

Our Vision for Families

The Grace Church elders have a vision to see families engaged in a consistent family worship time. We believe that God honoring families make for God honoring churches, God honoring churches make for God honoring communities, and God honoring communities impact the culture for Christ and bring glory to God through service and outreach. We believe parents (under the headship of the father) are primary in the spiritual leadership of their families and we encourage all of our families to prioritize this spiritual discipline in their family life.

We ask parents, who serve as daily mentors and the primary disciplers of their children, to value the importance of family worship as the church comes alongside them to support, encourage, and assist in raising godly teenagers. So when we use the term “Youth Ministry”, we want to draw a distinction from a “youth group.” A “youth group” suggests an isolated collection of young people primarily made up of the children of adult membership who are occupied by activities under the direction of a “Youth Pastor” while the parents do the “real” ministry. By “Youth Ministry”, we mean a focus on the entire family where young adults are an integral part of the life and outreach of the church.

A Theology of Young People

In the Scriptures, we see where God called young people to serve Him in significant roles, such as kings, prophets, and pastors. They were expected to live according to the Word of God (Psalm 119:9) and be an example for other believers (1 Timothy 4:12). They also had responsibilities, which primarily involved learning and mastering a trade to help support their family. It seems clear that the Lord desires to use young people, not just adults, to accomplish His purposes. For example,

- Joseph was seventeen years old when his brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:2), but his faith in the Lord remained strong.
- David followed the Lord faithfully as a young shepherd and slew Goliath (1 Samuel 17:31-37), later becoming king and a “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22).
- Josiah reigned as king over Judah from the time he was eight years old. At the age of sixteen, he began to seek God and four years later he led the nation in a massive revival (2 Chronicles 34:1-21).
- During Josiah’s reforms, Jeremiah, a youth himself, was called by God to prophesy (Jeremiah 1:4-8).
- Mary, the mother of Jesus, would have been what we consider a young teenager when she conceived of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus himself was twelve years old when He amazed the teachers in the temple (Luke 2:46-47).
- Timothy was likely a teenager when he joined Paul and Silas on their missionary journey in Acts 16.

But how have we gotten so far from this Biblical model for young people of significance and responsibility? Alex and Brett Harris summarize this well:

“Prior to the late 1800s there were only 3 categories of age: childhood, adulthood, and old age. It was only with the coming of the early labor movement with its progressive child labor laws, coupled with new compulsory schooling laws, that a new category, called adolescence, was invented. Coined by G. Stanley Hall, who is often considered the father of American psychology, ‘adolescence’ identified the artificial zone between childhood and adulthood when young people ceased to be children, but were no longer permitted by law to assume the normal responsibilities of adulthood, such as entering into a trade or finding gainful employment. Consequently, marriage and family had to be delayed as well, and so we invented ‘the teenager’, an unfortunate creature who had all the yearnings and capabilities of an adult, but none of the freedoms or responsibilities. Teenage life became a 4-year sentence of continuing primary education and relative idleness known as ‘high school’ (four years of schooling which would later be repeated in the first two years of college). Abolished by law were the young [David] Farraguts and young [George] Washingtons, who couldn’t spare the time to be children any longer than necessary. Cultivated instead was the culture we know today, where young people are allowed, encouraged, and even forced to remain quasi-children for much longer than necessary.”¹

One could make a case that churches need not have any youth program in their church other than the one that God has already ordained—that of the family. To have any youth or children’s ministry apart from an intentional ministry to the family as a whole may in some ways work against God’s plan for the family. We believe the church must come alongside parents and encourage and equip them to parent. Young people need to know how their deepest desires can be fulfilled. And for that, they need not only loving role models, but also solid grounding in the countercultural truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Church youth and children’s ministries should focus much attention on helping parents carry out a consistent Bible-saturated, prayer-filled, Christ-exalting parenting ministry to their children.

At Grace Church, our goal is to have a youth ministry built on the following foundational principles:

1. The ministry is not only directed at the youth, but ultimately to impact the entire family, assisting parents in raising God honoring teens.
2. The youth ministry exists to fulfill the mission and values of Grace Church, it does not exist to isolate itself, but to be an integral part of the life and ministry of the church.
3. Our youth ministry seeks to make an impact for Christ in our homes, community, and around the world through service and outreach.

¹ <http://www.therebelution.com/blog/2005/08/myth-of-adolescence-part-1/>

Impacting the Family

In 1 Corinthians 2:16, the Apostle Paul tells believers to have “the mind of Christ.” This means we should see things – all things – through His eyes and process them as He would. The command to obey your parents is obvious, but our youth must also recognize the importance of the family in advancing the gospel through family worship, sacrificial service in the home, and encouraging loving family relationships as Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5. This communicates the validity of the gospel to unbelievers. Young people need to realize that if they are to have the mind of Christ, they are to walk as He did not just at church, but at home as well. The home is the ultimate proving ground of what has been learned at church.

Impacting the Church

We want our youth to understand and follow God’s standard in the Scriptures. God’s Word is clear that just “not sinning” is no standard. God expects no less commitment from a teenage believer than He does from an adult believer. In order to reach God’s standard for young people we must get beyond simply avoiding “bad stuff” and raise the bar of expectation for our youth in the church. Young people are capable of understanding scriptural truth and doctrine and should be encouraged to minister to and along side adults on a regular basis. We believe that there is really very little that a young person cannot do in the church. For example, our youth serve in the nursery, assist in Sunday School classes and children’s church, encourage younger children as AWANA “listeners”, and minister in the worship services in various capacities. Many consider young people as the church of the future, but it is also true that they are the church of the present and should be expected and encouraged to minister as they are gifted and called to do so.

Impacting the Culture

When young people serve visibly in their communities, the culture takes notice. We believe that the best evangelistic youth events are those events that are already happening in the world. We make the greatest impact for the Kingdom of God through life on life relationships around these events. This is most effectively done within the context and leadership of families, where young adults serve alongside adults and younger children, as the event dictates, to minister the gospel. Evangelism primarily geared towards young people should be more along the lines of New Testament evangelism—going where the crowds were already drawn rather than competing with the world to draw a crowd for the church. Through the cooperative efforts of family, friends and the family of faith, we at Grace Church seek to bring glory to God through our youth ministry as an integral part of our outreach and service opportunities.