

The Discipline of Depth

By David Boyd

It was Easter Sunday just after noon. The children's service had just ended. We had an early service and a late service with an Easter egg hunt sandwiched in between.

Everything went great. The workers did their jobs. The 600 or so kids came to church and experienced the egg hunt, and best of all, many visitors accepted Jesus, including several parents in the adult service. That's when it happened.

There was a tug on my arm. Service was out; kids were being dismissed to their parents. The usual pack of children were crowding up near me (the children's pastor), coming up for last minute hugs and affirmation from their pastor. Many of them wanted to show the great prizes they had just won or all the candy they found. The tugging on my sleeve grew stronger. "Just a minute," I said, trying to give attention to those who were in line first.

The tugging got even stronger. I looked to my right in order to explain to this child that he would have to wait his turn, when my heart stopped. There he was, one of the boys we had been discipling for the past couple of years. He was blue. I mean blue! His eyes bulged and his hands were frantic. He was choking.

Nothing I could ever put down on paper could describe what I felt at that moment. The thought that ran through my mind was, *This boy is dying! Jesus, please help me*, I prayed

as I grabbed the nearest older boy and said, “Get me some adults to help me now!” Even so, I knew there was no one nearby; it was up to me. The workers were at the doors. Hundreds of children were between me and the nearest adult. I grabbed the boy and turned him around and began the Heimlich maneuver. At that moment I was very grateful for the first-aid training course I had taken to improve my skills as a children’s pastor, As I pulled back on the boy’s stomach with my fists, I waited for the object to dislodge. It didn’t.

Ministry comes into focus at times like these. We had prayed for a successful day, for unsaved children to come and receive Christ. We had prayed for good weather. We had prayed for safety on the egg hunt. (Yes, kids can get trampled if you don’t think things through.) We had asked God to lead this event. And that included this moment! Through my mind raced the words of the first-aid instructor, “It’s better to pull so hard that you’re scared of injuring the child than to have them die in your arms!” I pulled back hard! I was scared. There was a loud pop followed by a loud gasp, then tears and cries. But, oh, the joy of hearing him cry! Soon adults came and a medic arrived. The child would be fine.

This eleven-year-old boy will forever stay in my mind as a reminder of God’s faithfulness and a reminder that as good leaders we must prepare ourselves in every way possible. In this case, it was a first-aid course. Most children’s pastors or children’s leaders wouldn’t put a first-aid course at the top of their “to be learned” list. The important concept however is that there is a “to be learned list.” A children’s leader must

be a learner. In today's ever-changing culture it is critical that children's leaders dedicate themselves to continual learning.

The children's leader or children's pastor typically has the biggest need for building a team than any other pastoral position in the church. They must know how to build teams, mentor leaders, handle conflict, and establish vision for the ministry. As well, they must know how to minister to children, stay current with trends, reach kids, disciple them, utilize modern technology as well as time-tested methods to remain creative and applicable. On top of that, they must be masters of worker-screening responsibilities, nursery sanitation and safety concerns, training applications, age-level characteristics of children, and more. The children's leader who fails to apply himself to constant learning opportunities will eventually plateau in his ability to grow the ministry.

Children's leaders must dedicate themselves to the discipline of depth—learning all they can about leadership, team building, self-discipline, learning styles of children, modern trends, and many more. Make a commitment today to invest in yourself.

Samuel Rima in his book *The Art of Self Leadership* explains that Billy Graham, when asked what he would do differently, says that he would have spent twice as much time preparing himself for leadership and preaching.¹ Self-leadership is the term for a person who has made the decision to never stop improving. I often think of the young boy

¹Samuel Rima, *The Art of Self-Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 2000) 217.

choking on the Easter candy. I am fully aware that at that moment there wasn't anyone else who could have helped him. I'm almost certain that I would not have found a qualified person in time to save this boy's life if I hadn't been prepared. Improving oneself is never finished. There must be a constant goal to grow as a leader, a pastor, a mentor, an evangelist, a performer, a trainer, a counselor, and yes, even an emergency health-care provider.

Samuel Rima continues, saying, "Self-leadership is not about working our way into God's good graces or persuading him to bless our efforts as a result of our self-discipline and serious-minded effort. It is about taking full advantage of this opportunity we have been granted to run for the eternal prize."² As he states, self-leadership is all about becoming the very best we can be for God so that He can use us in every way He desires.

How is this accomplished with the average children's leader with the average amount of time allotted to him? First, a children's leader needs to be a constant reader. There are a huge number of excellent books on leadership, team building, vision casting, etc. These can be purchased, borrowed, or checked out of the library. A mother-load of materials on children's ministries is available on the Internet. Our website, 4kids.ag.org has over 1,000 pages of articles on children's ministries. Other Web sites might include www.childrensministry.org, www.childrensministry.com, www.kidology.com, etc.

²Samuel Rima, *The Art of Self-Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 2000) 228.

Technology is a must for children's leaders. The culture is changing fast. Staying current with the culture and growing in your technology skills is a must. Techniques are vital. Many techniques for ministering to children are simple to learn and inexpensive to begin. Balloon animals are a great example. In one day you could learn enough techniques from a good balloon-tying DVD to have some great new tools to use as you minister to your kids. Puppets are another great tool to use. Many children's leaders have seen poorly done puppets handled by children or teens in an effort to teach them ministry techniques. This is a poor example. Kermit the frog is the perfect example. One puppet with a good voice can be used for years in a creative way, giving your kids the opportunity to experience something very fun and unique. The list of techniques goes on and on. These would include drama, human video, illusions, object lessons, drawings, ventriloquism, storytelling, and more.

Paul says he "disciplines his body like an athlete" (1 Corinthians 9:27). It is vital for children's leaders to strive to grow in every way possible. If you don't have a degree, then start. Valley Forge College has a great on-line university if you would like to go that route. If you have a degree, begin to take an occasional masters level course. Continue to invest in yourself. God has a great plan for you. Rima makes a great concluding statement concerning constant learning when he says, "Few things are more essential if we are to realize the full potential God has given us as leaders and accomplish all he has called, guided, and gifted us to accomplish through the leadership positions in which he has graciously placed us or prepared for us."³ So, children's leader, never get complacent,

³Samuel Rima, *The Art of Self-Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 2000) 34.

always pray, keep investing in yourself to be the best caregiver of the lives God places in your hands. *Now go, make a difference.*

