


What Grace Life Church Has Learned So Far about Parent-Driven Children and Student Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

- How effective has the professing Church been in the area of children's and student ministries? A gentleman by the name of Mike Yaconelli spent 43 years serving youth and youth leaders across America. He is the founder of Youth Specialties, and he is often referred to as the "Father of modern youth ministry." It would be safe to say that Yaconelli had his finger on the pulse of youth ministry as we know it in the professing evangelical church. After devoting his entire adult life and ministry to youth and youth leaders, Mike Yaconelli penned these words just four months before he died :
 - "The success of youth ministry in the country is an illusion. Look at the results. Attend any youth group in this country and notice the aging effect. Attendance is directly proportional to age. ... Young people flock to Christian concerts, cheer Jesus at large events, and work on service projects. Unfortunately, it is not because of Jesus, it is because they are young. Very little youth ministry has a lasting impact on students. I believe that we're no more effective today, reaching young people with the gospel, than we have ever been."
- We know that God is sovereign, but we also know that He works through the obedient action and efforts of His children.
- Could it be that we have deviated so far from the biblical path and the principles taught clearly in the Word of God that it has prohibited us from experiencing God's grace to the fullest measure in regard to children and youth?
- We must go back to the clear teaching of Scripture and begin our foundation on the principles we find within its pages.
- We must not be rigid, strict, or extreme if the Bible does not give us clear instruction. But when the Bible does give us clear instruction, we must make every effort to mold and shape our structures and ministries around those instructions.

 *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I. UNDERSTANDING PARENT-DRIVEN CHILDREN AND STUDENT MINISTRY


- **Parents are primarily responsible for the discipleship and discipline of their children.**
 - This emphasizes the partnership between the Church and the Family in raising up the next generation of young people. The Church will and must always respect the fathers as they lead their families, but it would be unbiblical and foolish for a father not to exhaust the resources and influences provided by the Church and its members.
 - The Church should not usurp the authority of godly parents, nor assume the responsibilities of parents who are lax in their duties.
 - The Church should give itself to teaching the biblical principles of parenthood and to holding parents accountable to carry them out in the context of families.


- As a Church, we desire to strengthen parents in their God-called responsibility to “bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4)
- While we have an active program for children and youth, it should be viewed as an extension of the parent’s roles, and it is never to replace them.


II. DISCOVERING PARENT-DRIVEN CHILDREN AND STUDENT MINISTRY


A. By Examining the Scriptures

- The Scriptures provide us some clear direction and instruction that should serve as the foundation for the church’s ministry to parents and children. We take these ministries very seriously not only because they are commanded in Scripture but because we have a great burden for the next generation of children that will grow up in this church. Our desire is that every child that we have the privilege to minister to will one day put all his or her *confidence in God*. (Psalm 78:7)
- These passages serve as the foundational pillars by which our goals and Parent-Driven Children and Student Ministries are built and supported.

 *Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. Psalm 78:1-7*

 *Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

 *Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Colossians 3:20*

 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:1-4*

B. By Observation and Experience

What are the options?

1. Church A’s opinion of Children and Student Ministry

- Child centered
- Event driven
- Youth Pastor led/Personality built
- Entertainment based
- Outreach only-for numerical growth
- Separated from the church body

2. Church B's opinion of Children and Student Ministry

- Family never separates-Small Group or Sunday School must be together
- No youth group
- Fun Is Forbidden
- Family discipleship only
- Limited evangelism for purity's sake
- Independent spirited (from the church)

3. Church C's understanding of Children and Student Ministry

- God centered
- Teaching emphasis
- Family supportive
- Church integrated
- Outreach oriented
- Discipleship opportunistic

C. By Applying What We Have Learned

1. At Grace Life we are striving to disciple and assist parents as they evangelize and disciple their children.

- We are trying to give credence to the biblical principle of parents teaching their children. This would include both discipleship and evangelism.
- However, we do understand that these principles are not the only guidance we have in the Scriptures in regards to this matter. The Scriptures speak often of older women teaching younger women. We also have the example of the Apostle Paul's relationship with the young Timothy. We try to balance both sides of the biblical equation.

2. We are attempting to maintain this biblical balance by not buying into either of the extreme views that have recently been adopted and implemented into many of our modern churches.

- One of these views states that "the family must never be separated." The other implies that children must always be separated from parents during any and all forms of church activities. These types of environments often lead the parents to believe it is the church's responsibility to evangelize and disciple their children.
- More often than not, subconsciously these parents will attempt to delegate their spiritual responsibilities to a children's minister or youth pastor. This is not right nor is it biblical.

III. APPLYING PARENT-DRIVEN CHILDREN AND STUDENT MINISTRY

- At this point, we need to be careful. We must avoid the notion that a specific structure or organization will accurately assess the leadership's desire or fix the problems that we have. We must remember that this is about the heart. If the hearts of the leadership and parents are right, you will have a successful Children and Student Ministry regardless of the way it is organized or structured.
- "Idolatry and immaturity is when you put emphasis on the structure over the heart condition."
– Jeff Noblit
- The biblical diagnosis for the problems we experience in regard to Children and Student Ministry is a problem of the heart not the structure. Your church could have a terrible structure while the hearts of

the people are right, and you will have a wonderful Children and Student Ministry. And visa versa, you can have a wonderful structure without the right heart and have a ministry that is in shambles.

- These are some of the things that we are currently doing at Grace Life structurally and organizationally to reinforce the truths of biblical parenting and the Parent-driven model of Children and Student Ministry.
 1. **Student Activities Director:** This title, rather than Youth Pastor, more accurately describes the role of the Youth Leader on the Church Staff. The title also serves as a “bug in the ear” of our fathers to reinforce and remind them that they are primarily responsible for the spiritual upbringing of their children, not the Youth Pastor.
 2. **Small Groups:** We have Small Groups divided up by age and gender. (For example, 6th grade boys and 6th grade girls, 7th grade boys and 7th grade girls, etc.) The boys’ classes are taught by men (usually not their father) and the girls’ classes are taught by women.
 3. **Take-Home Curriculum:** The *Children Desiring God* curriculum that we use in our Children’s Department provides a take-home sheet each week that we give the children to take home and look over with their parents. Beginning in the 6th grade, everyone in the church uses the same Small Group curriculum. This provides the opportunity for our youth to interact with their parents around the Word that they were taught in Small Groups. Outlines and/or handouts are often provided for our youth during our student services, and they are encouraged to take them into the home and discuss what they were taught with their parents.
 4. **Parent Involvement:** We attempt to get parents involved in events that the Student Department will be involved in throughout the year. For example, parents are always invited to attend any student service or event that we are having at any time including camps, retreats, fellowships, etc.
 5. **Train Fathers:** This primarily comes from the pulpit, but we have begun to offer parenting classes that devote much effort to this particular agenda.
 6. **Take It Home:** We provide application questions from the Sunday sermon for fathers to discuss with their families throughout the week.
 7. **Parent Dedication and Baby Presentation:** A three-week parent training class is offered and required for parents before they present their babies publicly to the Church. This provides an opportunity for all new parents to make a public commitment before the Church body to purpose to live out the biblical parenting principles that they have learned in the parent training class. This also serves as a corporate agreement between the Church and the parents that they will co-laborer together to reach this child for Christ.
 8. **Pulpit Ministry:** The central force that drives our Parent-Driven Children and Student Ministry is the pulpit. This is a major point of application from the expositions that thunder from the pulpit. It would be nearly impossible to create a parent-driven mindset in the hearts and minds of the congregation without consistent exhortations coming from the pulpit.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF PARENT-DRIVEN CHILDREN AND STUDENT MINISTRY

A. Minister Biblically and Effectively

- Our goal here at Grace Life is to disciple and assist parents as they evangelize and disciple their children, while maintaining a strong program for evangelizing and discipling those who do not have Christian parents.

B. Glorify God

1. By being thoroughly biblical
2. By keeping the Word of God central
3. By teaching and living the truth

RESOURCES

Church

- <http://hopeingod.org/document/vision-child-and-youth-discipleship>
- *Our Vision for Children's Ministry*

Parenting

- *Instructing a Child's Heart* by Tedd and Margy Tripp
- *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp
- *Age of Opportunity* by Paul David Trip

Students

- *The Great Work of the Gospel: How We Experience God's Grace* by John Ensor
- *Concise Theology* by J.I. Packer
- *The Pilgrims Progress* by John Bunyan
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Church* by Don Whitney

Children

- *The King Without A Shadow* by R.C. Sproul
- *The Priest With Dirty Clothes* by R.C. Sproul
- *Dangerous Journey* arranged by Oliver Hunkin