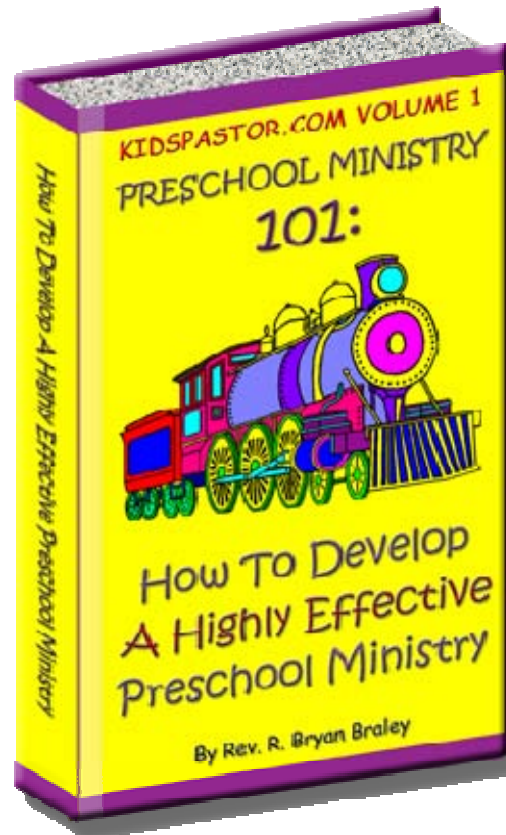


KIDSPASTOR.COM VOLUME 1

PRESCHOOL MINISTRY 101:



How to Develop a Highly Effective Preschool Ministry for Kids in Your Church

*(And Make Sure Every Child Gets
THE Bible Truth,
Regardless of the Curriculum You Use)*

By Rev. R. Bryan Braley

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**By Rev. R. Bryan Braley
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To My Wife, Phylissa

*Thank you for all help and support,
both in compiling this book and in the
years by my side in the ministry.*

*May we continue to work together
to make a difference in the Kingdom.*

Forward by David Spiegel

I have known Bryan as a fellow Children's Minister for quite a few years now. During that time, his heart for reaching and teaching kids has been easy for all to see. About three years back, he and his wife Phylissa started attending here at Sachse Assembly and shortly there after joined our ministry team. When an opening as Pastor of our Preschool Ministry became available, I approached him about taking on that role as a way to get on staff here at the church. He informed me that he was an Elementary age Children's Pastor and that he wasn't too sure about working with preschool age kids. But I knew that the same dedication and organizational skills that made him an effective leader in other areas was just what this ministry needed. As the Pastor who is responsible for all Children's Ministry at Sachse Assembly, it has been a pleasure to sit back and watch the results.

What was once an area for which recruiting volunteers was difficult and an area that, to be honest, did not quite measure up to the rest of the Children's Department, is now one of our brightest attractions. "The Flame Factory" is a bright, fun place. It is well staffed with committed workers who stay involved because it is well organized and the kid's are enjoying themselves and learning the word of God all at the same time. We have seen tremendous growth and our visitors now rave about a great first impression, whether they have preschool or elementary age children. Yes, it is true, this man who once thought of himself as only an elementary age Children's Pastor has fallen in love with these little ones and they have fallen in love with him.

I am so sold on this approach that I believe if you will take this book, starting wherever you are, and implement it one step at a time, you will see great results and your ministry will create new excitement. It has sure worked for us!

David Spiegel
Children's Ministries Pastor
Sachse Assembly of God
Sachse, TX
www.saog.org

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UNIT 1:

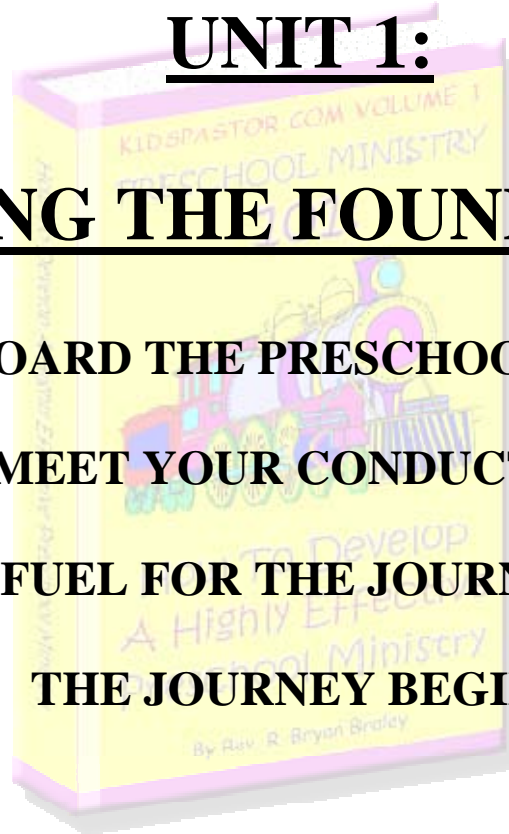
LAYING THE FOUNDATION

ALL ABOARD THE PRESCHOOL EXPRESS

MEET YOUR CONDUCTOR

FUEL FOR THE JOURNEY

THE JOURNEY BEGINS



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CHAPTER 1: ALL ABOARD THE PRESCHOOL EXPRESS

Welcome

Welcome to the exciting world of Preschool Children's Ministry. This is one of the most interesting, rewarding and necessary forms of ministry today. You are about to embark upon, or have already started, a major journey that will have eternal effects upon the children to whom you minister each and every week. I am glad you decided to allow me to join you on this journey and, along with Children's Pastors everywhere, I say, "Welcome to Children's Ministry, I hope you have as much fun as I do!"

The Purpose of this Book

It is my prayer that the facts, opinions, beliefs, and examples contained in the following pages will both challenge and inspire you to be the best Preschool Children's Pastor you can be. I hope this book will give you the insight, courage, and faith it will take to raise the quality of Children's Ministry in your church. I praise the Lord that He has blessed my life and my ministry and I humbly pray that you will be able to take some of what I've learned, apply it to your situation, and move to the next level that God has for you. So fasten your seatbelts as you join us on this incredible journey known as Preschool Children's Ministry.

So You WANT to Be A Children's Minister?

(Overcoming the Stigma of Children's Ministry)

I would like to take a moment to assure you that you have been called by God to minister to kids.

YES, GOD CARES ABOUT KIDS!

This is proven a number of times in the Scripture and there is perhaps no greater evidence than when Jesus said that we are to "*Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these..*" – Mark 10:14

Even though our Lord and Savior **expressly and directly commands** a ministry to children, there are many people in many places today that continue to look down on Children's Ministry as a lesser ministry, or even worse – a babysitting service.

Children's Ministry IS Real Ministry

I'm reminded of a time when a Senior Pastor spoke to me and said these words, "You don't want to be a Children's Minister and not a real Pastor." At the time, I took these words to heart and continued in the role of Assistant and Associate Pastor for a couple of years. However, in the end, I could not resist and I could not change the direction I felt God had laid on my heart. That direction was Children's Ministry.

What Kind of Return Do You Want on Your Investment?

Along the way I met another influential minister in my life, an international evangelist. This man shared with me the truth that, if he had a choice, he would minister to children. His reason was this, he said that at best, twenty percent of the people to which he ministered would respond to the message and give their hearts to Christ. However, at least eighty percent of the kids to which I minister would do the same thing. It was in that moment that I finally realized that I did not care what people thought or what kind of stigma was attached to Children's Ministry. I was going to do exactly what God called me to do – MINISTER TO CHILDREN.

At least EIGHTY PERCENT of the children to which you minister will give their hearts to God!

Onward Christian Soldier

I encourage you to do the very same thing regardless of what others think or say. Be true to the calling God has laid on your heart to minister to these precious little ones. Don't look back and don't look away! Be like fine gold, tried in the fire. Remember, it is God who has called you to be the best Children's Minister you can be. He has given you the glorious privilege and awesome responsibility to be one of the first to share the love of God with children.

Ready or Not, Here I Come!

On another note, for many years I have been an Elementary Children's Pastor. I have held crusades and have worked with one of the best Children's Pastors in the nation. Then God opened a door for me to move into Preschool Ministry. I wasn't sure I was ready for that move or that it was the direction in which I wanted to go.

Isn't Preschool Ministry Just Babysitting?

Again there was a stigma, a question on my mind. That question was, "What can I really do to help these kids and can I achieve the same results with these kids as with elementary age kids?"

Now I know that the real results are eternal and we will not know what we have really accomplished until we get to heaven, but I like seeing the response and knowing that lives are being changed. This can be very evident and immediate in Elementary Children's Ministry and yet not so much in the Preschool Ministry. It takes time to see the changes in lives, and it takes time to see the changes in actions and behaviors.

So What Is The Point of Preschool Ministry?

One day I had a mother ask me "What is the point of Preschool Ministry? Do you really think they get it?" In a moment of pride, I spoke of the fact that these kids have to be able to get saved. If they couldn't, God would not have me in a position of ministry to them.

Upon further reflection on the question, I came to a totally different conclusion. The conclusion I reached is this, **the reason I am in Preschool Ministry is to plant seeds**. Paul said that one plants, another waters, but it is God who makes it grow (*1 Corinthians 3:7*). I would like you to remember this and keep it in mind as you go through your "Preschool Ministry Years."

As a Preschool Minister, we get to till the ground and plant the seeds. There are even times when we get to water what was planted. As we are faithful to do what God has called us to do, there are also times He blesses us with seeing a plant begin to sprout. Then, on a very rare occasion, we actually get to reap the harvest of a precious young soul that still has years they can give to Christ.

CHAPTER 2: MEET YOUR CONDUCTOR

Before we go any further, I would like to introduce myself and let you get to know the man behind the keyboard. My name is Bryan Braley, and I have been involved in some form of Children's Ministry for over twenty years. I have worked in Children's Church, Kids' Crusades, Preschool Ministry, Boys' Groups and Sunday School. I've done everything from telling a Bible story to writing curriculum and from playing a crazy character to delivering a serious, heart felt, life changing message. I've ministered to as few as one or two and to as many as two hundred and everything in between. I currently serve as the Early Childhood Pastor at a growing Texas church and minister to forty to sixty preschoolers on a weekly basis.

My Story

Those are the facts, now let me tell you the story. This is the story of how God led me to take Children's Ministry in general, and Preschool Ministry in particular, from ordinary to extraordinary. This was accomplished by putting into practice some simple steps and allowing God to lead and guide me along the way.

The Early Days

I was raised in a small church and have always felt a call toward ministering to children. I even majored in education in college just so I could help others understand difficult concepts. After marrying, my wife, who is also an experienced Children's Minister, and I served as Sunday School teachers for a brief time and then moved into Children's Church work on a regular basis. After doing Children's Ministry for a while, I was asked to try my hand at Youth Ministry. I soon found out it was neither my calling nor my gifting.

Back To the Children

I then moved on to the ministry of Assistant Pastor and it was during my tenure as Assistant Pastor that I began to once again feel a definite call to Children's Ministry. I began to search for a way to move in this direction as God opened doors. I was soon able to begin ministering to elementary aged kids on a regular basis and I loved every minute of it.

A Continuous Quest for Improvement

I was always on the lookout for ways to become better at what God had called me to do – minister to kids. I was fortunate to become acquainted with David Spiegel, one of the best and most innovative Children’s Pastors I know. I got to watch David and his team in action year after year as they ministered during our annual Kids’ Crusade. Then, I began implementing some of what I saw and even did a couple of my own crusades.

Looking back at where I started, I can see God’s hand throughout the process. It is with this understanding that I make the following statement:

Three things have changed my life in regards to Children’s Ministry.

- **Spirit Directed OPPORTUNITY**
- **Anointed, Quality EDUCATION**
- **Practical, Godly MENTORSHIP**

OPPORTUNITY

The first was the opportunity to do a Kids’ Crusade and minister to more kids than ever before. I’ll never forget the feeling the first time I finished ministering at a crusade. It had taken weeks of planning and hours of work just to get ready. It was a very high-energy service and I was exhausted as it came time to deliver the message. God was with me, and His Spirit anointed me, but I was not prepared for what was going to happen next. At the end of the message, I gave the altar call for those who had never accepted Christ as their personal Savior. I was able to lead several children in the Sinner’s Prayer that had never said it before! Kids I had never seen before were asking Jesus to come into their hearts and God was using me to lead them! What a feeling! I just sat down and cried after the service at the goodness and mercy of God.

That night cemented in my heart that I was supposed to work with kids for as long as I possibly could.

EDUCATION

The second thing that really made a difference in my life was when I signed up for a Children's Ministries Conference hosted by Willie George of Church on the Move. I went hungry for ideas and desperate for ways to improve the quality of the Children's Ministry at my church. I was not disappointed with the conference. **I came away not only with new ideas, but also with a new found desire and determination to be the best I could be at ministering to kids and training others to do the same.**

MENTORSHIP

The third and final thing that brought me to where I am in Children's Ministry today was being able to work side by side with a super Children's Pastor, David Spiegel. The Lord began moving us to be able to join David at Sachse Assembly of God in December of 2002 and we began working with him on a regular basis a few months later.

God Will Open the Door

After about six months, the Lord opened a door to begin training children's volunteers for a special series of evangelistic services our church was to hold. In His providence, I was given the task of learning and training how Preschool Ministry was to take place during these services.

A short time later, the Preschool Director was led in a different direction and I was asked to step in as the Preschool Pastor. I was scared to death! I had never done, and had no real desire to do, Preschool Ministry. Nevertheless, I agreed to take the job and began preparing for my first tenure as a Preschool Pastor.

Baptism by Fire

Remember that special series of services I mentioned, well, it was the responsibility of me and my wife to provide Preschool Ministry during these two weeks of services. We had some ideas "going in" and made quite a few changes during those two weeks. Someone commented on the number of changes that had taken place and I simply replied, "We just did three months of services in two weeks." So it looked like things were changing a lot faster than they were.

There you have it, a long term Children’s Minister that was given the opportunity to minister to preschoolers. I’ve made some changes along the way and do not doubt that I have more to make, but -

The secret to successful Children’s Ministry is doing whatever it takes to reach the kids for Christ.

God has given me a great love for these kids and has blessed me with a wonderful wife and a great team to help me minister to them.

I only hope that, in the pages that follow, I will be able to pass along some of what I have learned in a way that will be helpful to you. I pray that you will find many things in this book that will help you build a better ministry and lay a better foundation in the hearts and lives of preschoolers. However, I am reminded of the words of a friend of mine, “When I go to a conference or a seminar, talk to a fellow minister, read a book, or listen to a sermon, if I can get one good idea or strategy that I can put in place as is, or tweak a little for my ministry, then I feel like the endeavor has been successful.”

I hope that you will find at least one nugget of truth that can help you effectively bring more young souls into the kingdom for eternity.

Notes:

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CHAPTER 3: FUEL FOR THE JOURNEY

Now that I have given you a little bit of personal history, let's get started into the whole reason you bought this book in the first place: To learn the methods you need to use to make sure your Preschool Ministry is as good as it can be and that the children are getting what you are trying to teach them. Remember, if the children cannot learn the way you teach, it is up to you to teach the way they learn.

The Power of Prayer

Perhaps the most important item in all that I am going to teach you is the same thing that is important in every other area of your life and is vital to your spiritual health and well-being. That item is the truth that. . .

Prayer must precede, accompany, and succeed any thing you do in Preschool Ministry.

You cannot make a change just because you think it is a good idea or because you like the sound of it. Ask the Lord what He thinks about it, lay out a plan, discuss it with colleagues, and implement the plan.

Some plans can be implemented without much effort and pretty seamlessly, but others require careful planning. Some can only work as major overhauls to your current system while others can be introduced gradually. Which ones are which? That is where prayer, planning, and discussion come in.

The Power of Authority

When I first began preparing to train several new volunteers on how to do Preschool Ministry in the current environment, I found that I had a pretty good grasp on how things worked and what needed to be done. After taking part in the system that was in place for a couple of weeks, I could see some definite changes that I thought needed to be made, but I knew I could not make them immediately. Why? **Because to do so would have been to step out from under the authority I had been given** as a trainer and special services leader and into the authority that had been given to the Preschool Coordinator. Notice, the authority was not mine to make the changes I thought needed to be made.

It is vitally important to remain in the authority God has given you and to know when to stand in that authority.

The Power of Perseverance – Stay Where You Are

One more note on authority before we move on. Your ministry will never grow larger than the heart of the Senior Pastor for children and his willingness to trust you to lead the Children's Department into the fullness of God's purpose for the ministry. If his heart doesn't match yours, that is OK, prayer can change his heart. If you feel hemmed in, remember Jesus' words – "*you have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.*" – (Matthew 25:21). It takes time to gain the confidence of a Senior Pastor. It takes time for them to realize you are capable of doing the job right. As you prove yourself to him and to the people of the congregation, you will see your ministry grow into the vision God has given you. Stick with it, hang in there, and God will bless your efforts.

There are really three things that must stay at the forefront of your mind and your thinking in order for you to be successful in Children's Ministry:

“The 3 P’s of Successful Children’s Ministry”

PRAYER

POWER

PERSEVERANCE

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An Overview

OK, now that we have the three prerequisites out of the way, let's jump in to the meat of *How To Develop A Highly Effective Preschool Ministry And Make Sure Every Child Understands The Bible Truth You Are Teaching, Regardless Of The Curriculum You Use*.

In the following pages, I will discuss these topics:

- Understanding The Preschooler
- Understanding The Preschool Parent
- Discipline In Preschool Ministry
- Brining Everything Together With “The Power of One”
- The Elements Of A Successful Preschool Worship Service
 - Music
 - Songs
 - Bible Stories
 - Storytelling
 - Puppets and Crazy Characters
 - Praying With Preschoolers
- The Rotation Model – Pastor Bryan Style
- What's In a Name?
- Many Hands Make Light Work – Volunteers, How To Get Them And Keep Them Happy
- Securing Your Preschool Ministry Area
- How To Choose A Curriculum
- And Much More

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CHAPTER 4: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Understanding the Preschooler

I think it is pretty safe to say that before you begin ministering to someone, it is a good idea to find out what you can about them, their culture, and their learning style. Chances are that unless you are ministering in a foreign country or an area vastly different from where you were raised, you already know many of the cultural nuances that apply to the general population. If that is the case, however, you may not know all you need to know in order to effectively minister to kids.

A great book on understanding some of the psychology of Children's Ministry is *Teaching On Target* by Dr. Robert Choun and Jane Willson Choun. It goes into detail about what children at different ages can truly understand about different foundational doctrines.

Understanding the Preschool Parent

The first rule in understanding the preschool parent is to realize that their child is special. Each time they have a runny nose, each time they have a cough, or fall down and have a "boo boo," it is different from any other child. Their child has special days and their child has special moods. Their child is smarter than the other children and is, for that matter, further developed. Their child is more intellectual than the other children and there is always a reason their child is having a bad day.

The first rule in understanding the preschool parent is to realize that their child is special.

Yes, it is true; each and every preschool child is special and must be treated like they are special. We must convince and prove to the parents that we believe their child is special. It doesn't matter that we have seen a thousand runny noses and heard a million coughs. It doesn't matter that we have seen several hundred temper tantrums and witnessed the bad days, the mood swings, and the unpredictability that are standard fare for the preschool mindset.

“Preschool Moments” – Whose Fault Are They?

There will be days when preschoolers decide they do not want to go to kids’ church. Many times it has nothing to do with you and it has nothing to do with your program. It has nothing to do with how you approach Children’s Ministry. They are simply having what my wife and I like to call a “*Preschool Moment*.”

If It Is Your Fault

The parent may or may not give you their own rendition or understanding of why their child has decided to take a leave of absence from your ministry. If they do, I encourage you to listen to what they say and see if there is something you can do differently. See if the reason is legitimate. If it is, do something about it. Change. Do something different. Do something better. Don’t take it as a criticism with the intent to tear down, but take it as relevant feedback with the intent to build up. This is an opportunity to make better what God is doing for you and your church.

If It Is Not Your Fault

If the reason is not legitimate, smile and say you understand and that you appreciate their position. Above all, make a special point to say “Hi” to the child any time you see them. Sooner or later, the child will return and will be back having fun with the rest of your kids.

Discipline in Preschool Ministry

If you are new to Preschool Ministry, or if you have years and years of experience, I am sure you understand there are right ways and there are wrong ways of implementing child discipline in a ministry environment.

Many or Few?

Most of the time, discipline situations that occur during a service will only involve one or two children. These situations can be handled by an attentive volunteer who is working in the room. There will also be times, as a Preschool Minister, that you will be required to stop the service to address a specific situation that is occurring. Both of these situations require wisdom, patience, and the direction of the Holy Spirit to determine when and how to handle them.

An Example of the Few

If Johnny and Jimmy are talking among themselves and no other child is being bothered, it is probably a good time to let it slide. You may mention it or you may motion with your eyes to a volunteer to handle the situation, but this is done without stopping the flow of the service. Remember, it is important that the service continues to flow.

An Example of the Many

If you have a number of children who are not paying attention and have decided it is their turn to talk, you might try a few different tactics that I have learned over the years and have also witnessed in school and ministry situations.

Try saying something like **“One, two, three, eyes on me!”** to get the attention and focus back on you and the service. Another method I have found that works quite well is to have the children **“Catch a Bubble”** or **“Put a Bubble in Your Mouth.”** I have also used sayings like **“Clap once if you can hear me.”** and **“Clap twice if you can see me.”** You may even want to make it a little more fun and have them rub their belly or touch their nose if they can see and hear you. Sometimes I go through several steps like these, saying each one more and more quietly, to bring the kids back to where I want them to be.

Never Single Them Out

It is never a good idea to verbally discipline one particular child in front of all of the other kids. While it is acceptable to call their name to get their attention, that should be the limit of individual disciplinary attention in public. You want the child to feel loved and appreciated, not degraded. You want the child to come back so you can continue to minister to them. Remember, God has a plan for them and your desire should be for that plan to be fulfilled. Do not embarrass or intimidate them, for to do so would be to greatly harm your cause.

Second Level Discipline

If a child continues to act out in a way that is extremely disruptive to the entire service or in a way which may bring harm to themselves or to someone else, it is your responsibility to remove the child from the situation. At this time, you might have an aide or another volunteer take the child to another room, or take them into the hallway and contact their parents. It is a good idea if you, or another ministry leader, talk to the parents, and explain the situation to them, when they arrive to pick up their child.

A Formula for Re-introduction

Before calling the parents, do your best to bring the child back into compliance with the rules and back into involvement with the other children in the service. An example of a “re-introduction opportunity” is when a child is having a bad day and continues to cry for Mom or Dad. If they are really having a rough day, here are some suggestions that may help them out:

- Use compassion
- Take them into another room
- Let them play for a little while
- Talk to them
- Get down on their level
- Love them
- Hold them
- Hug them

When We Can't – The Parents Must

Ultimately, if you, or another volunteer, are unable to get them calmed down and get them involved, it is time to call the parents. Remember, it is rarely something you have done, or something you have caused, that is making the child cry. This is another “Preschool Moment” and sometimes Mom and Dad are the best ones to handle a “Preschool Moment.” If everything gets better, let the child come back and have fun later in the service.

Remember, you cannot minister to those that are not there.

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UNIT 2:

**MAKING YOUR MINISTRY
OUTSTANDING**

KEEP THAT TRAIN MOVING

**STAYING ON TRACK WITH
“THE POWER OF ONE”**

WHICH CARS WILL YOU PULL TODAY
The Elements of a Successful Preschool Service

**RIDING THE RAIL
“PASTOR BRYAN STYLE”**

WHAT TRAIN ARE YOU RIDING

MAKING YOUR TRAIN LOOK GOOD

PULLING OUT THE FANCY CARS

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CHAPTER 5: KEEP THAT TRAIN MOVING

One of the biggest secrets to successful Preschool Ministry is that you have to keep the kids interested in what is happening. In order to keep them interested, you have to keep things moving. Your acceptance of and reaction to this truth will directly determine the success of your Preschool Ministry.

In order to keep preschoolers interested, you have to keep things moving.

Just the Facts

Research shows that the attention span of children is equal to approximately one minute of time per year of age. That means, if you have a group of three to five year olds, you need to be doing something different every three to five minutes or you **WILL lose the interest of your audience.**

My Audience?

That's right, I said audience. In today's world of *Barney*TM, *Nick Jr.*TM, and *The Disney Channel*TM you have to be willing and able to compete for kids' attention. What does that mean? You have to be willing and able to put on a show for kids. In other words, **you have to give them what they want!** What a concept! If you don't give them what they want, they will "TURN YOU OFF" and escape to their own little world of imagination. Now don't get me wrong, I understand that we are working with preschoolers and there will be days when some of them will "TURN YOU OFF" no matter what you do or how well you do it.

That being said, if you look out and see more "OFF" than "ON," it is time to do something different.

Give them what they want, a change, and get what you want, their attention. You can then slide in a little bit of truth and they won't even realize what just happened.

What did just happen? You just took back control of the service. Now it can go where you want it to go – **right into the truth of God's Word.**

Watch the Signs

How can you tell if the kids have “turned you off” or if they are still “tuned in” to what is going on in the service? Look at them:

- Can you see their eyes?
- Can you hear their voices?
- Are they playing or fighting with someone?

Their actions will tell you whether or not you have them where you want them.

Please Secure All Loose Minds

The preschool mind is easily distracted (as if adults aren't), and if you want to keep them riding the train you are conducting, you have to keep their attention. To do that, you have to KEEP THINGS MOVING. If you don't, they will hop another train and you'll have to stop, get them back on your train, and take off again.

Don't Stop

Did anyone notice the number one Preschool Ministry “dirty word” I just mentioned? STOP - If you have to keep things moving, this is the last thing you want to do with a group of preschoolers. When you stop, you run the risk of losing the ones that were still riding your train. Remember, if you're leading with no one following, you are just taking a walk.

The Secret To Constant Forward Motion

So how do you keep things moving in a Preschool Worship Service? That is a very good question and I am glad you asked it. It can be challenging at times and I am always looking for new ways to make the mundane, housekeeping things more exciting and help keep everything moving along.

One thing you don't want in any Children's Ministry endeavor is “dead air.”

“Dead air” is that awkward, silent time between the finishing of one thing and the beginning of another and it is a killer to effective Children's Ministry.

Here is a list of some ideas to help prevent “dead air” in Preschool Ministry:

- Have A Schedule
- Have A Tight Schedule
- Provide For Transition Times
- Have Songs Ready To Go
- Have Fun With Announcements
- Use Puppets Or Crazy Characters
- Have Props Ready To Go
- Keep Instructions To A Minimum
- Be Ready To Improvise

Have a Schedule

It is utterly important that you have a schedule. If you want to be effective, you can't just go in to the service with something like this:

- Sing a Couple of Songs
- Do the Memory Verse
- Throw In a Puppet or Two
- Tell the Bible Story
- Take the Offering
- Pray

You have to **KNOW** what you are going to do **BEFORE** you walk in the door. If you don't, those sweet, innocent, little preschoolers will **EAT YOUR LUNCH**. You will then leave your service confused, disappointed, and ready to quit the ministry after only a few failures. I know, I've been there, and I've done that.

Have a Tight Schedule

If you **HAVE** to have a schedule and you **HAVE** to **KEEP THINGS MOVING**, then your schedule needs to be **TIGHT!** Remember, you only have three to five minutes of quality ministry time in each activity. You can learn to stretch these numbers a little bit with experience and God's help and anointing, but don't push it too far or too fast. Look for the signs, are you “ON” or “OFF?”

Here's an example of a tight schedule for a preschool service:

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>
11:00	Welcome to ??????
11:02	Song (Know What Song)
11:05	Lesson Introduction (Main Point)
11:09	Offering (Get the Kids Moving)
11:13	Memory Verse (Get Creative)
11:16	Song (Know What Song)
11:19	Bible Story (Get Creative)
11:25	Prayer & Dismissal

Make It Work For You

We use a schedule very similar to this every Sunday morning. Please realize, this is not the only way to do it. You may want to change things up a little bit, add something from your own experience or preference, or delete something we're doing altogether. Remember, this is just an example. Let God lead you and your experience show you what works for you.

If you get an idea, try it! If it doesn't work, toss it. If it does, keep it!

Don't Keep the Schedule a Secret

Type out the schedule and make copies of it – plenty of copies. One for the sound technician, one for the light technician, one to go behind the puppet stage, one for the dressing room, and at least one for the podium or whatever you use to hold your service supplies. This helps make sure that everyone is on the same page at the same time. Everyone knows what is happening right now and what is going to happen next. This helps keep the service moving along and having your support staff know exactly where you are going can be a real life saver.

Servant or Master?

Remember, the schedule, though carefully and prayerfully put together before hand, should remain our servant and not become our master. If you need to do something spontaneous to get the kids back on board with you, or if a key person for a particular part is called away unexpectedly for a few minutes, do something out of order. Just make sure you communicate it to everyone involved so you stay on the same track.

Provide For Transition Times

If you know that you need time to get something ready, to change into a specific costume or to get behind the puppet stage, plan for it ahead of time and make sure you have time to be ready for the next thing **before the next thing gets here**. Remember, KEEP THINGS MOVING.

Tag, You're It

The best way I have found to do this is to use the “tag team approach.” This approach is somewhat easier if you are married and both you and your spouse are involved in the same ministry. If you are single, or are involved in a different area of ministry than your spouse, you can still integrate the “tag team approach” into your ministry routine. This will require a lot of verbal communication in the beginning. As you become more comfortable with your ministry partner, each of you will become quite skilled at correctly interpreting non-verbal communication as well. Regardless of the situation in which you find yourself, I still recommend this approach for a number of reasons, transition times being one of them.

Using the “tag team approach,” two or more members of the ministry team are “up front” most of the time. Then, when it is time for one of the team members to slip off and do a quick change, they quietly disappear and the ministry carries on.

But the Kids Will Know

Sure, the kids will notice when someone leaves, and they may even be able to figure out who does which characters and puppets, but who cares. The mystery helps keep them involved in the overall service. I've had preschoolers that knew who was under the “Maynard mask” within a couple of times of seeing me and twelve year olds that took months to figure it out.

It Takes Two (At Least)

Anyway, back to the “tag team approach.” Did you notice that I mentioned two or more members of the team are up front most of the time? Actually the only time they aren’t both up front is when one of them is getting ready for the next thing. Then, if the next thing is interacting with a character or even a puppet, both members of the team are back up front, even though one cannot be seen.

A Word to the Wise

Let me take a moment to stress the importance of having more than one adult in the classroom with children.

In today’s litigious society, we have to re-double our efforts to remain above and beyond even the APPEARANCE of impropriety in all areas of ministry but especially with children. One of the biggest areas of church lawsuits today is that which includes accusations of inappropriate behavior with children – whether these accusations are true or not.

Also, in today’s perverted society that is so hung up on sex, we can’t afford to let anyone be alone with our children – EVEN WITH a good background check and volunteer screening process in place. We may not know what someone has gone through in their past, or what they may be struggling with outside the church.

We NEED more than one adult in a room with children for protection:

- ***To protect our children***
- ***To protect ourselves***
- ***To protect our church***

The Bible tells us to be wise and to be aware of the ways the enemy would try and destroy us. As the importance of Children’s Ministry is dawning across this nation, you can be sure that Satan will try his best to destroy what God is doing today.

Have Songs Ready to Go

So what do I need to do to have the songs ready to go?

Off Key Acapella

You may say, “We simply tell the class ‘Let’s sing ‘Jesus Loves Me,’ and start singing, without music.’” Remember when I mentioned earlier that we were competing with *The Disney Channel*TM and *Nickelodeon*TM? Well, **for the most part, acapella songs that have been sung for centuries WILL NOT give the kids what they want.** We need to actively seek for new, exciting songs that have a modern beat AND the opportunity for kids to really get involved with all kinds of actions. There are several publishers of some great children’s music out there and much of it is great for preschoolers as well as elementary age kids.

What Are the Big Kids Singing?

Something we have done to keep in step with the music of the day is to take some of the songs the big kids are singing and introduce them to our preschoolers. This helps us make sure we have fun and exciting songs. It also helps prepare our kids for the day when they get to join the big kids. As a matter of fact, our entire preschool praise and worship service is just a scaled down version of the praise and worship service for our elementary age kids.

Some Fun Recommendations

Some of the songs we use are: “Undignified,” “Everlasting Love,” “The Throw Up Song,” “It’s Not By Might” (not the hymn), “Big God O,” “Great Big Love,” and several others. Some great CD’s are available from Group Publishing, Integrity Music, One Way Street, and many others. Just take a trip to your local Christian bookstore or do a Google search for “Christian children’s music.” You may even want to get some youth involved in helping you determine which music will work for today’s kids.

So Many CD’s

Once you decide to take the leap into some more up-beat music, you will be faced with another problem – how to have everything ready to go so that things keep moving during your service. The easiest way I have found to do this is to make a backup copy of your music CD’s onto your computer. You can then take these backup copies and burn a service CD which includes all of the songs and sound effects you will need for that particular service. This prevents having to switch out CD’s quickly, which can be a hassle. In fact, I don’t even burn a different CD for every

service since we use the same group of songs on a regular basis. Every few months, I'll burn a new service CD and just play the tracks I want from that CD during a particular service (I note the track number on the schedule).

Have Fun with Announcements

If you absolutely, positively have to have live announcements, have fun with them! Turn them into a newscast or have a special character make a special announcement. Above all, deliver them with excitement and deliver them quickly. If you deliver your announcements like you are reading from a church bulletin, you have just STOPPED THE TRAIN and kids will "TURN YOU OFF."

Use Puppets or Crazy Characters

The use of puppets and crazy characters is vitally important to keeping things moving. A new voice or a new visual can be just as effective in changing things up as a new physical position or location for the children.

Alternate Communication Entities

One of the easiest ways to change things up is through the use of "alternate communication entities," otherwise known as puppets and crazy characters. So, grab a puppet, or put on some crazy clothes, and get to work. You may not be the best in the beginning, but kids can and do forgive a lot.

Caution – Falling Preschoolers

I would like to offer one word of caution on this point: Some kids, preschool and elementary alike, may be uncomfortable, or scared, when they encounter a puppet or crazy character. Do not let this cause you to abandon this tool, let it help you learn how to use the tool more effectively. In my experience, kids will warm up to the characters they see on a regular basis and this tool is far too valuable to lay down.

Have Any Props Ready to Go

OK, it's time for the Bible story. Today's story is "Elijah Goes to Heaven," and you decide that you want to talk about the mantle, the river, and the chariot of fire for the story. **Have these things readily available BEFORE the story starts.** If you cannot get them ready, have a helper get them ready and hand them to you as you reach each stage of the story. Remember, if you don't KEEP THINGS MOVING, the kids will lose interest and "TURN YOU OFF."

If you look back at the schedule, you will notice we only have five or six minutes to tell the Bible story. To some that may seem like an eternity, but in reality it will pose a formidable challenge to all who attempt it.

The challenge is this: How to tell an exciting story in an exciting way while delivering a key point in less than five minutes.

I must admit, I still have trouble doing this myself at times. Who knows, maybe it is the long winded preacher in me.

Keep Instructions to a Minimum

Warning, MAJOR TURN OFF approaching! That's right, if you are spending more than about thirty to sixty seconds giving instructions without getting the kids involved, whether it is the introduction, rules to a game, or just mindless droning, you will begin to see a majority of the kids "TURN YOU OFF."

Like Mom used to tell me when I first started preaching, K.I.S.S – Keep It Short Stupid! Boy, she really loved me, didn't she! The truth is, that advice really works in Children's Ministry (and may not be so bad when ministering to adults as well – but that's a whole other can of worms).

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Be Ready To Improvise

Have you ever been in front of a group of people and suddenly realized that, even though you were talking, no one was listening? Somehow, you had managed to lose your entire audience and were not sure how you did it. I have experienced this sensation on a couple of occasions and I will be honest, most of them were in front of a group of children. Children are a demanding audience. They demand that we entertain them and keep them involved.

Most of them, at least for a while, care more about the flash than they do about the facts.

Next Stop – Neverland

With that in mind, when you look out and see the faces of your kids lost in *Neverland*, it is time to do something and quick. If you do not think what you had planned can pull them back into your world, you have to improvise!

You have to be willing and prepared to do whatever it takes to get them back into your world by giving them what they want so you can give them what they need.

Sing a quick song, bring out a puppet, turn your Bible story from a monologue into an interactive drama, whatever; just be ready and DO IT!

Trust Your Instincts

As I mentioned earlier, kids have about one minute of attention span for every year they have been on this earth. It is also known that preschoolers are in love with the familiar, if you don't believe me, just try to mess with their schedules a little and you will quickly see what I mean.

Oops, I Did It – Once

As a matter of fact, I would like to share a personal example that will help illustrate this point. My church holds water baptisms on a pretty regular basis to allow those who are new Christians to publicly announce their commitment to Christ. On one such occasion, my son, Justin, told me he was ready to follow Christ in water baptism. Needless to say, I was thrilled and honored that I would have the opportunity and the privilege of baptizing my son. The only problem was that the baptismal service was scheduled to take place during the service part of our preschool rotation.

We decided to rearrange the rotation and do the service later in order to allow for me and Mom to attend the baptismal service. What I thought was not that big of a deal turned out to be almost disastrous. When we brought the kids back in for the service, it was virtually impossible to get a flow going or to effectively minister the truth of the day to them. Next time, I will get a substitute for the service.

The Same yet Different

The fact that preschoolers love the familiar presents the Preschool Minister with a wonderful challenge – How do I keep things consistent enough to keep them comfortable without keeping them so consistent they become bored?

Sing a New Song

One of the main areas this happens is in the area of songs. As I introduce a new song, I will keep it in the rotation for a few weeks just to let the kids learn the words and motions to the song. At that time, I will start mixing in some other songs the kids have already learned.

For a while, I can see real excitement in the faces of the kids, but then a funny thing happens. As I begin to feel a little bored with the song, I also notice there may be just a few kids participating in the song. I know this can be just the age. I also know they may be having a “Preschool Moment,” and I always take that into consideration. If more and more kids are choosing to sit rather than to participate, I know it is time for a change. So, what do I do? That song goes on the shelf for a few weeks and another new (or new again) song comes out and the excitement is reborn.

That's a Wrap

So there they are, some of the key things you need to understand about the needs of the preschooler and how to put together a service to meet those needs. I will go deeper into the elements of successful Preschool Worship Service in Chapter 7.

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