



A Pastoral Perspective on Youth Ministry and the Family

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in Christian circles regarding the relationship of the family and the church. This discussion has been beneficial in emphasizing the importance of the family, the need for male leadership, the significance of spiritual instruction and worship in Christian homes, and the value of intergenerational worship and service within the local body of Christ. However, by highlighting some of the shortcomings of modern youth programs, it has also sparked debate over the role and validity of youth ministry within the church.

Here at Redeemer Bible Fellowship, while we wholeheartedly believe that parents have the primary responsibility for the biblical training and upbringing of their children (Deut 6:6-7; Eph 6:4), we hope that our youth ministry can serve as a way to humbly support parents in raising up children who love the Lord. By providing unique opportunities for other believers to speak and model truth to students (Eph 4:11-14), our youth ministry strives to see those students become passionate disciples of Christ who are committed to the church as well as to their families.

Some Considerations

The way parents choose to fulfill their task of raising up children in the Lord within the context of the church will vary from family to family and child to child. Therefore, we do not advocate any specific method since there are numerous options available that God can use to bear fruit. However, below are some thoughts to take into account when considering your family's participation in our church's youth ministry.

First and foremost, parents need to understand that they are the primary spiritual caretakers of their children. No matter what programs and opportunities the church provides, nothing can replace the biblical instruction and example of godly parents in a child's life. Our youth ministry is not intended to be merely a place where parents send their children to become better behaved or receive "spiritual tutoring" from experts. Our youth ministry is no substitute for consistent biblical parenting.

Second, it must be noted that it is the responsibility of families to integrate into the church and not the other way around. The church is not a collection of families, but rather a collection of individual believers saved by grace (cf. Matt 12:46-50). Thus, believing parents should not view the church as a servant to their families, but rather ask, "How can our family participate and serve together in God's church to the best of our ability?"

Third, youth ministry is not in the Bible. It is simply a methodology that allows us to minister to students within our local church, which we have adopted for a number of reasons:

1. It enables us to provide age-specific instruction aimed directly at the hearts and minds of students.
2. It allows us to minister to students of families from a wide range of spiritual backgrounds and maturity levels, which provides opportunities not only for the training of students, but also the training of their parents so that they might be better equipped to spiritually nurture their children.
3. It facilitates discipleship opportunities with other older and godly believers who serve in our ministry.
4. It provides evangelistic opportunities as believing students are able to bring their non-believing friends to hear the gospel proclaimed among peers.



5. It gives believing students more immediate opportunities to exercise their spiritual gifts in the context of the local body of Christ.

Fourth, despite some of the benefits of youth ministry, we realize that parents may feel that their children are better off with them while at church. This is a matter of personal discretion and conviction before the Lord.

Fifth, parents who do decide to have their children participate in our youth ministry are strongly encouraged to be involved themselves. Parents are welcome at any of our events and are invited to consider serving alongside our youth ministry staff.

Ultimately, we want our youth ministry to be a support to parents as they raise and instruct their children in the Lord. Some parents may choose to withhold their children from youth ministry activities, others may choose to selectively allow their children to participate in youth ministry activities, and still others may encourage their children to participate in all of our youth ministry activities. There is freedom and discretion in this area, but we encourage all parents to thoughtfully think through their family's involvement at our church in a biblical manner.

Questions to Ask Yourself

As you consider the role of youth ministry in the church as it applies to your family, here are some questions that you can ask yourself.

1. How do I view my role as a parent in raising up children in the Lord?
2. In what ways is my family participating and serving at our church?
3. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of having my children participate in our church's youth ministry?
4. To what extent do I want my children and myself to be involved in our church's youth ministry?

Additional Reading

For additional reading on the topic of youth ministry and the family, consider the following resources:

1. Baucham Jr., Voddie T. *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007.
2. Kostenberger, Andreas J. and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010.
3. Waldron, Sam. "The Relation of Church and Family." Reformed Baptist Fellowship. <http://reformedbaptistfellowship.org/2009/09/09/the-relation-of-church-and-family/> (accessed November 30, 2011).