

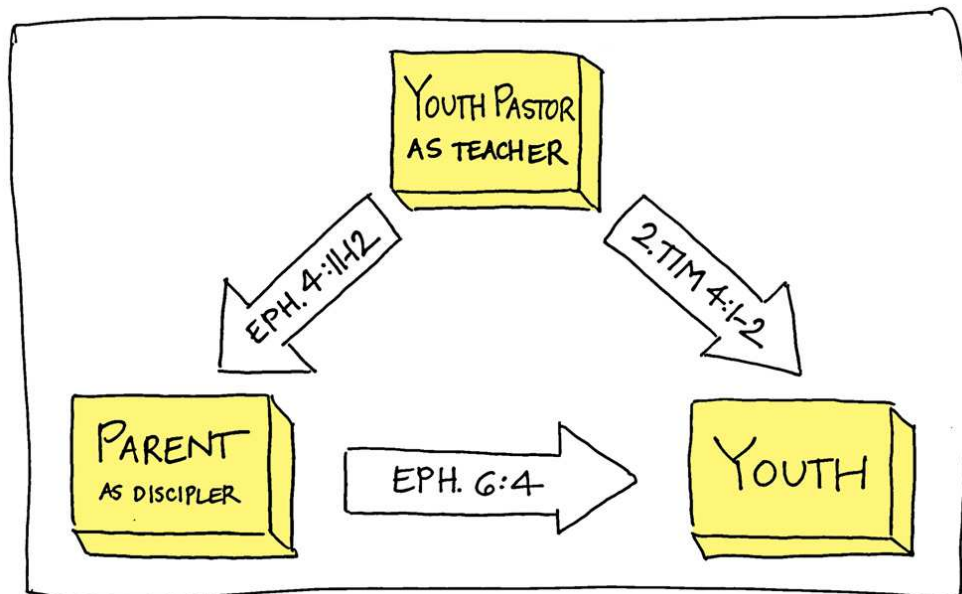
TEACHING IN TWO DIRECTIONS: Instructing Teens and Equipping Parents

INTRODUCTION

Teaching¹ God's Word is the most important responsibility for a youth pastor. As a means of growth for both parents and youth, teaching is the nonnegotiable ingredient for a biblically faithful youth ministry. While many youth pastors would agree with this statement in principle, not every youth pastor's practice reflects this priority. The youth pastor should conceive of his role primarily as teacher and should direct his teaching to *both* teens and parents.

TEACHING IN TWO DIRECTIONS: A MODEL FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

Teaching in youth ministry cuts two distinct channels through which the grace of God may flow: teaching God's Word to teenagers in an age-appropriate way, and equipping parents for the work of parenting. It works like this:



2 Timothy 4:1-2 helps youth pastors think about their responsibilities to youth: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." Ephesians 4:11-12 helps youth pastors understand their responsibilities to parents: pastors and teachers "equip the saints for the work of ministry." In particular, youth pastors equip parents to do the work of parenting their teens, equipping them to disciple their teens in obedience to Ephesians 6:4.

This approach is not the norm today, partly because youth pastors are confronted with a dizzying array of options. Googling "youth ministry" won't help: there are thousands of websites devoted to guiding youth pastors to the "right" methods of youth ministry. Clearly, the priority of teaching runs countercultural to today's popular youth-ministry

¹ The rest of this paper deliberately refers to "teaching" rather than "preaching." The words and concepts are theologically distinct, but closely related. For helpful background, see John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 122-125.

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wisdom. Is it enough to provide an entertaining environment in the hopes that young people will stick around long enough to learn to like church? Is it best to separate the teens from the larger church so they can take responsibility for their own spirituality? Or should the church back off and let the family do all the spiritual nurturing? How do games, special events, worship, student leadership, youth caregroups, and other components of youth ministry fit in?

These are important questions that must be answered theologically. Youth pastors must not be held captive the latest trend or fad. Any definition of youth ministry must begin by answering the question, "What does Scripture say?"

THE YOUTH PASTOR AS TEACHER

Of all the roles any pastor is called upon to fulfill, "teacher" must top the list. Teaching God's Word is the most important role for every pastor, and it must be central to the job description of a youth pastor. In other words, the priorities of the youth pastor are the priorities of every pastor: teach the Word.

When Paul lists the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, every item describing godly character is required elsewhere in the New Testament of all Christians. Only one requirement stands out as unique to pastoral ministry: the pastor must be *able to teach*. Among his last words to Timothy, Paul charges his young protégé: "*preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*" (2 Timothy 4:1-2). So closely are pastoring and teaching related that they are listed together as dual distinctives of one office in Ephesians 4:11-12. We read in 1 Timothy 5:17 that "elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who *labor in preaching and teaching*."

These verses function like beacons, guiding pastors through the fog of options to the safe harbor of biblical ministry. These verses have shaped how I think about youth ministry. In five^{15,2} every meeting or gathering becomes an opportunity for teaching. Every meeting! Retreats, short-term missions trips to Mexico, Manskool, Student Leadership Council meetings, and even band auditions become teaching opportunities for both parents and teens. I once did a brief teaching before a Redskins playoff game about sports, humility, and the remote control. That teaching is one of the messages I hear parents refer back to most often. Not every teaching opportunity requires a pulpit, thirty minutes, and a three-point outline. Sometimes the teaching is more formal, sometimes less. The important point is that in every setting, the youth pastor is thinking: "Teaching is what I'm uniquely called to do. The most effective way I can serve in this moment is to teach."

By God's grace we can expect that teenagers will hear and understand Scripture, will be genuinely converted, and will begin to apply the gospel in a way that shapes their

² Our youth ministry is named five15 in reference to 2 Corinthians 5:15.

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behavior. Popular youth ministry expectations forecast advancing worldliness in the lives of teenagers as they approach graduation. We've experienced just the opposite. Over the last few years, we've watched a majority of seniors graduate and continue participating faithfully in the church. Many of these teens are eagerly following God, many have a deep love for their parents, many have a broad knowledge of Scripture. They serve in a variety of ways throughout the church, and the culture of our youth ministry is becoming one where godliness is prized. One student recently said, "This is a place where it is cool to be godly."

Of course I can't take credit for these signs of spiritual health. The Holy Spirit has been at work through both the pastoral teaching of God's Word and parents' faithful discipleship of their teens. Fathers are discipling their sons and mothers are discipling their daughters more faithfully and effectively than they used to. Teens have responded to the gospel in very encouraging ways, for which we thank God! I'm convinced this model of the primacy of teaching has made the difference.

THE YOUTH PASTOR INSTRUCTS TEENS

Our youth meetings are aimed primarily at teenagers. This is the 2 Timothy 4:1-2 arrow on the chart. Here we part ways with the family-integrated model. While we share the conviction that parents bear primary responsibility for training their kids, nevertheless, these teens are in the church, under our pastoral care.

But what should a youth pastor teach? There is no formula for creating a teaching curriculum. Biblical, theological, and practical needs emerge as we know the flock. The annual teaching curriculum includes both formative and responsive teaching priorities. In other words, there are some topics that teens need to hear, regardless of the situation in which they find themselves. The gospel, personal holiness, relationship with parents, and other topics like these will form the core of any curriculum. At other times, there may be topics or themes that emerge as unique needs to a particular youth ministry. A wise youth pastor will maintain a regular diet of formative teaching and supplement with topics that fit the needs of the youth ministry, like dating, music, movies, Facebook, and so on.

Consider this: a youth ministry for 7th through 12th graders with a modestly paced 9 youth meetings a year will provide a youth pastor at least 54 sermons to shape students by the time they graduate. This represents a tremendous amount of influence in the life of a teenager. A wise youth pastor will consider carefully the topics to be addressed over the course of those six years.

Here is an idea for guys in a smaller context: you don't have to have a full-blown youth ministry to teach in two directions. Maybe your church is too small to sustain a monthly youth meeting. A four- to eight-week series of classes (Sunday school, Sunday night, mid-week, whatever) can provide an opportunity to address specific topics with parents and teens together.

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Addendum 1 is a guide I've created to help me develop annual curricula for five15. There are some topics that I want to address every year. There are others that I hope every teen will hear at least once before they graduate. Your topics might be different based on the ages, maturity, and size of your group. But I hope this gets you started.

This teaching model addresses teens directly, calling them to love and serve the Savior. It also addresses parents, equipping them to do the work of parenting, teaching them to disciple their teens to follow the Savior.

THE YOUTH PASTOR EQUIPS PARENTS

The pastor as teacher does not replace the parent. Ephesians 6:4 teaches, "Parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Simply reading this verse is not enough.

Ephesians 4:11-12 explains how "God gave... pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry..." Surely this includes equipping parents for the work of parenting. Could there be more at stake here? We must transfer the gospel to the coming generation, and equip parents to do this with their children.

We start with a theological basis for parenting and move to practical instruction on parenting. Parents need help to recognize the differences between parenting younger children and parenting teens. They need application to specific topics, from music and video games to dating and college. At Sovereign Grace Church, we haven't done this flawlessly and we're seeing the need to be much more deliberate about our teaching curriculum for parents. Addendum 2 describes our current parent-training plan.

Like many youth pastors, I am 10-20 years younger than most of the parents in my youth ministry and my children are still quite young. Teaching on parenting can be an intimidating task, and there are limitations to what youth pastors like me can teach parents. Where there are limitations, we are responsible to arrange for teaching by someone with adequate skill and experience. Pastoral teams will have to work through this together, but there are many options. A youth pastor may be able to use books and DVDs on parenting to provide teaching for parents. He may be able to collect the best teaching available from other resources and organize it into a form that serves parents. He may be able to invite guest speakers who can teach from their own experience about training teens. There are parents in the youth ministry who can be interviewed or whose testimonies might be valuable. A youth pastor doesn't have to do all the teaching but is responsible to provide teaching.

PARENTS DISCIPLE THEIR TEENS

Teaching parents directly teaches them how to bring up their children in and discipline and instruction of the Lord and provides content that they can use in the discipleship of

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their teens. We are seeking to position parents to disciple their teens and to position teens to humbly follow their parents. As parents are equipped for parenting, we should expect to see their involvement and initiative with their teens increase rather than decrease through the teen years.

Equipping parents in youth ministry supports parents in discipling their teens by providing a framework of material for parents and teens to work through together. Further, the teaching will provide a foundation for parent-teen discussions that extend beyond the youth meeting. Almost every meeting we have includes an opportunity for parents and teens to discuss together what they've heard. They take home discussion questions that help them further the conversation. Thus the teaching in our youth ministry not only instructs parents about parenting, but also provides resources for them to use as they disciple their teens.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

The three elements of this model (pastor instructing teens, pastor equipping parents, and parents discipling teens) don't need to be three completely separate and distinct components. In fact, each element can be present in a single meeting. A typical five15 meeting includes a message that is geared towards the teens: while still strong in biblical content, they are shorter in length, illustration- and application-heavy. We also look to inject purposeful fun into these meetings as a way to engage youth or illustrate a point. Next, there is usually a portion of that message that is directed to parents, helping them understand how to lead their kids through the material. Finally, the evening typically concludes with 20-30 minutes devoted to family discussions: parents and teens talking together about the message they've just heard. Parents get the chance to lead their kids right away.

WHY NOT YOUTH CAREGROUP?

You might have noticed that I haven't referred to youth caregroups or recommended them as a method for youth ministry. There are many different legitimate ways to do youth ministry. Scripture doesn't specify a method for youth ministry, so the structure of a youth ministry is a wisdom issue for pastoral teams to navigate together. I have deep respect for my friends who have practiced parent-youth caregroups, but from what we have tried in five15, it seems that this approach comes with limitations and drawbacks.

Here are just a few, which I'll explain more fully in a moment: The practice of youth caregroup can limit the youth pastor in his teaching role and inadvertently delegate that teaching role to well-meaning small group leaders who are not called to teach or sufficiently equipped to teach. Further, these groups can provide false assurance for the percentage of teens who are not converted. Given the limited amount of time we have with teens before they graduate, we want to preserve as much time as possible for teaching. At Sovereign Grace Church, we would rather create contexts for teens to relate to their parents than with their peers.

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Limitations: Leadership Challenges

Youth caregroups present a unique leadership challenge. Teenagers are not an easy group to lead, and the vast span of relative maturity in high school makes it very difficult to lead a discussion that engages all (or even most) of the kids, stays on topic, and bears fruit in the lives of a majority of the teens. This would be a challenge even for pastors to fulfill, let alone the average youth caregroup leader. In adult caregroups, spiritual maturity, life experience, and biblical literacy combine to create a ripe context for genuine fellowship. But few teenagers possess the spiritual maturity to experience genuine fellowship with their peers in a small group setting. Our approach has been that “fellowship begins in the home.” We give parents as many tools as we can to help them train their teens to fellowship in the context of the family, thus shaping the teen’s character by the parent’s example and instruction.

There is a teaching component in youth caregroups that is inadvertently delegated to the youth caregroup leader. Although his responsibilities are limited to asking questions and leading discussions, the caregroup leader will be required to teach in some form, fulfilling a role that is likely not sufficiently gifted for. There is a body of theological understanding needed to direct the conversation and adjust erroneous answers. Youth caregroup leaders are servants, no doubt, but they are not called or equipped to lead through teaching.

Limitations: Purpose of Caregroup

Another limitation to youth caregroup is the purpose of caregroup itself. If caregroup is a context for believers to experience fellowship, mutual care, and spiritual life, it is hard to see how a mixed group of both converted and unbelieving teens will be able to experience meaningful fellowship. If fellowship is only possible between believers, it does not seem wise to impose this format on a group of teens, some of whom are not Christians. The presence of unconverted teens does not seem to contribute to the health of a youth caregroup. If these unconverted teens are openly rebellious, their rebellion may influence even the godly, let alone indifferent, teens.

Limitations: False Assurance

Finally, youth caregroups present a danger of false assurance. In every youth ministry, there are unconverted teens who are not openly rebellious but have yet to put their faith in Christ. Often these are teens who have grown up in the church and possess an impressive biblical vocabulary. The application of spiritual practices make it hard to discern their true spiritual condition. Youth caregroups present a danger to these teens: by inviting them to participate in a form of “fellowship,” these teens may be further persuaded that their spirituality is genuine when in fact they have not trusted in Christ for salvation.

CONCLUSION

I hope this paper serves to focus your attention on the priority of teaching for the youth pastor. There are so many things youth pastors could spend time and attention on, but so few things that promise the fruitfulness and effect of faithfully teaching God’s Word.

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The drawing at the beginning of this paper highlights a biblical method for youth pastors to structure a youth ministry. Let us hold as our goal the biblical and theological formation of teens and parents through the preaching of the Word. In short, let us obey Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-2: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus... **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience **and teaching**."

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ADDENDUM 1: ANNUAL TEACHING TOPICS

ANNUAL

1. Gospel (person and work of Jesus Christ, reality and danger of sin, etc.)
2. God (attributes, relationship, etc.)
3. Godliness and/or worldliness, maturity, Christian life
4. Relationship with parents (honor, respect, follow, gift from God)
5. FOR Parents: Biblical understanding of roles and responsibilities of parents

BI-ANNUAL

6. True Conversion
7. Priority of the local church (spiritual gifts, serving)
8. Relationship with peers, true friendship, fear of man
9. Relationship with opposite sex, dating, biblical manhood and womanhood
10. Lust/Modesty
11. Spiritual disciplines (Scripture, prayer, etc.)
12. Media (TV, music, movies, internet, Facebook, text messaging, etc.)
13. Words (encouragement, gossip, lying, truth-telling, fellowship)

OTHER TOPICS

14. Wisdom & folly from Proverbs
15. Person & work of the Holy Spirit
16. Heaven, hell, eternal perspective
17. Evangelism
18. Work, leisure, laziness
19. Worship
20. Sports

**TEACHING IN TWO DIRECTIONS:
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ADDENDUM 2: A PARENT TRAINING PLAN

PURPOSE

To equip parents of our church with biblical, practical tools for parenting their teens and pre-teens. Further, to promote discussion between husbands and wives and fellowship within caregroups on the topic of parenting.

My hope is to promote an approach to parenting that is gospel-centered, humble, active, and biblical.

VENUES

I propose the following plan for the next ministry year, to be reevaluated each year, making adjustments as necessary, and planning the following year's messages based on our needs at the time. Basic plan:

- August Parents Meeting: Plans for the year, one element from Phil of Min, Q&A.
- Take 3-4 not-so-big meetings per year: split parents/teens, teach parents on parenting. Choose from topics below.
- A one-month Sunday school class each year. Develop a core of 4-6 classes that we rotate through.
- Possibly 1 major parenting seminar every year. Friday night/Saturday format?

POSSIBLE TOPICS

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Theology of parenting | • Music |
| • Gospel, authority, & influence | • TV & movies |
| • What is repentance? | • Internet |
| • Discipline & consequences for teens | • Clothes, piercings, and other debatable matters |
| • Fun! Surprise & delight | • Sacraments |
| • Parent-teen relationship | • Spiritual disciplines |
| • Father-son/mother-daughter relationships | • College and career choices |
| • Friendships & fellowship | |
| • Siblings | |
| • Navigating guy/girl relationships | |
| • Cultivating convictions about dating | |
| • Sports | |
| • Anger/self-righteousness in parents | |
| • Anger/self-righteousness in teens | |
| • The priority & practice of communication | |
| • Working through conflict | |

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IDEAS

- Teach/discuss/Q&A (following LG's model for classes)
- Role-play
- Panel discussion:
 - Parents who are doing well, OR
 - Parents who have moved out of that season/lessons learned
 - Include both dads and moms where possible
- Collection of teens honoring their parents for growth, etc.
- Testimonies
- Door prizes

PLAN

DATE	EVENT	TOPIC
2006-2007		
4/07	nsb Parents Mtg	Philosophy of Ministry
4/07	Sunday School	Green Thumb in Parenting
5/07	Sunday School	Conversion & Sacraments
8/07	Parents meeting	Plan for 2007-2008
2007-2008		
11/07	Sunday School	True Conversion
1/08	Sunday School	Giver & Gifts
8/08	Parents Meeting	Plan for 2008-2009, themes, trends, etc.
2008-2009		
9/08	nsb Parents Mtg	Goals for Parenting: Age of Opportunity
10/08	nsb Parents Mtg	Sibling Revelry: When families delight to be together
11/08	nsb Parents Mtg	Spare the iPod, Spoil the Child: Discipline for Teens
2/09	nsb COMBO Mtg	Bob & Devon Kauflin—Lessons Learned from Rebellion
8/09	Parents Meeting	Plan for 2009-2010
2009-2010		
9/09	nsb Parents Mtg	
10/09	Sunday School	(with LG) Parenting 101
1/10	nsb Parents Mtg	TBD
2/10	Sunday School	TBD
4/10	nsb Parents Mtg	TBD
5/10	Sunday School	
8/10	Parents Meeting	Plan for 2010-2011