

Three Questions Regarding Youth Groups

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As young children grow into their teen years, one of the most pressing questions that parents ask, particularly when they are looking for a new church is, 'Is the youth group a good one?'. In fact, you will often see families going shopping from church to church until they find a youth group that their children enjoy and that the parents "enjoy".

What kinds of questions should you be asking as a parent regarding youth groups?

First, where does the idea of youth group came from?

Search the scriptures! Here is our most important source of information regarding any ministry. All ministry to youth should be judged against the testimony of scripture, for it is not only sharper than a two edged sword, it is also:

"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work". II Tim 3:16-17

As we search the scripture, we do not find the words "youth group" or the practice illustrated anywhere. The closest resemblance to a youth group in the Bible is an incident where at least 42 youth were together. Unfortunately, this resulted in bears devouring the 42 members of the group because of their disrespect for a prophet (2 Kings 2:23-24). This passage of scripture gives us a brilliant illustration of the impact of concentrated foolishness. The concept of youth group is absent from Biblical ecclesiological language. So we first must say that the idea of youth groups does not come from the teaching of the apostles, the prophets or the writers history and poetry.

Second, what are the results of modern youth groups?

The answer: the results of the youth groups are atrocious, and they are not worthy of repetition. Josh McDowell and George Barna have clearly documented the bankrupt values of the youth that are currently in our evangelical youth groups. By collecting youth together, we multiply foolishness and participate in the creation of a culture of foolishness.

The fruit of this ministry technique is obvious. My observation after having been a youth pastor and now a father, is that if you want to deepen and prolong immaturity, put the youth together in youth groups. I happen to believe that the parent is almost always smarter than the other kids in the youth group. Six year olds learning from six year olds; 13 year olds learning from 13 year olds and 16 year olds learning from 16 year olds is one of the silliest ideas of the last century.

I do not believe that youth are best ministered to by bringing them together.

Our youth are products of a method that does not work and, will never work, because it was never recommended by the God who made them.

Since the mid seventies, I have been a high school pastor, college pastor, senior pastor, singles pastor, business owner, elder, church planter and men's ministry leader. I love the Church of Jesus Christ. I believe that she is the only institutional hope for the world. I believe she is the pillar and support of the truth. I believe that she has the only message that can bring salvation, joy and healing to the world. I am confident that God is able to use these kinds of ministries, but it is clear from simple observation, that in the midst of the feverish activity of the church, much of the apostolic model has been lost.

Third, what is a Biblical philosophy of youth ministry?

The Lord has already given his philosophy of youth ministry in the entire testimony of scripture and summed it up in Deut 6. In the New Testament, it is summarized in the in Ephesians 6:4. Also see Acts 16:30-34. The delivery system for the divine truth was always meant to be passed from father to son. And everywhere in scripture, when we see the delivery system is broken, sorrow and judgment and captivity is the result. Scripture presents a complete picture with vivid examples of what happens when fathers fail to carry out their trans generational calling.

We Need to Turn to the Word of God

Tough as it may be, it is time for people in the church to turn to scripture for their youth ministry philosophy and practice. It will do no good to look around to the prevailing culture to find our way in life. God never intended for us to look at other churches as a model. He calls all churches in all generations to look to His Word instead. When the church does this, I expect that she will abandon her youth groups.