, department meetings, or age-group meetings among the team members. At these meetings, recognize "stars" among your team who are serving with "above and beyond" commitment. Compliment team members openly. Establish "standards of excellence" that inspire all team members both spiritually and professionally. Challenge the teachers to meet regularly before the service for prayer and to be connected during the week for support.



- D. **Evaluate your own personal “walk” with the Lord.** Are you growing spiritually? Are you seeking Him daily? Do you read the Word regularly? Are you bringing new learning and experiences to your students or team members? Your ministry and teaching should be filled with an “overflow” from your own personal relationship with God. If you are teaching from the “lesson plan” instead of from your heart, you may be not nourishing your children or ministry adequately.

3. Regulate your ministry “exercise routine”

A. **Create new challenges for yourself, the ministry, and the children.**

As with any exercise routine, you have to “push yourself,” or you won’t improve. You need periods of “rest” when you enjoy programs or teaching techniques that work well. Like the old saying goes, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” But you should also increase the spiritual challenges to your ministry and your children periodically. You might have a “rule” that says, “Try something new every six months.” This might be a new outreach, a new teaching technique, or a new service project. You might expect more from your children or their parents. Whatever it is, it is new and comes with a greater challenge.



- B. **Take carefully planned risks.** Our society is built on safety and fear of lawsuits. This mindset has to guide the CM. Safety and caution are excellent qualities, but you can still take some “carefully-planned” risks periodically. Talk about trying new things and taking risks with your ministry supervisor or pastoral staff. Reduce the “fallout” from the risks by advertising well, preparing your children, parents, and the team beforehand, and being prepared for whatever might happen. A new “risk” might be something that involves getting the children messy, wet, or “dirty.” It might be a new program or approach to ministry that you’ve never tried before. You might have to be willing to “take the hit” for a “failure” if it doesn’t work out well, but at least you tried. Each “risk” brings the potential for learning and improvement for the next attempt. **Note:** NEVER put the safety of your children at risk.



4. Cleanse your ministry “toxicity”

- A. **Create CM team identity.** Create a team logo, slogan, or some other statement that identifies who you are and what you are about. Spend time at team meetings talking about your vision, your passion, the challenges you face, and the wonderful “fruit” you all enjoy. Share success stories! Require that each team member bring a success story (something that happened in the past few weeks that indicates that your vision is being realized) to the meeting. Spend quality time in praise and worship of God for what He has done in the ministry and in the families involved. Change your terminology from “childcare” to “children’s ministry,” from “workers” to “team members,” and from “we need help” to “we have some openings.” Go on fun adventures with your CM team.



- B. **Remove the grumblers and “wolves” among your team.** In every group of people, there are grumblers and those who cause disunity. They seem to thrive on trouble, and on discord. The children’s ministry team is not the place to “minister” to these people. It is not the place for “weak” people to come and receive ministry. The children’s ministry team is a serious entity that faces amazing spiritual battles and spiritual responsibilities! We are shepherds. We must not permit any person to infiltrate the team and become “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” If someone is grumbling or causing disunity, we must confront them, challenge them, reward their improvement, or remove them from service according to the principles in Matthew 18: 15-17. Removing “scoffers” is very Biblical;



“Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; Yes, strife and reproach will cease.”
Proverbs 22: 10

- C. **Invite your senior pastor to enjoy the “fruit” of your ministry.** Most senior pastors care deeply for children and families, but the cares of their ministry demand that they pay more attention to the overall challenges of the adults. If we, in children’s ministry, are serving faithfully, and God is blessing the work of our hands, the senior pastor may “drift” farther and farther away from the actual workings of the children’s ministry. This isn’t because he doesn’t care, it is because he needs to trust us, and can’t be involved in everything happening in the church. To make sure that he doesn’t become too disconnected, we have to invite him to teacher meetings, children’s ministry events, family gatherings, and anything else we think he might need to see. Sending him periodic email reports of the “fruit” of the ministry is also a great idea.



- D. **Display the children’s ministry “fruit” for all to see.** Too often we unintentionally “hide” the fruit of the children’s ministry from others in an attempt to be “humble” and not boastful about what God is doing. This is not a good practice! It is God who is doing the great work with the children, and if we hide the fruit, we are offending Him! Share positive testimonies during the adult service. Create consistent displays of the fruit of the ministry in the foyer of the church, in the church bulletin (don’t just announce the “needs”), on the walls of the hallways of the church, in newsletters and emails to church members, in CM meetings, in church staff meetings, in board meetings, etc. Proclaim if from the rooftops!



- E. **Empower and incorporate the parents.** It is the parents who are Biblically given the responsibility to nurture their children spiritually (Deut. 6: 4-9). We, in the children’s ministry, exist as a support to them, and as a “pseudo parent” to those children whose parents don’t take the responsibility seriously. We must do all we can to support the parents, and to empower them to lead their own children to the Lord. Create parenting seminars, create parenting pamphlets on specific topics, create online parenting support, offer free copies of what you do in class so the parents can continue it at home, create parenting networks within the church to encourage parents to connect with each other, ask the senior pastor to preach on parenting, and to do all he can to provide support, counseling, etc. to the parents in your church.



5. Relieve your ministry “aches and pains”

A. Seek God’s wisdom in seeing the “big picture” of the conditions of your ministry.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God’s practice of “curses” and “blessings” is consistent. He “curses” (or withholds blessings) from those who displease Him, and He “blesses” those who honor Him with their “heart, soul, mind, and strength.” It is a good practice to say to the Lord, “...search me, oh God, and try me...” (Psalm 139: 23, 24) Are the challenges of your ministry related to each other? Do you struggle with “not enough” (people, money, facilities, children...) because God isn’t blessing your efforts? Is there a “pinched nerve” in your neck that is causing the pain in your arm? Ask God for wisdom, as you humbly fall on your face before Him.



B. Reestablish the fact that “your ministry” is not yours. The work of the ministry is God’s work. We are simply caretakers and servants. It is His Holy Spirit who does the work through us. As you take your ministry to the spa, you have to remember this basic fact. It is not your ministry. It is not through your efforts that children come to Him. He is simply using you, if you remain useful, as His voice and hands. Tell Him that you understand this basic fact and recommit yourself as a servant.



6. Refocus your ministry goals

A. Remember your vision, passion, and goals. There are so many passages in the Bible in which God challenges us to “remember.” He knows that we can easily get “caught up” in the things of the world, and forget who He is, and what we are about. In Joshua 4, God tells the people of Israel to make a monument of remembrance. They were to use the pile of stones as a place to return to and remind each other of what God had done for them, and what He had called them to do. This place was called “Gilgal.” Do you need to return to “Gilgal,” and remember your passion for children, and the vision that God gave you for the ministry? Do you need to return to “Gilgal” to remember who you are, and what God has done for you? The enemy wants you to forget, God wants you to remember...

B. Clarify the “giants” in your ministry. Just as God is wanting you to move forward in the power of His Holy Spirit, the enemy wants you to stop and be afraid. When Moses sent out “spies” to visit the promised land in Numbers 13 and 14, most of the spies came back and told about the “giants” in the land. It was Joshua and Caleb who focused not on the giants, but on the power of the Lord;

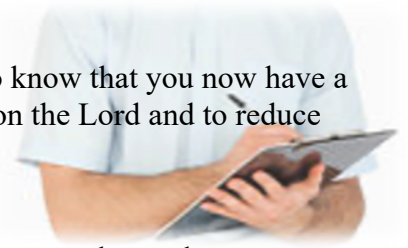
"The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them." Numbers 14: 7-9



What are the “giants” in your ministry? Of what are you afraid? What stops you from leading or teaching with boldness? Ask God to identify these “giants,” and to open your eyes to the lies of the enemy. Then, move forward in the power of the Lord and defeat the “giants” with your faith!

Regular Check-ups (establish a proactive ministry lifestyle)

After you have refreshed yourself and your ministry, you'll be pleased to know that you now have a "lifetime membership" to this spa! You can return regularly to remain focused on the Lord and to reduce your stress. Here is a simple plan to help you with regular "check-ups."



A. Consistent personal devotions

Make sure to have consistent devotions with God. Since you are busy, these may have to happen whenever you are able. During your devotions, "return" to the Lord and to the "spa perspective" of needing His help and "therapy."

B. Weekly Sabbaths

Since the "Sabbath" is probably your busiest day, you should have your weekly "Sabbath" at another time during the week. The "Sabbath rest" was designed by God to let your body, mind and spirit rest from work. Get away, walk on the beach or forest, or wherever you can to let God surround you.

C. Network with others

We in ministry can find ourselves in our own "comfortable rut." You can become comfortable with what you do and you never let yourself be challenged with new possibilities. The power of a network with other CM pastors or directors is in the fellowship and encouragement, but also in the new perspectives that may come.

D. Attend conferences

In today's online world, "attending" a conference may not require flying, driving, or staying in a hotel. That's good, but there is something powerful when you are able to pull away from your ministry to go to a conference and expose yourself to new things. It is a good way to "reset your breakers" and restore your vision.

E. Stay connected with children

In ministry leadership, you can easily isolate yourself from the children. Your entire job is about the adults on your CM team. If you do walk around during the services or programs, you might only "see" the adult/child ratios and whether or not the safety policies are being maintained. In order to remain soft and focused on the children, you need to discipline yourself to remain connected to the children. Play with them, talk with them, laugh with them. Adults can be very boring! Have some fun!

F. Return to "Gilgal" regularly for vision refreshment

As God instructed His people in Joshua 4, you need to "return to Gilgal" regularly. Your "Gilgal" can be a memory of a time when you knew without a doubt that God either spoke to you, or acted obviously in your life (miracle, answered prayer, etc.). The business of the ministry can become so "sterile" and you can easily forget the deeply spiritual nature of what you're doing. Return to Gilgal and remember!

Resources:

- Children's Ministry Magazine – (Group Publishing) childrensministry.com
- International Network of Children's Ministry – (Children's Pastors' Conference) incm.org
- Group Publishing – children's ministry conferences, seminars, etc. group.com
- "Growing A Healthy Children's Ministry" by Steve Alley
https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Healthy-Children-Ministry-Step/dp/B01FKUZY4Q/ref=sr_1_1?crid=9ID07RERDCAF&keywords=Growing+A+Healthy+Children%27s+Ministry&qid=1695820697&sprefix=growing+a+healthy+children%27s+ministry%2Caps%2C85&sr=8-1