

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO IN five15

“...and he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” 2 Corinthians 5:15

Why do we do what we do? And why do we do it this way and not some other way? As Christians, as a ministry, and as a church, these are vitally important questions that we must answer with a thoroughly biblical basis.

You won't find “youth ministry” in your concordance, but you will find some related words that are very important. Taken together, these words provide us with some key convictions that shape our thinking about youth ministry:

1. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH

- a. The Church is God's vehicle for the gospel to go forth (Acts, Eph, 1 Cor).
- b. There are distinct demographic segments within the church, each with unique opportunities and needs (Acts 6, John 1:12-14).
- c. The irreducible minimum for the church is the Sunday meeting, where God's people gather to worship God and submit themselves to the preaching of God's Word. (Rom. 12:10; Gal. 5:13, 6:2; Eph. 4:2; 1 Ths. 5:11; many others).

2. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE FAMILY

- a. Children are a gift from God (Ps. 127:3, etc.).
- b. The responsibility of raising godly children into mature, believing adulthood lies primarily with parents (Dt. 6; Eph. 6:1-4; Proverbs).
- c. Parents have limitations in their time, gifts, skill, and knowledge to train their children. Therefore, help from others (the church) is necessary (Pr. 3:7-8; Romans 12:3-4; 1 Cor 12:12-27; many others).
- d. There exists a generational responsibility to convey the truth of the gospel (Dt. 6; Ps. 78:4; Ps. 145:4-7; 2 Tim 3:15).
- e. The spiritual family transcends the biological (Mk. 3:35).

3. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE PASTOR

- a. Pastors are under-shepherds of the great Shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Pt. 5:1-3; Ac. 20:28, cf. Jer. 23 and Ez. 34).
- b. Pastors have a job to do among God's people: make disciples and equip the saints for ministry. (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:11).
- c. Pastors will one day give account for God's people (Heb. 13:17).

4. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE TEENAGER

- a. Scripture has a lot to say to and about young people (Proverbs; others).
- b. Teenagers are capable of genuine faith (Samuel, David, Solomon, Timothy).
- c. As youth, teenagers are immature, and require guidance and instruction to reach mature godly adulthood.

These theological convictions are helpful to us in describing *why* we do what we do, but they don't tell us much about *what* we should do or *how* we should do it. There are perhaps many valid and legitimate ways we could walk out youth ministry based on the above convictions. Here at Sovereign Grace Church, we see three priorities that emerge from these theological convictions: we are Christ-centered, parent-involved, and church-based. This is *what* we do in five15:

1. **BUILD THEM INTO CHRIST.** The gospel of Jesus Christ is our central message (1 Cor. 15:3) and our motive for all we do (2 Cor 5:15). This means that the preaching of God's Word holds a central place in the life of our youth ministry. Thus, to build teens into Christ must include building them into His Word. So, the first commitment of our philosophy of ministry is to build teens into Christ, to do all in our power to help them know Jesus Christ, love Him, and live for Him.
2. **BUILD THEM INTO THEIR PARENTS.** Ours is a culture that has radically eroded the role of parents in teenage lives. It has been said that today's children are getting older younger. That is, teens are claiming for themselves—and culture is driving them towards—increased independence from parental authority and guidance at ever younger ages.

The best thing our youth ministry can do for the teen is to build them into their parents.¹ This means asking parents to attend youth meetings, retreats, missions trips, and other events with their teens. We further seek to create as many opportunities as possible to equip parents to evangelize and/or disciple their teens, and we are regularly on the lookout to create opportunities to promote interaction and fellowship between parents and teens.

3. **BUILD THEM INTO THE CHURCH.** While parents bear primary responsibility for parenting their children, there is a day on the horizon when teens will move out of the house, and a parent's formal responsibility for their kids will end (though in a God-glorifying relationship, the interaction and influence will continue). Our hope and prayer is that these young adults will be functioning and fruitful members of the local church by this time. All our efforts are being poured into preparing them for this.

These priorities may get worked out in a variety of ways. Our methods (*how we do what we do*) may take many forms and may change from time to time. We currently use BIG MEETINGS, not-so-big meetings, the five15 Retreat, Mexico trips, and many other methods to accomplish the above priorities.

We conclude by recognizing the urgency of youth ministry. As D. A. Carson explained, “the church is never more than one generation from extinction.”² Therefore, our *motive* for youth ministry is to build the church that it might be preserved for future generations. Could there be a greater tragedy than to pour out our strength only to lose our future generation to the trappings of the world? Can we bear to watch, as our eyes grow dim, the light of the gospel fade from our church because we did not build for the future day when we can no longer fan its spark into flame?

We remain confident that the future of the Church is safe in Christ's hands. The security of the gospel in this county and in the world for decades to come is not finally our responsibility. But we also know that we have a responsibility to the future of *this church*. Our motives are not sufficient to sustain this church through the trials and temptations that are to come. We must do something, and by defining why we do what we do, we are cutting a channel into which we can pour our strength and our effort, knowing that we are being faithful to what God has called us to do, and trusting that God will be faithful to bring forth fruit from our efforts.

Let's get busy. *Soli Deo Gloria.*³ Steve Whitacre, Sovereign Grace Church

¹ I am here assuming Christian parents. If the parents are not Christians, our approach and priorities may differ somewhat.

² *For The Love of God, Volume 1*, entries for 5/24, 7/19, 10/25.

³ This document is a condensation of a longer document: “Philosophy of Ministry – five15”, which is available upon request.