



Youth Ministry at Littlerock

Deuteronomy 6 was written in the context of Israel's redemption from Egypt and on the cusp of their entry into the Promised Land. At that time Moses gave the people of God a command to remember who God is, what his law is, and what he has done for his people. He then gives a charge to pass this knowledge on to the next generation- family by family. It is the family's responsibility to share the faith with their kids.

The New Testament dials this in a little tighter. Ephesians 6 is in the context of Paul's explanation of how the family reflects the Gospel. So a Christian father loves his wife as Christ loved the church and sacrificially gives himself up for her (we are not our own!). A Christian father is also the head of the house in a way similar to Christ's headship of the church. This headship role isn't one of prestige or superiority but of responsibility. The Christian wife lovingly and respectfully submits to her husband knowing that he has this selfless love for her. Paul teaches us that this husband-wife relationship in Ephesians 6 is meant to reflect truths about God's redeeming work in our own lives.

Paul further teaches that the family unit as a Gospel picture is also displayed in how the children are incorporated into the family. The children are to honor their father *and* mother. There is no distinction here because, to the child in a Christian home, the parents are a unit. Moses, Jesus and Paul call it the one-flesh union. So kids aren't to make distinctions in how they honor and obey their parents. Mom is, by God's design, shown the same amount of respect as Dad is and vice-versa.

Even though that's true- God places the weight of the child's discipline and instruction on the *father*. Not the Sunday School teacher, or the pastors... but the father. This reality hasn't changed for God's order of things from the Exodus all the way to the establishment of the church in the New Testament. At Littlerock Church, we believe that responsibility remains true in Christian families today.

The church's role in this is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The work of ministry includes all sorts of things but one of those things includes parenting. Parenting is a ministry. As a church we are here to equip parents for this ministry.

As one author says, equipped parents don't feel the need to partner with the youth pastor to disciple their teens instead the youth pastor has pre-emptively partnered with *them*. Equipped parents have a healthy walk with Christ and can lead a discussion about Scripture at home.

Our Sunday morning worship service is where we see the bulk of our equipping happening. That's where we're all growing together as Christians, young and old. Equipping also happens in one-on-one discipleship, Christians who are further along guiding and mentoring those who are newer in the faith. Our small groups ministry is designed to facilitate this; as are our men's ministry and women's ministries. All of these are ways that we as a church are equipping parents to do the ministry of parenting.

So why have a youth ministry?

Even in a church where parents are being equipped, youth ministry is still a helpful tool. Here's why:

1. Adolescence is a unique time of life.

FOR PARENTS--

Parents, our goal is (should be) to prepare our kids for life out of the house. We are preparing them *academically* to be able to function in the world. We are preparing them *physically* to be able to survive on their own (laundry, cooking, managing money, good hygiene, social skills etc.). We're teaching them a work ethic where they can hold down a job and raise families of their own. We're teaching them how to relate to others in a godly way so that they can maintain healthy relationships. We are teaching our kids all of these things with the express purpose of one day pushing them out of the house and living on their own.

BUT we're not raising them to leave the church! If you're a Christian you never graduate from Christ's church, you may go to a new church but you fundamentally belong to the church of Christ because you are in Christ and the church is his body. This creates an interesting dilemma, as parents we are fostering *independence* from the parental unit and at the same time a *belonging* to the people of God.

This dilemma is why we've designed our youth ministry to be a bridge ministry. It isn't a holding tank ministry. A holding tank puts some entertaining things in the mix with the youth and tries to keep them safe and healthy until they're too big and too old for the tank... Then they're booted out into the real world- prepared or not.

A bridge is nothing like that; instead, it helps young Christians to realize that they really are a part of the church. They serve the church, they're learning the same Bible, they're singing the same songs, they're getting to know the same people as their parents are- in short, the young people *belong* to the body of Christ. With this in mind we encourage our young people to participate in our music,

children's, visitation ministry, and benevolence ministries. Our young people should be incorporated into nearly every aspect of church life.

FOR YOUTH --

There are other realities we need to consider when approaching youth ministry. For one, youth are beginning to emotionally separate from parents and become more independent. They're shaping their own identity apart from mom and dad. This means that even though youth are overwhelmingly influenced most by their parents they are naturally becoming more and more influenced by peers, the culture, and other adults. We believe that as we genuinely and sincerely encourage belonging to the body of Christ youth will also appreciate more the input of other Godly adults.

Youth are also struggling with new temptations as they enter adolescence and looking for guidance in this. We hope that they're also asking new questions and beginning to own the faith they were raised in. A Biblically based youth ministry acknowledges these realities and again acts as a bridge for students in this season.

2. Youth ministry is important because parents are sinners

I'll be the first to say that my home does not always look like the one Paul describes in Ephesians 6. Actually my home usually does not look like that. My goal is that it would- but it doesn't yet because my wife and I are sinners. I recognize that there are areas of sin in my life that I am currently oblivious to and if I'm the only person influencing my kids they're going to pick up those same habits. But there are other adults in the church, adults outside of a young person's parental unit, who don't sin in the same ways I do. Because of this, it is a good thing for our young people to have other gospel influences in the church. It's biblical.

That's what we see happening in Titus 2. Paul assigns Titus, a church leader, with the responsibility of teaching sound doctrine. That's our primary job as pastors. Then Paul tells Titus what the older men and women in the church are supposed to look like- how their lives should reflect what they believe. That is then communicated to the responsibilities that they have as being more mature Christians. Older women are to train the young women. Young women are to be looking to their parents first but also to spiritually mature women for training in the Way. The young men are to be primarily under Titus' influence and the influence of the male teachers in the church.

Titus' model for youth ministry is church-wide, not segregated. There's a general picture of discipleship happening all over the church and the youth are included in that. So while the parents are the primary care-givers, and teachers, and shepherds and disciplers; there is a recognition that parents won't do this perfectly or completely and the church will walk alongside them.

3. For unbelievers.

Just like everything else we do here at Littlerock Church, there are aspects of our youth ministry that that are evangelistic. We want non-Christians coming to our gatherings on Sunday mornings and Bible studies and small groups and our youth ministry.

So at the same time that we want to train our Christian young people to know that they belong to the body of Christ, there will be non-Christian young people who *do not yet belong* to the body of Christ. Youth ministry gives them a venue to learn about the gospel alongside their peers. It's a place where they can ask questions and think about matters of faith without feeling embarrassed.

There are also young people who are Christians or who are interested in Christianity but their parents are not believers. So all of that stuff that we're banking on, that they're getting training at home, and their parents are Spiritually investing in their lives... that's not true for this group of young people. The church serves this group of youth through its youth ministry. We become their Spiritual parents and support them in a unique way.

SO WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE PRACTICALLY?

Let's break it into a pyramid structure. Tier 1 at the bottom, tier 3 at the top.

Worship is tier 1.

There are 168 hours in the week. 1.5 hours of that is dedicated to the gathering of the people of God to worship our Savior. That's 8/10ths of 1 percent of the week. If parents don't value the worship of God with his people, their kids won't value it. **Parents are the number one stumbling block in their kids' lives.** No way around it. Your choice to show your kids that the worship of God is important holds far more sway than their youth pastor will have with them.

Sunday morning worship gives us fodder for conversations as a family. Application points that are mentioned in a sermon can lead to confession of sin or encouragement for the entire family, parents and kids. The songs we sing remind us of the truths of the gospel and they can be on our hearts as a family throughout the week.

Our Sunday morning gatherings are also where we as Christians serve one another. Helping in nursery, the PreK room or in the children's church, helping with the music ministry, greeting and hospitality; all of these are ways where we as families remind our kids that we're not here to passively consume a product or watch a show, we're here to actively serve one another and worship our Lord.

Worship also includes what we do as families throughout the week. Praying together, reading the Bible together, having conversations that call your young people back to the truths of the Gospel. This was so important to the church after the time of the reformation that not doing this was a disciplinary offense. Can you imagine getting kicked out of the church because you didn't do devotions with your family? While we won't go that far at Littlerock Church, we do strongly encourage family worship.

Tier 2 is church-life.

What I mean by this is the general way that people within the church ought to be relating to one another: Eating meals together, going to events together, spending time together, enjoying life together, being in small groups together. The goal is that other people in the church know and love your kids, they're seeing them, they're praying for them, they're encouraging them, and they're helping them to see that they are a part of the body of Christ.

This is where the Titus 2 stuff comes in. If you have daughters, it's especially important to be surrounding them with examples of godly women you admire. If you have sons and they're different than you and there are other men in the church that share the same interests that they do- you as parents have the responsibility to forge those relationships. We can help provide the structure for this as a church but the responsibility falls on the parents to take the initiative.

Tier 3 is where our age specific ministries are, including youth ministry

Age specific ministries are not siloed away with some entirely different approach to discipleship. Instead they fit with the rest of what we're trying to accomplish as a church. That means for youth ministry, our primary goal isn't fun and games, or big events meant to distract our kids from the world. Our primary goal is helping you as parents to root your kids deeply in Christ.

The way of Christ is truth and discipleship, it is not entertainment. So we're not holding up an alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and sex-free version of the world's fun and asking kids to "choose this"- we're holding up the cross of Christ and saying "choose this!" If we give our kids a wimpy, Cross-free, moralistic gospel it will not last.

That doesn't mean we won't ever do things that help to build relationships and memories for our young people. We make an effort to provide venues where our young people can enjoy themselves. But, again, entertainment is not the primary goal of this top triangle.

Our primary goal is that our young people would have a faith that is their own. That means they know how to study their bibles. They know what they believe and how to explain what they believe to you, and themselves and others. Our youth ministry is a training ground for young Christians.