

The Power of Empowerment

Ephesians 4:11-12

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...” (NKJ)

Empowerment has become a sort of buzzword in today’s leadership circles. It carries with it the power of transferred authority, the intimacy of mentorship, and the finesse of self-duplication. From what I can see, empowering others is similar to the process of discipleship. Discipleship is effective, and when set in motion, as modeled by Jesus, it has world-changing power. In fact, we are encouraged to go into all the world and preach the good news, *making disciples* out of every nation (Mark 16:15).

While it may seem obscure, I believe there is one key difference between discipling and empowering someone. That difference is found in the intent. Usually, we disciple others with the intent of helping them grow in their relationship with God, or to improve in certain areas of their lives. But Jesus was doing more than that

with his twelve closest ministry companions. What we see from His example is the truest form of empowerment. Beyond just teaching and knowledge, Jesus gave his disciples tools for effective decision-making, and taught them principles and ideas for service. Beyond just *their* future, Jesus was focused on the future of all mankind. Borrowing from a proverb and parable of the scriptures, He was teaching them to fish.

When we empower someone, we release *to* them all of *our* authority and release *from* them, all of *their* potential. They have the authority to make decisions, create plans, run programs, and act in our stead. They have been given the right to “make it their own.” Of course, all of this authority and empowerment comes from our relationship to them and requires much training and mentoring. But this type of empowerment is essential to growth.

Empowered Disciples

There are many words we could use to describe what Jesus was trying to accomplish with his disciples: discipling, mentoring, training, but none of these capture the power of empowerment. Why is this so important to understand? In our ministry to kids, we not only want them to participate in serving, but to understand

the idea of serving. With this understanding, they will not only do what they are asked, but they can initiate service and eventually teach others to serve.

Let’s look at another example of this idea.

Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “ *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...*”
(NKJV)

Notice verse eleven says, “He himself gave....”. To empower means, “*to give power or authority to; to enable.*” In these scriptures, we see God giving us His power and authority, or enabling us to do His work within the local body of believers. He has literally *empowered* us to accomplish His work. Not only has He called us to specific functions within the body of Christ, but He has *enabled* us, that is, He Himself, has equipped us to be successful.

It is important to understand that only God can truly empower us with any of the five-fold gifts. He alone is able to establish and

empower the working of the five-fold gifts within the body of Christ. Once we have discovered our gifts from Him, we can help others. While we do not decide who gets what gift, we can help kids discover their gifts and make way for them to fully use those gifts under the authority of the local church. In fact, I believe that many churches have missed their full potential because they lack this kind of gift-nurturing environment, especially in the area of ministry to kids.

According to Ephesians 4:12, the very purpose of empowerment is, “... *for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” So the reason we have been given these gifts as a church is to equip others for the work of the ministry. Beyond just teaching kids to read the Bible, to pray, and to be kind to others, we are to equip and empower them to accomplish the work of the ministry.

Empowering Kids

An acorn, even though it is small, has within it all the potential and power to become a giant oak tree. It has the full potential of the great oak within itself. It only lacks one thing: environment. In the right environment, the acorn’s full potential is realized. It will

eventually tower, bring refuge, and most importantly, drop new acorns, full of the same potential, to the ground.

Our kids are like these acorns. When we create an environment ripe with the potential-nourishing truth of God’s Word, encouragement, and love, we will see great oaks rise. Future generations will flourish. The right environment is so important that much attention and purpose should be given to every detail of how kids are being ministered to in our local churches. Just like God designed the entire process for the acorn to become an oak, there is also a design for kids to become ministers, operating in all of the gifts, as kids.

An Oak Tree, is an Oak Tree, is an Oak Tree

An oak tree does not become an oak tree when it is fully grown. We would not walk into a forest and look at a twelve-inch oak tree and call it by a different name. We may say it is a sapling, but it is still an oak. Even though we may see kids as immature and undeveloped, the truth is, kids will rise to the level we set for them. They will rise no higher, and without a standard, they will definitely fall short. That is why environment is so crucial. In the

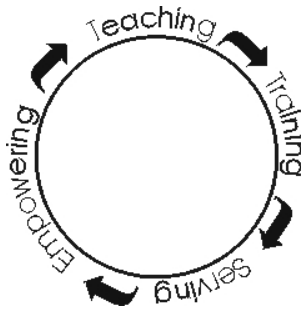
same way that an oak tree is an oak tree, kids are to be ministers and servants even though they are kids.

I believe that much of our effort to teach kids in church has failed to make this very critical connection of empowerment. We need to realize that the end result of our teaching and training should be empowerment. We should be looking to give every child the opportunity to serve, to use their gifts and talents for the good of others. Teaching is key to empowering, and so is releasing those we teach to use their skills. Certainly we hope that our kids use what they learn outside the church in everyday life. We must also allow them to use their gifts and knowledge, in an environment that fosters growth, through correction and instruction within the church. This is how we equip them for the *work* of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. In fact, we see from Ephesians 4:12, that empowerment focuses on the *work* and *edification* that should result from learning.

Learning Machines

There are few groups of people equipped to receive and adapt to instruction like kids. They are learning machines. They are keenly aware of their surroundings and soak in every possible tidbit of

information. Whether we realize it or not, our kids are watching and hearing everything we do and say. If you find that hard to believe, just ask the embarrassed parent who had to explain their way out of Johnny’s honest, “My dad thinks you’re lazy,” statement while at dinner with friends. They absorb, retain, and assimilate information quickly and efficiently. We must be prepared and focused on helping the kids apply that learning through service. I see this as a cyclical process that flows as follows:



The teaching and training equip them for service. Their diligence in service allows you to empower them to become teachers and trainers. Creating a healthy environment for this process is key to successfully training and empowering kids to serve.

Duplication

When we begin the process of empowering, we are actually embarking on the explosive potential of duplication. Duplication is where true growth begins. The idea of duplicating ourselves in others requires a new way of thinking, and a certain level of confidence. When we duplicate ourselves by mentoring, training, and empowering others, we maximize the potential of our ministry and ourselves.

As you begin to teach, train, and empower kids to serve and lead, keep this in mind: duplication is your goal. You not only want them to use their skills, you want to see them changed by the power of God’s Word, and by the training they receive. As they grow, you will find it easy to give them authority and power. As you release authority and power to them, you begin to duplicate yourself. As you duplicate yourself, you make room for growth, and extend your reach. You will begin to see growth in every area of your ministry. This is the model that Jesus showed us with His twelve disciples. While Jesus started the work that changed the world, it was the men He empowered that actually propelled it in the earth.

If you were gone for a month, how well would your ministry function? The difference would be in direct proportion to the level

you have empowered those around you. If your answer to this question is “not very well,” don’t get discouraged. Find good leaders and team players and begin the process of empowering them for the work of the ministry.

You will find that kids can actually be great leaders and team players. In fact, I have four key leaders in our kids ministry that are 16 years old and younger. They are amazing young men and women, and I trust them with very important decisions. I feel confident that they will go on to be even more successful leaders in their adult life because of our time together.

Multiplication

One of the most powerful results of empowerment is multiplication. The first step is duplication, but from there, it becomes multiplication. This idea is actually very simple, and happens naturally as a result of duplication. Let’s say for instance that you had three kids in whom you duplicated yourself. If they followed your pattern, they each in turn would then duplicate themselves in three others. This process would continue until the results would become almost overwhelmingly successful. Starting with one leader and three duplicates, your growth pattern could look like this:

1 to 3 to 9 to 27 to 81 to 243 to 729 to 2187...

That truly is the potential of this idea. In fact, let’s take the disciples as an example. Their growth pattern had this potential:

1 to 12 to 144 to 1728 to 20736 to 248832...

“But they didn’t all stick around,” you might observe. True, and this only strengthens the importance of this idea. Empowerment, resulting in duplication and eventually in multiplication, is the only way to maximize your resource of people, and specifically, kids. To do any less actually minimizes your efforts. We must place importance on empowerment and find ways to release the full potential of the gifts God has given our kids.

Empowering kids is necessary... because it creates a positive growth pattern for their life.

They get the chance to make mistakes when the potential for serious results is not as great. They learn the power of authority and responsibility. They get the chance to have success when it

can be shared by a supporting and caring team. It inspires them toward service into their teenage years.

Empowering kids is necessary... because it increases your resource of creative, energetic, and loyal helpers.

Some adult helpers in your kids ministry may be loyal. Some may be energetic. Others may be creative. But how many creative, *and* energetic, *and* loyal adult helpers do you have? I would guess that the adults who fit that description have either been hired, or are a target of your constant recruitment.

The main goal of most kids is to be kids. Kids rarely aspire to be much more than that. And that is the way it should be. This makes our job much easier. All we have to do is tap that “just give me something fun to do” mentality and make every job they do, fun. The really cool thing is, the more kids you can get to join the team and have a great time, the more kids will want to join. Kids are an endless supply of creative, energetic, and loyal help.

Empowering Kids is necessary and effective because... the next generation needs and wants someone to look up to.

Kids look up to adults, and kids also look up to kids. Take a second and watch the commercials early on Saturday morning, or right after school. You will see kids using products, kids saying the catch phrase, kids wearing the clothes...kids, kids, kids. The only adults you typically see in these commercials are in the background, or cartoon characters. Companies seem to be saying that what attracts the attention of kids is other kids. The kids who attend your church need to see other kids leading worship, running sound, taking the offering, doing skits, and everything else you can use them to do. When they see their peers as positive role models, they will be inspired to get involved as well.
