

What is Successful Youth Ministry # 5 - Multi-Generational Discipleship.

By God's command and design, parents are called to be the primary "youth pastors" of their children. When this God ordained foundation of youth ministry is minimized or ignored, regardless of how well intentioned it might be, it can only result in harm to our youth. There is little doubt that the minimizing of the parental role has been a primary factor leading to the current crisis in youth ministry. Biblical Youth ministry must begin with the family.

However, the fact that parents have the *primary* responsibility to disciple and train their children does not mean that they have the *only* responsibility. The broader church has an important role to play in the discipleship of youth as well. The Scripture is clear that meaningful relationships with other Christians is vital to growing in the life of faith. Consider the following Scripture passages:

- Proverbs 13:20 - "Whoever walks with the wise, becomes wise..."
- Heb 3:12 - "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, so that you will not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."
- Heb 10:24 - "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."
- Gal 6:1 - "Brothers, if any of you caught in transgression you who are spiritual should restore him..."
- Heb 13:7 - "Remember your leaders, consider their outcome and way of life, imitate their faith. "

All of us need older, wiser, more mature saints to speak into our lives as we grow in Christian maturity. We need our brothers and sisters to gently restore us when we are caught in sin, to model for us faithful walking with the Lord through good times and bad, to help us apply God's word to our everyday lives and decisions, and to comfort us with the promises of God which have comforted them. How impoverished would we be spiritually if we had no relationships with or access to other brothers and sisters in Christ? This reality, which is true for Christian adults, is also true for Christian youth. They also need to be connected with older, wiser, and more mature members of the body of Christ. They also must walk with the wise, that they might become wise. They also must have friends and mentors whose way of life they can consider, and whose faith they can imitate.

In Titus 2 the Apostle Paul indicates his *expectation* that multi-generational discipleship will be present in the church. He sets forth the principle that the older men and women in the

congregation have responsibility for, and play a vital role in, the discipleship of the younger generation.

Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. (Tit 2: 2-6)

What are the implications of this for youth ministry? I will list just one, namely that a primary focus of youth ministry must be to connect youth to the larger body of Christ. One of the greatest mistakes that has been made in the youth ministry of recent decades is the assumption that youth don't want interaction with older generations. The opposite is actually the case; youth are *hungry* for older men and women in the church to take an interest in them and disciple them. There are a variety of different ways this can happen in a church, but it must be a priority. Sadly, neglecting this focus has led to the serious problem of isolation in much youth ministry today. Many churches, in a well-meant attempt to reach youth, have created a completely separate youth culture, complete with a separate pastor, building, events, small groups, church service, missions trip, etc. The result of this segregation is that the youth of the church effectively become a separate congregation. Little, if any, participation with adults is expected or encouraged. Multi-generational relationships are not formed, and the youth are functionally ignored by the adults in the church, leading youth to a "this is not my church but my parents church" mentality. Worse, adults in the church begin to think that they do not have a responsibility towards the youth, because "that's the youth pastor's responsibility." The problem with this approach, of course, is that (just like us) youth will grow spiritually when they are connected to the larger body of Christ, not removed from it.

Thus, a biblically based youth ministry focuses on exposing youth, not merely to Christian teaching, but also to Christian men and women. If youth only build meaningful connections to the youth group, and not to the larger church, then a key foundation of God's design for youth ministry is being missed. And again, this can only be to the detriment of the youth.