



part 1 of 3—

Pastoring Children

by Dick Gruber



"I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord (Jeremiah 23:4).

Jeremiah speaks to us across time and space concerning the heart of the children's pastor. God is looking for men and women that will shepherd His children. In this sin-darkened world, children need good shepherds.

Notice that God's people, as described in Jeremiah 23, "will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing." With recent world events seeming to spiral out of control, children are living with greater fear than ever before.

Children have a fear of losing one or both parents, fear of travel, darkness, wars, and natural disasters. Never before on the stage of human existence has the need been greater for committed servants to step into the role of shepherding children. Boys and girls need good shepherds who will do all they can to ensure that fears will be overcome and

that none will be counted missing in action.

Shepherding, or "pastoring," children is more than simply coordinating programs. A children's ministry coordinator can run an effective series of programs for children, but he/she does not typically fill the role of a pastor. A big part of any children's pastor's job is found in administering or coordinating



Christian education for children. We must recognize that for the children's pastor there is more to the job than coordination. The children's pastor must be a shepherd to his/her children.

What is involved in shepherding boys and girls? Think of all of the things you expect of

your senior pastor. Those things and more are expected of the children's pastor. Here is a basic list to help jump-start you into the mindset of a shepherd to God's little lambs.

A children's pastor...

- † Is available on call 24/7.
- † Will visit the sick and injured in the hospital.
- † Will visit children in their homes.
- † Has a working knowledge of Scripture.
- † Is instant in season for preaching, prayer, and counseling.
- † Is well prepared when teaching or preaching.
- † Is confident in counseling.
- † Has an upbeat personality.
- † Is always on time for meetings and classes.
- † Is courteous.
- † Is available to help in times of family crisis.
- † Is knowledgeable in basics.
- † Loves God and people.

Available On Call 24/7

We expect a pastor to be available when we have a need. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you

not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Pastoring children calls for a deeper commitment than simply teaching children’s church. Boys and girls in the church and community today need a shepherd who will be there at the point of felt need. For many years I have given the children I serve my phone number. They can call me anytime of the day or night. Boys and girls may have a crisis any time, any day of the week. A pastor must be available to them on the same basis.

Hospital Visitation

The children’s pastor has a great opportunity when it comes to hospital visitation. There may be no more effective use of your time than to visit children and their families while they are hospitalized. Make an effort to minister to a hospitalized child daily. Calls do not have to be

long to be appreciated. I have made life-long friends while sitting in hospital rooms talking with children and their parents.

One couple was so amazed that I stopped by the hospital after their son was born. They could not believe that I would take the time to do that with my busy schedule. To this day, seven years later, they still talk about my visit. Children will be lifted to Jesus during your visits. Parents will forever be indebted to you as you take the time to comfort and pray for them and their children.

Visitation in Homes

As we look to Jesus’ ministry, we find this Good Shepherd visiting people where they lived. He stayed in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He visited Peter’s house and was sitting in a home teaching when a hole was made to let a paralyzed man down for healing. The children’s pastor has an awesome op-

portunity to build bridges with churched and unchurched children and families through home visitation.

I visited the home of a couple of my bus kids one Saturday. Their unsaved mother invited me in, and I had a nice talk with her and the boys. These boys had been causing problems at church. I did not mention their self-control difficulties with Mom that day. I enjoyed a short visit in their home as they laid out their metal collection for my viewing. (The boys had a metal detector and had discovered a small treasure trove of scrap in local city parks.) The next time those boys came to church we had no problems with their behavior. A visit in the home made all the difference. A visit to a home can be the beginning of friendship and pastoral ministry to an individual child and his family.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What is the difference between a children’s coordinator and a children’s pastor?

2. What areas of your own children’s ministry could be changed to help you better serve the children?



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Working Knowledge of Scripture

We expect that every pastor who takes up pulpit space on Sunday mornings will be knowledgeable concerning God's Word. The children's pastor must be a man or woman of the Word. He or she must rightly divide the Word of Truth. He must be ready to give an answer. The personal daily devotions and study habits of a children's pastor must be cultivated.

There have been times when a child has asked a question that I didn't know the answer to. I have researched these questions and called the individual with an answer before the next Sunday. As a pastor, I may not know every answer, but I can look up the answers for my children.

Instant in Season for Preaching, Prayer, and Counseling

In my first year as a children's pastor, I once walked into my senior pastor's office and stated: "I can't get any work done. People keep interrupting

me!" My pastor just sat back in his chair, laughed and said, "People *are* your work."

People are not an interruption in our daily schedules. They are the top priority of our work. As a pastor to children, I must give



children, their families, and those who serve them my time. I must be ready anytime, anywhere to preach, pray, sing, or testify at a moment's notice. I must be ready and available to serve. A shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Can we do any less?

Well Prepared When Teaching or Preaching

Nothing is more embarrassing for children and church workers than to see a pastor

fumbling and bumbling around with a message or service. We must set a high standard for ourselves in the area of preparation. A well-prepared shepherd will have fewer discipline problems in his children's church.

Adults expect the senior pastor to have spent hours in study preparing his message for the morning service. Children deserve the best. Whatever we do to the least of these, we are doing to Jesus. Step into the classroom or pulpit well prepared and prayed up, and present the gospel with confidence.

Confident in Counseling

The children's pastor will have a constant stream of children, parents, and workers who desire counseling in a variety of areas. I have always had an open-door policy. I leave it open for any to come in for counseling, and when they enter my office I leave it open for appearance' sake. Children have come to me for everything from prayer for an upcoming test to worry over their parents' impending divorce.

It is important to note here that a person ought to know

his limitations. A time will come when you do not have the resources, education, or ability to help a child or family in the counseling role. It is best to admit your limitations and have on hand a number of professional Christian counselors who can handle a variety of counseling needs.

Be confident that God will use you in counseling children. Be smart in knowing when to turn over a counseling matter to someone who is better equipped to help in the healing process.

Upbeat Personality

Nobody likes to hang around a negative person. As a pastor

to children, you should be one of the most exciting people the boys and girls meet each week. You represent Christ. He is not boring!

I recognize there are different personality types represented in people who minister to children. Personality type or style is not a factor. Excitement is! We all expect that a pastor will be excited about what he is doing. Children need to see an excited, loving, Christlike pastor who will inspire them to live all their lives for the Lord.

Always on Time for Meetings and Classes

Being a pastor of any kind

demands you be a person of integrity. As a children's pastor, the integrity of keeping your appointments and keeping them on time is important.

Children learn by watching your life. A pastor that consistently arrives late for meetings and classes is teaching the children that they are not important in God's sight. If they were important to God, they would be important enough to you to drive you to excellence.

If children's church is important, then start on time and fill it with all kinds of godly lesson material that will redeem the time for Jesus and His children.

Questions for Further Study—

1. In what ways do you put a high priority on people?
2. What resources are available to you when it comes to child and family counseling?
3. How would you describe your level of character or integrity? How would others describe it?



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Courteous

We expect that a pastor will show us common courtesy. He learns our names and uses them with respect. He answers our phone calls in a timely manner. He replies to our e-mails. We can do no less as children's pastors. Common courtesy will go a long way in building a positive ministry to children and their families.

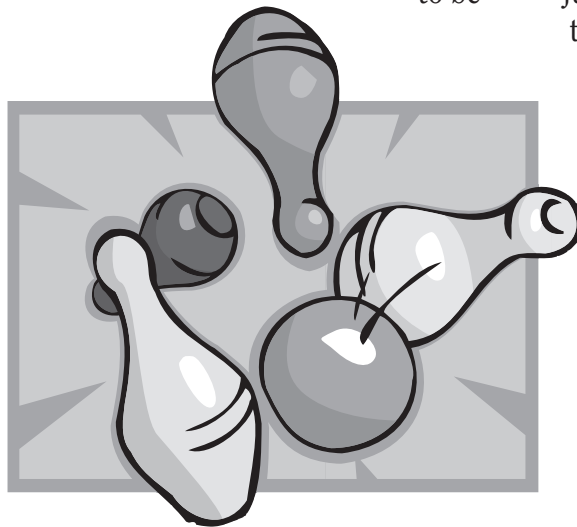
Available to Help in Times of Family Crisis

The children's pastor should be available whenever a child has a need. One evening Luke called me. His dad had just announced to him and his siblings that he was leaving and would divorce their mother. I comforted Luke over the phone and we prayed together. Luke's dad returned home before morning, repented, sought counseling, and is living as a Christian husband and father today.

I received a call one day from a woman whose sister had died. I was the only contact she or her family had with a church. The deceased woman's children had attended my children's church

on occasion. I spent many hours with that family, preached the funeral, and counseled with those kids off and on for months after the funeral.

Jesus was there for the blind man by the road, the lame man by the pool, and the dead friend in the tomb. As a shepherd of God's little lambs, you must determine to be



available when family crisis occurs. You could be the agent of healing for a hurting child, a disrupted marriage, or a family in mourning.

Knowledgeable in Basics

A pastor is often expected to be knowledgeable in a variety

of subjects. It is as if common sense were part of the job description. People have sought my advice in every area from baking a good apple crisp to being a witness at their elementary schools.

The children's pastor will receive a host of questions each week on just about anything. Kids assume that as a pastor you just know how to bowl and how to repair skateboards. I walked into the local bowling alley one Wednesday evening. Our girls' club program was hosting a bowling night. I slipped into a pair of rented shoes and walked around talking to the participants. One girl handed me a ball and told me to bowl for her. I stepped to the line and bowled a strike. The girls cheered; I turned away and thanked God it wasn't a gutter ball. I am certain those girls thought I was a pro-bowler turned pastor.

Remember to be honest. If a child has a question about something out of your realm of knowledge, tell him.

Loves God and People

Children's pastors must

cultivate their relationship with God and with the people.

When I first became a children's pastor, I thought the majority of my ministry would be directly with children. I soon learned that over half of my time was spent ministering to parents and other adults who served the children in our clubs and classes. I found it very easy to love the kids, but had to learn to love the adult workers.

People expect a pastor to love them. Pastors receive all kinds of verbal abuse from

people and still they are expected to love. God can help you love the unlovable. For the children's sake, you must become a person who demonstrates God's love in sometimes surprising situations.

Proverbs 27:23 states, "Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds." A children's pastor loves his flock so much that he keeps his finger on the pulse of their needs. A pastor's love will drive him to give

"careful attention" to the needs, desires, and wants of his flock.

Jeremiah 23:4 says, "I will place shepherds over them." God has personally placed you over His children for such a time as this. Take on the challenge of pastoring them. Know that the Lord has called you to lead, love, and listen to children and their parents. Pray that our Good Shepherd will grant you a heart of compassion for that part of the flock He has entrusted to your care.

Questions for Further Study—

1. Are you making yourself available to children whenever needs arise? What improvements might you make in this area?
2. What steps do you take to keep informed on current issues so that you always have an answer ready for those who ask questions?
3. In what ways do you show God's love to the children under your care?