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Preparing for a Spirit-Filled Children's Ministry

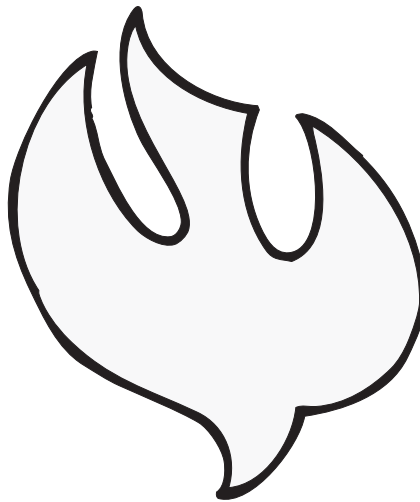
by Billy Burns

As a child growing up in a small South Texas Assemblies of God church, I witnessed the early days of children's ministry. In those days, children's pastors and Christian education directors were nonexistent. The ministry methods were primitive by today's standards. Puppets often had a missing eye or a mouth that wouldn't open. Bible stories were told using small pictures recycled from outdated Sunday School curriculum.

During my 21 years of full-time children's ministry, I've witnessed an evolution that has catapulted many of today's children's ministries into a high-tech, multimedia extravaganza. In some churches, the children enter a theme-park environment each Sunday as today's children's pastors and Christian education directors strive to reach today's child with today's methods.

In an age where children's leaders feel driven to produce high-energy, sophisticated productions each week, it is important for us to evaluate the effectiveness of our ministries. Are we impacting a generation of children with a Holy Spirit-

given, heartfelt message, or are we just tickling the five physical senses? If we are honest, some reading this article will admit that our desire to draw big crowds and have great programs has replaced our desire to allow the Holy Spirit to be in total control of our services.



After being a children's evangelist for 10 years, and then becoming a children's pastor in 1989, I thought I had all of the answers. I could produce a good, fresh service each week. I changed our children's church name to Pneuma (Greek for *Spirit*) Force to reflect a new image. Things were going great until the day I had a heavenly

interruption.

While I was driving back from a conference, the Holy Spirit spoke words that changed my life and ministry: "Change your actions or change your name." My first reaction was to challenge Him. After all, I had been in this ministry for 15 years. Was He talking to the right person? Then the Holy Spirit crystallized His instructions: "If you call yourself a Pneuma or Spirit-Force church, the Spirit has to be in control." The Spirit was telling me to back up our name with the proof of His presence. I began to make major changes in my life and ministry to facilitate the Holy Spirit's work.

Holy Spirit Empowered Ministry

The above story doesn't apply to my ministry alone. Many Pentecostal children's ministries are Pentecostal in name only. Occasionally, the Holy Spirit is allowed to move if time permits. If your church is a part of a Holy Spirit movement, there should be a movement of the Holy Spirit. Like the apostle Paul, we



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We need to desire a children's ministry where the Holy Spirit moves freely because:

1. It Is Biblical

God's Word promises that the Holy Spirit will move on our children. God wants to make this a reality, not just a promise.

❖ "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy'" (Acts 2:16,17).

❖ "Peter replied, '...And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off'" (Acts 2:38,39).

2. It Is Historical

What God has done before, He can do again. Below are examples of the Holy Spirit's touching and flowing through children.

• **Cane Ridge Revival, Kentucky, 1801.** "Little children, too, were brought visibly into the kingdom of God, like the 7-year-old girl, sitting on her father's shoulder, who exhorted the crowd for a time and then slumped down in weariness."¹

• **Maria Woodworth-Etter, St. Louis, Missouri, 1890.** "One day, a helpless little girl was brought to me. She could neither talk nor walk. After I prayed for her, I told some of the folks to take her out and let her try to walk....After a while, they brought her back. She was walking and talking, but they



couldn't understand a word that she said. I stood her on the platform, and she began to walk about and preach. With hands uplifted...she preached to the astonished multitude, showing what great things the Lord had done for her."²

• **Welsh Revival, Evan Roberts, 1904.** "While this was

a revival of youth, children were so taken up with the things of God that they held their own meetings in homes, barns, yards; many from about the age of 10 would exhort, sing and pray with great power."³

• **John G. Lake.** "I was sitting one day in the home of the DeValeras in Krugersdorp, South Africa, when a man arrived who...had developed a large cancer. He came into the house and...in a little while a 6-year-old child who had been sitting near me went across the room, climbed on the man's knees, put her hands on his face, and prayed. I saw the cancer wither. In half an hour, the thing had disappeared."⁴

3. It Is Essential

The Pentecostal movement's future leadership is now sitting in our children's ministry. It is imperative that our children learn to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence and know how to flow with Him. It is critical that they be allowed to see and hear Him work in their services. During these foundational years, it is our responsibility to create an atmosphere where children

echo the psalmist David's words, "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory" (Psalm 63:2). This ensures that future generations will desire to flow with the Holy Spirit.

How can the typical children's ministry change into a Spirit-filled children's ministry? It is not a matter of *what* you know as much as *who* you know. No curriculum or Spirit-in-a-box methodology will produce a Spirit-filled children's ministry. It comes from what I call the "know and glow" principle. After Moses had been alone with God, his countenance was changed. After spending time on our faces in His presence, we won't be able to contain His glorious presence.

While I acknowledge that our children's ministry isn't where I want it to be, I'm thankful that it is not where it used to be. We are changing, one child at a time, into a Pneuma-Force church that allows the Holy Spirit to flow freely. Children are learning how to go after God in their worship and how to allow the Holy Spirit to flow through them during times of prayer. While I strive each service to have excellent ministry techniques and methods, I continue to strive to be sensitive to His leadership. All pre-service plans and curriculum are subject to His promptings. We want to see demonstrations of the Spirit and of power and be a Pneuma-Force church in name and action.

ENDNOTES

1. Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1958), 33.
2. Wayne E. Warner, *Revival!* (Tulsa: Harrison House, Inc., 1978), 55,56.
3. Mary Stewart Relfe, *Cure of All Ills* (Montgomery: League of Prayer, 1988), 86.
4. John G. Lake, *Adventures in God* (Tulsa: Harrison House, Inc., 1981), 15,16.

Questions for Further Study—

1. Are there children in your ministry who could benefit from the infilling of the Holy Spirit? What steps are you taking to reach them?
2. Without the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of children today, what heritage are we creating for the children of tomorrow?
3. What steps can you take to preserve and/or re-ignite the fire of our Pentecostal heritage for children today?