



## OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS OF EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO MINISTER

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One of the most important roles of adults, parents, and children's ministers within the local church is to help the younger generation to recognize their value, and their God given gifts. Sometimes we as adults lose sight of this wonderful role. We get desensitized by barriers that are put up to discourage us from stepping into that role. Below are a few barriers that we may allow ourselves to believe, but in reality they are just lies. It is time for us to break through these barriers, embrace our children, and encourage them to allow the Lord to use them for His kingdom!

### **Barrier 1: They need to grow up first.**

Do you remember the phrase, "children are to be seen and not heard"? Surprisingly this can be a view that is embraced in the church. It's easy to assume that children are too young to minister effectively for the Lord, but that is not true. Children should be *seen and heard*, especially in the church setting. Remember the words that Paul shared with young Timothy, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12). God has made all people (*including children*) in his image. He created them with gifts, talents, ideas, visions, ingenuity, and industry to impact the world. As adults we have the ability to see these qualities in children before they realize that they have them. It is our duty to speak it out, so they have confidence to move in the way that God has made them. If we believe they are too young to be used, then we will fail to help them recognize and develop their gifts.

Fear, paralyzes most people, and so it critical that we help children overcome fear by fanning the flame of the gift that God has put in them. Paul also said to young Timothy, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:6-7). This is a beautiful representation of an adult empowering the younger generation. Paul knew what God had for Timothy, but Timothy needed guidance through that. He wasn't able to see it yet. So Paul stood beside him and mentored him. This leads us to the next barrier that we as adults may face.

**Barrier 2: They do not want me around.**

Influencing the next generation happens through relationships, up close and personal. Though the current culture projects images of children and young adults independent enough to make their own decisions, the reality is that they still need guidance. It is a lie to believe that the next generation does not want older people around them. That's not the way God designed discipleship to happen. We see this so clearly through Jesus and his relationship with the disciples. He welcomed the questions that they asked and spent time with them developing their spiritual hearts and minds. My experiences as I have worked with children and youth are that they desire to be mentored by those who are older and more mature. Rather than believing the lie, "They don't want me around", adults need to step up and become spiritual mothers and fathers to the young, just as Paul was to Timothy.

**Barrier 3: I would never do it that way!** When we do not understand something, our temptation is to control it. When we empower children, there is potential that their ideas may differ from the way we would do things. The question is, can we release them to do it? Can we allow them to do it their own way, while still being involved by guiding and protecting them? In fact, it takes discernment and personal security to allow something to be done that is out of our comfort zone while still providing guidance. It's tricky!!!! They will make mistakes just like adults make mistakes. Peter constantly made mistakes in his journey, but the Lord never gave up on him. He never stopped guiding Peter. When children make mistakes as they minister, reassure them with the truth that they are loved, and that the Lord is at work.

**Barrier 4: What if they get hurt?** As parents we want to protect our children! It is hard to see them experience pain, but we cannot prevent all pain. When children step out in ministry they will at some point get hurt along the way. They will be criticized. They will be rejected. They will feel the attack of the evil one. They will be misunderstood. They will get discouraged. But in that place you need to challenge them to depend on their loving heavenly Father. With that guidance they will experience His comfort, strength, power, and presence. Release them into God hands (2 Cor. 4:7-18).

It isn't easy to overcome these barriers so that children are empowered to minister. But it is necessary! It pleases the heavenly Father when his children embrace their God given gifts. Why should we prevent children from experiencing the joy of sharing the truth of God's love through their unique gifts? Let's spur it on! Let's strengthen them, because ultimately this will strengthen the body of Christ.