The Person is Crucial

Have you ever read a book by a Children’s Ministry “expert”, only to later find that the “so-called-expert” is actually someone who saw a kid once about 30 years ago? I’ve been disappointed by books in the past that were supposed to be cutting edge and ground breaking – and they probably were when the author was connected to a local church in the mid 1960s. That’s part of why I love this book so much – this isn’t a book written by an ethereal believer in Children’s Ministry. It is written by a “down-in-the-trenches”, “roll-up-your-sleeves-get-the-job-done”, Children’s Pastor. (Please understand I am not invalidating books or thoughts from individuals who are not currently CP’s – but I think you get my point.) I personally love when I have the opportunity to talk with authors or see them at conventions. That’s part of what makes Crucial Concepts in Kids Ministry such a great book for me. I have met Randy Christensen on several occasions, having had the opportunity to witness his ministry and talk with him one-on-one. Going beyond what I know of Randy personally, the question of “Why should I listen to you?” is answered by one of the greats in Children’s Ministry – Jim Wideman. He was asked, if he were the Senior Pastor, who would he hire as his Children’s Pastor? Without hesitation, Bro. Jim answered: “Randy Christensen.” That’s more than enough to make me sit up and listen.

Progressive Traditions…(isn’t that an oxymoron?)

In Children’s Ministry, it is always a struggle to stay on top of what’s new and happening. We read books, watch trends, network on Kidology – all in the hopes of trying to stay on top of Kid Culture and the latest techniques. You’ll be happy to know that this book has nothing to do with new kid culture and it still will help you to stay on top of things. (Collectively - Huh?)

Take a step back and look at things – do you ever need a fresh perspective? Think of how many times you have read a familiar scripture; you know it backwards and forwards – it has been written on the walls of your heart. Then you hear a sermon where, with a masterful stroke, the minister expands your understanding of God’s Word and explodes what you thought you knew. Welcome to the intro to Crucial Concepts: a fresh perspective on an issue or ministry many of us have wrestled with for years. Christensen takes a step back from ministry in the local church and walks through all the steps needed to build a successful Children’s Ministry. It’s old stuff that is often taken for granted by those who have been in Children’s Ministry for a long time. From foundational issues like vision, to upper levels of the building, like worship and teaching styles, Christensen deconstructs things and then helps us put them back together. “For me, being in Children’s Ministry less than a year, this book really helped me to feel better prepared to face some of the challenges in Children’s Ministry. It felt more like a manual or guided tour of what I need to be aware of…” – Darcie Farmer, Children’s Ministry Intern - Crosspointe Life Church.
Eutychus? Eutychus? Anyone? Anyone?

“...in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said "Do not trouble yourselves, for 'his life is in him.' ...and they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.”  Acts 20:9, 10, 12 NKJV

Even though it might not always seem like it, kids are passionate about God!!  Think of the spiritual battles that they carry.  They live in a harsh world that does not glorify God or encourage a personal faith.  They deal with adult size issues daily – from unsaved loved ones to bullies in the school yard – yet they continue on.  This is who Eutychus was – a young man who loved God and desired to know more about God.  He is a model for modern Children’s Ministry – a faithful follower... who happened to fall asleep.

Many churches never really see the full potential behind children – they look at them with skewed perspectives: they view them as cute, or inconvenient.  They miss the great potential behind this generation of young people.  Echoing the words of many books on Children’s Ministry, the issue of how the church receives, supports, and teaches children is again confronted.  Pastor Todd McKeever points out: “Randy talks about how ‘we must stop looking at the outward appearance and realize that God does not want to choose anyone because of his or her maturity.’  I think at first we all quickly say AMEN!  But I want to challenge us to think about this.  I wonder how many times we have given certain parts, ministries, and responsibilities to kids who look like they have it all together.  How many times do we treat kids according to what they show us on the outside?  How many kids do we talk about with others when they misbehave?  The importance of what we do helps shift the adult perspective to shape a positive view of children.

'Trickle down' doesn’t work here... from the ground up is how to go!

What is the ground level in Children’s Ministry?  And no... it is not the person who empties the “diaper genie”.  The foundation of any Children’s Ministry, corporation, church, or whatever, has to be vision.  We won't have a great Children’s Ministry just because we have a great Kids’ Church or Nursery.  Those are the top levels of the building – we might have great pieces, but we need to have something that ties them all together.  This is not new information – we know this – we’ve heard this... this has been preached over and over.  Finish the sentence: “Where there is no vision ____________.”  Here is the brilliance of what is shared by Christensen – he actually shares what his vision is for Children’s Ministry... in his church!!  An actual example of what a church uses...wow!  The goal of this book is to equip you to do ministry – much like a Pastor’s job in the local church.  We equip the saints so that they can do the work.

Our job as leaders is to have vision. Vision is something that comes from God.  Vision is essentially being able to see what God sees.  Since God sees the beginning of time and the end of time, he has a vision for your ministry and for each kid in it.  As leaders, our goal is to work toward seeing that vision accomplished.  Vision isn’t a buzzword - it’s the foundation of your ministry.  It is vital to fulfilling the call God has placed on you to train up the children in your ministry.

Sit quietly with your hands in your lap… Yeah, right!

"Do as I say, not as I do!"  Does anyone give off that message?  "One of the great quotes for me is: Whatever you allow is what you teach.  When we go and allow certain behaviors to take place and do nothing about them, then we are showing that it is ok, that no consequences will take place.” - Pastor Todd Mckeever.  In a classroom, this makes sense – kids do what we let them get away with.  But what about how this applies to other areas of life?  Think about the opportunities we provide as Children’s Leaders – what level of value do we place on the fact that kids are active learners and like to participate in what is happening?  Go back to what we said earlier about the perspective from which adults view children – if we do not give them the opportunities to minister, then what are we...
saying to them and to other people? Here’s a short list, from the book, of ministries you can plug your kids into: puppets, short skits and dramas, pantomimes, worship back-up singers, children’s choir, bell choir, registration helpers, ushers, greeters, clowns, audio techs, video/computer techs, costumed characters, kids newsletter writers, seasonal decorators, senior citizen visitation program, preschool ministry helpers. Dare to believe that kids can contribute to the ministry that is supposed to be for them. I guess that’s the question – is your ministry *for* kids or *to* kids?

**It’s Children’s Ministry and it’s all about YOU!!**

I was challenged while reading this book to really stop and take a look at myself and what I do in Children’s Ministry. While I always thought Children’s Ministry was about the kids and not about me, I’ve discovered it really *is* about me. As I am challenging the kids and equipping them, if I myself am not growing and becoming more than I was before, then there will always be a limit to what I can teach the kids. I personally will hinder their growth by my own lack of growth. I think it was a brilliant decision to place a whole chapter in the book about the importance of humility.

Have you ever worn a Hawaiian shirt to an adult service? Or taken a pie in the face? It can be a humbling experience, but that’s really the key to doing what we do. We keep the perspective of why we do it – it is for the kids. Humility is a huge key to walking in a successful Children’s Ministry. Christensen writes “Earn the respect of your kids by humbling yourself and becoming part of their world. That’s what God did. He left the riches and wonders of heaven, humbled Himself, and entered our world. He became like us, so in time, we may become like Him”.

**But I’m not *that kind* of Children’s Pastor**

Got any skills? What are the “tricks of the trade” that you carry around with you everywhere? Can you juggle? Can you tell a good story? Can you eat fire? Do you have to in order to be a good Children’s Pastor, Director, or Leader? I honestly don’t think you need to be a circus performer in order to be a Children’s Pastor – it wouldn’t hurt, but it’s not required. But where is the line in the sand? What skills do we think a person should have to be a good teacher? Most of us are happy if people are willing to serve – we spend time looking for the curriculum with the least amount of preparation and “no special skills needed”. I think there is a time and place for that, but what about for you? Do you have any new skills you are working on to help you do your ministry better? Are you perfecting a presentation form, or are you a “jack of all trades and master of none”?

Randy shares a story of a traveling evangelist who had something horrible happen to him on a trip overseas. He arrived at the airport only to find out that his luggage had been lost. What did he do? Come up with something on the spot? Nope – he cancelled his meetings. Why? Because he didn’t have his ‘tools’. What would you have done? What if your PowerPoint won’t work, or your “automatic” magic trick falls apart? What do you do? Do you pack up and go home or throw on a video for the kids to watch? The answer should be a resounding *NO!* Something we always have to keep in mind: YOU are your best prop! Dan Rector, Children’s Ministry Specialist at North Central University in Minneapolis, MN, calls it “walking around with a story in your pocket.” So what are your pockets lined with?
Children’s Ministry 101

Walking away from reading some books, I’m left with the feeling of: “Ok...now what?” That’s again the beauty of Crucial Concepts in Kids’ Ministry – it’s like a mini-study course. At the end of each chapter there are a series of questions to help you walk through the process of what Children’s Ministry is to you and how you can shape things at your local church. It’s like having a little coaching guide to walk you through the steps.

A right perspective on what we do

I want to share this passage from the book:

“One of the foundational reasons that churches are suffering today is that deep down inside, their ministry to children is suffering. Many church bodies have grown to have a high pain threshold in the area of children's ministry.” This pain takes a while for it to show itself. It takes years, and by the time it shows itself, it has been so long in coming that diagnosing it becomes really difficult. People need to wake up and see the value of Children's Ministry. Sometimes, because kids are not immediately seen as the vital work force of the church, or the big tithers, etc., then they can be viewed as less important. I think at times they can be seen as just a growth tool and not as souls we need to invest in for eternity. I think at times we who oversee the Children's Ministry in our churches can take it lightly, quickly just throw a curriculum message together, and really not study and have a plan for where God wants to take the kids. Our only plan is whatever that curriculum says it is.

A radical thought for many people – what we do in Kids’ Ministry will impact the local church. What we do is not a short-term project. It is a marathon. We will impact the lives of kids for eternity based upon what we do or don’t do.

A final story to share from the book: Years ago, while traveling as a children’s evangelist, I stepped into a church foyer and heard two children’s church leaders greet each other in the foyer. One stated "Aren't you leading Children’s Church today?” “Oh no, I thought you were!” They both laughed. Neither has planned to be with the children. The first stated: "Well, I’ll go downstairs and lead a couple of songs if you’ll pull out a flannelgraph story to tell the kids.” They both giggled together about their little slip up and somehow didn’t seem to grasp the gravity of the situation. Children’s souls hung in the balance.

We aren’t talking about creating a Disneyland; we aren’t trying to make the best kids’ program in town. Nope, we are ministering to Eutychus – because you never now who is about to fall out a window and needs to be ministered to right then and right there.

Written by Spencer Click, Kidology CP Team Member and Children’s Pastor of Crosspointe Life Church in La Mesa, CA

Kidology is a non-profit organization dedicated to equipping and encouraging those who minister to children. Through our website, conferences, and resources we are here to serve you. Join our online community and find the help and encouragement you need!