

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

SIDE BY SIDE

*“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind **striving side by side for the faith of the gospel**”* Philippians 1:27

INTRODUCTION¹

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...” 1 Peter 5:1-2

To borrow Peter’s metaphor for pastoral ministry, pastors have a responsibility to shepherd their flock. For a literal shepherd, this includes defining when and where the flock may pasture, feed, wander, and sleep.

To translate the metaphor back into the daily life of the modern church, we are not claiming that pastors should define where church members eat or sleep, but rather that pastors own a responsibility to define how we *do* ministry. This paper is an attempt to describe and define how we *do* youth ministry² at King of Grace Church.

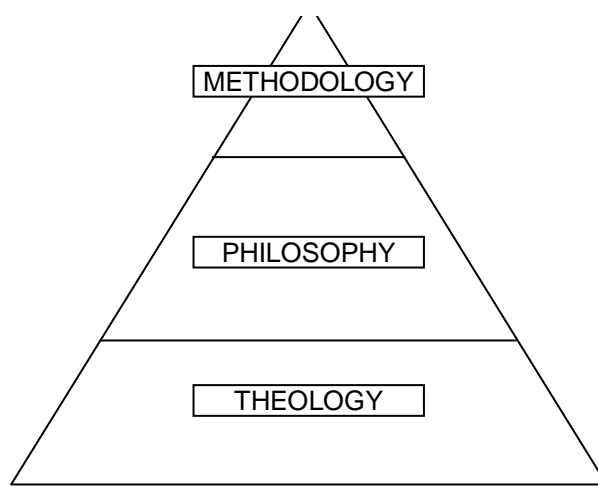
Defining the controlling philosophy for a ministry in the church is perhaps one of the most vital teaching tasks a pastor can undertake. To fail to define direction is to wander, to wander is to risk becoming lost. To be lost is perhaps not as bad as leading the church into error, but the net effect is to risk similar peril. It is therefore of utmost importance that we carefully define what our ministries are about and why.

This mandate is even more important when leading a ministry that could legitimately be led in different directions, structured in a variety of formats, or built to include numerous different emphases. The priorities may diverge widely depending on the needs and situation of the church at that time. In fact, few of our ministry choices are decided for us in an explicit way in Scripture. We know we are to preach God’s Word, use the Spiritual gifts, and administrate the sacraments. Beyond these basics and a few others, we’re going to have to make a case from the ground up.

Finally, “The way we’ve always done it” is not a sufficient justification to continue the immense investment of time, money, and effort that is poured into a ministry to make it effective. I hope to provide description and prescription for youth ministry at King of Grace Church.

¹ Most of this document was compiled by Steve Whitacre who leads the parent-youth ministry at SGC in Five15. Many thanks go to him and the use of his hard work.

² It will become increasingly clear through this paper that this church’s ministry to young people would be better termed a ‘parent-teen’ ministry. I will continue to use ‘youth ministry’ as convenient shorthand, but I ask the reader to keep this mind.



THE MINISTRY PYRAMID³

The theological and theoretical underpinnings of a ministry could be thought of as a pyramid. This pyramid includes three layers representing three components of the underlying thinking that drives a ministry: theology, philosophy, and methodology. Each component must be carefully defined and considered, and the priority and interaction of each component to the others must be weighed and balanced.

The theology of ministry is the lowest level of the pyramid. Derived directly from Scripture, our theology of a given ministry is essentially what Scripture says about that ministry, in an organized form. Because it derives directly from Scripture, this layer is least susceptible to change, unless it becomes clear that the church has been in error. The theology of ministry is primarily concerned with answering the question, “What does Scripture say about this ministry?”

The philosophy of ministry is derived from the theology. These are theoretical principles based on Scriptural truth that in turn govern our methodology. It answers questions like “why?” and “how?”

The methodology of ministry is the last portion of the pyramid. At the top, it is most flexible, able to change when necessary (while remaining within the constraints of theology and philosophy) to best suit the needs of the ministry. Methodology answers the question, “what?”

Taken together, these three layers form a comprehensive explanation for why we do what we do within the context of any given ministry. Much of this explanation is understood intuitively by the thoughtful church member. However, an explicit restating is worth the time and effort for the clarity it brings to our work.

Reasons to minister to Families

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. -Ephesians 3:14-19

The Bible is full of family imagery that defines us not in relation to individual identity to culture but instead to the relationship of the personal intimacy of the Family. The family relationships provide an imperfect reflection that goes to the very heart of who God is when revealed in the Father Son Spirit relationship of the Triune God (**Mt. 28:19; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:14**). At King of Grace

³ I am indebted to Eric Bancroft of Grace Community Church and his message, “Youth: Despise, Distract, or Develop” at the 2006 Shepherds Conference for the idea and explanation of The Ministry Pyramid, as well as other concepts contained in this paper.

Church we are committed to strengthening the family unit, by serving parents in the youth fellowship times. We also understand that relationships that challenge us to grow in Christ-likeness take time and must be sought out intentionally. The process of supporting parents to build stronger and closer bonds with their teenagers is sought to be accomplished through the following initiatives:

- support families in growing their teenagers to be disciples of Christ
- strengthening parents and teens relationally through fellowship times
- bring parents and teens together for meaningful discussions and interactions
- challenge parents and teens to live out the Gospel in the greater community of King of Grace Church
- allow the Gospel to come to fruition by the power of the Holy Spirit in families of teens

Because we are seeking to celebrate, live by, and proclaim the Gospel in all we do; we acknowledge that ministry is a process and does not happen over night. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to draw, lead, and change the hearts of each person in the church (**Gal. 5:16-26**). At King of Grace Church we long for the youth fellowship times to have the following benefits:

- Significant times of ministry
- Team ministry by partnering with parents
- Active spiritual growth together in community
- Relational community built around the Gospel

In all areas we are seeking to allow God to work freely in our midst and we want the Gospel to be seen in all we do as a church (**Psalm 115:1**).

OUR THEOLOGY OF YOUTH MINISTRY⁴

We cannot claim to own a “theology of youth ministry” in any proper sense; while Scripture has much to say about young people, youth ministry is not directly addressed in the Bible. We must arrive at a theology of youth ministry through inference and implication. Having said that, we must also agree that we are not free to innovate ministries at will, completely independent of the Bible. God’s inspired Word is our authoritative standard for all we think, say, and do. Thus, we hold certain convictions about the church, the family, the pastor, and about young people that, taken together, form the theological basis of our Philosophy and Methodology for youth ministry.

This theology of ministry derives directly from Scripture. The following is a collection of Biblically relevant truths that pertain to the discussion at hand.

1. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH

- a. The Church is God’s vehicle for the gospel to go forth (Acts, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians).** Of all the methods God could have chosen to propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, he chose in his infinite wisdom to use the church. The church is the basis for ministry to individuals. This means that youth ministry is not to function independently from the church, as some sort of loosely affiliated para-church endeavor. Rather, youth ministry is an integral part of the church. And yet:
- b. There are distinct demographic segments within the church, each with unique opportunities and needs.** Even at its inception, the church was organizing to care for the unique needs of certain widows (Acts 6), John addresses church members, fathers, and young men separately (1 John 1:12-14), and in numerous places in the Pauline and General Epistles are distinct groups addressed.
- 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.** Beyond this minimum, pastors must discern, based on a church’s culture, needs,

⁴ I am indebted to Grant Layman, Dave Brewer, and the 10:31 Youth Ministry of Covenant Life Church for the material that follows.

and resources, what programs will best help the church accomplish her mission and satisfy the “one another’s” listed in Scripture (Rom. 12:10; Gal. 5:13, 6:2; Eph. 4:2; I Thess. 5:11; many others).

2. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE FAMILY

- a. **Children are a gift from God (Ps. 127:3, etc.).** God intends for couples to have children, and these children are clearly a gift from him to parents.
- b. **The responsibility of raising godly children into mature, believing adulthood lies primarily with parents (Dt. 6; Eph. 6:1-4; Proverbs).** Throughout Scripture, we see parents taking responsibility to train their children in ways appropriate to the needs of the child at that time. As the child grows, this includes biblical and theological instruction, ethical training, and age-appropriate discipline.
- 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).** Scripture is adamant that each of us is limited in our ability to see clearly. Sin blinds us to truth, especially spiritual truth in ourselves and in those closest to us. It is therefore imperative that we receive help from outside ourselves. This is part of what gives the body metaphor its richness and urgency.
- 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?).** Parents bear a God-given responsibility to pass on the truths of Scripture and the gospel to the next generation.
- e. **The spiritual family transcends the biological (Mk. 3:35).** When teens come to faith in Christ, they enter the community of believers in the church, receiving certain privileges and accepting certain responsibilities.

3. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE PASTOR

- a. **Pastors are under-shepherds (1 Pt. 5:1-3; Ac. 20:28, cf. Jer. 23 and Ez. 34).** Their job is to care for *all* the flock of God. Clearly this includes the members of the church, implicitly this surely includes their children as well.
- 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).** In other words, prayer and the ministry of the word (see Acts 6:4) among God’s people and in the world.
- c. **Pastors will one day give account for God’s people (Heb. 13:17).** Again, it seems obvious that this is for those who are members of the church, but it surely includes the children of those members as well.

4. CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE TEENAGER

- a. **Scripture has a lot to say to and about young people (Proverbs; others).** While Scripture doesn’t describe teenagers in the modern sense, an entire book of the Bible is devoted to the training and instruction of young people (Proverbs).
- b. **Teenagers are capable of genuine faith.** The faith and obedience that God expects of humanity fully applies to teenagers as responsible individuals. The number of verses that make this point are too many to count. There are many descriptions in Scripture of young people who come to genuine faith (Samuel, David, Solomon, Timothy...)
- c. **As youth, teenagers are immature, and require guidance and instruction to reach mature godly adulthood.** This is the conclusion we must draw from the fact that the book of Proverbs has been preserved for us.

OUR PHILOSOPHY OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Our philosophy of youth ministry is distinct from, and flows out of, our theology of youth ministry. While our theology of ministry is derived directly from Scripture, our philosophy of ministry is an attempt to logically state conclusions from those theological principles that will then govern and shape our methodologies.

Our philosophy of ministry derives from the theological commitment that all ministry in the church has a purpose: discipleship and equipping. In other words, no ministry exists for its own sake. We don't have a youth ministry because other churches have a youth ministry, or because we need something for kids to do on Saturday night, or even because it is fun. Rather, youth ministry is the ministry of the church applied to parents and teens, for the purpose of God's glory and the good of His people.

Based on the theology of ministry described above, the philosophy of youth ministry is to prepare teens for a life of passionately following Christ, fruitful participation in the church, and eager evangelism of the world. Our efforts in youth ministry are building for a day yet to come. Being specifically dependant upon the Holy Spirit, we are building teens into Christ, into their parents, and into the church. In other words, our youth ministry is Christ-centered, parent-driven, and church-based.

1. Build them into Christ.

Because a ministry is not independent but a part of the church, the goals and emphases of a ministry must derive from the goals and emphases of the church and apply them to the context at hand. We can do nothing better for our teens than to preach the gospel to them and 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).

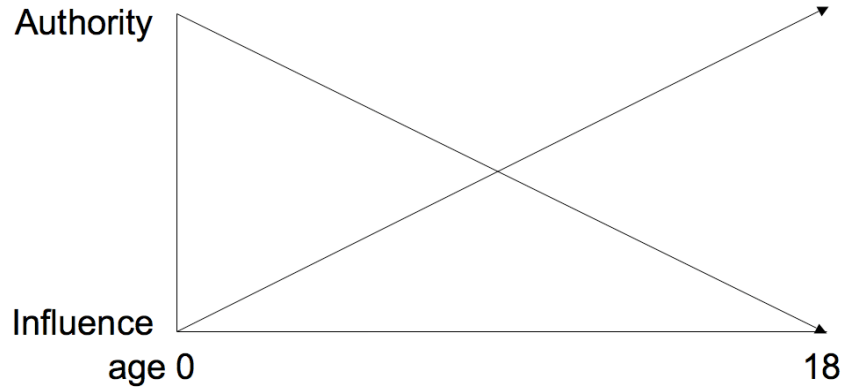
This means that the preaching of God's Word holds a central place in the life of our youth ministry. Scripture is God's divine self-revelation and therefore an understanding of God as He has revealed Himself is necessary to a proper understanding of life in God's kingdom. Thus, to build teens into Christ 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. With this said we must realize that we want youth to be comfortable to invite friends into the fellowship. We seek to be wise in this and reevaluate after six months if parents have not yet become involved in the church and meet with their parents to graciously share concerns and invite involvement. We understand that we must be wise in how we live out and bring the Gospel to bear on all of life. As a church we seek to be friendly to those who are seeking God but who have not yet been converted to Christ. Youth fellowship will require for each youth to have an adult sponsor and seek to have the parents involved as much as possible.

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.

However, wisdom and humility indicate that as a teen matures, the involvement of his parents becomes more and not less. Moreover, Scripture demands this. Many of the examples of parental instruction in Scripture seem to involve older children (Dt. 6, Proverbs). Author Tedd Tripp has captured this idea well with what he calls the Authority-Influence Continuum:⁵



Dr. Tripp explains: “Authority here denotes what may be accomplished with your child because you are stronger, faster, larger, and so forth. What parents with new-born children may accomplish simply because they are in charge—because they are the authorities—is at an all time high... The parent’s word is law because they have the physical capacity to enforce it. As a child grows, the ability to control him diminishes... While I am limited in what I can accomplish through the raw use of authority, my son is willingly under my influence. In this chart influence represents the willingness of a child to place himself under authority because of trust... The result is obvious: your words will have weight. You have influence with him. Each day you live with your children, your influence grows.”⁶

Tripp’s explanation might only be qualified to say that the decrease in authority with a child’s age is not automatic, in many cases a parent may have to exert *more* authority as a child ages. Decreasing authority might be better understood to be tied to a teen’s growth and maturity, than to age.

Meanwhile, a parent’s increasing influence is in one sense tied to age, as a parent increasingly appeals with the gospel to a steadily developing intellect. In another sense, a parent’s influence over his teen may be stunted owing to sin, rebellion, or immaturity in the life of their teenager. Wisdom must be exercised by the parent to discern where on this continuum his children are.

Whatever mix of authority and influence is appropriate in the life of a teenager, the best thing our youth ministry can do for the teen is to build them into their parents.⁷ 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

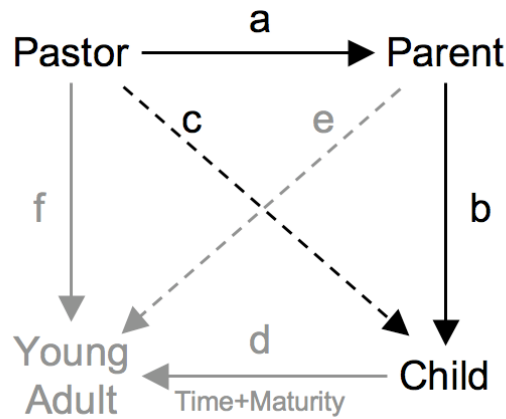
⁵ Used by permission. From Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding A Child’s Heart*, p. 117. Shepherd Press © 1995.

⁶ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, pp. 117-118.

⁷ I am here assuming Christian parents. If the parents are not Christians, our approach and priorities may differ somewhat. But that is not so common at this time to require comment.

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.

It should be obvious from the theology of ministry above that pastoral responsibility for these young adults is not a switch that is turned on at the precise moment the parental responsibility switch is turned off. Rather, an ideal scenario is an overlapping parental—pastoral responsibility for their teens. This can be illustrated in the following diagram:



Pastors have a direct responsibility for parents as members of the church (a). Parents have a direct responsibility for their child (b). As younger children and teenagers, pastors have an indirect responsibility and the ability to influence these kids (c). At the some point, with the right mix of time and godly maturity, these children move to the left (d), coming out from under their parents responsibility and under the responsibility of pastors (e). A parent’s influence remains significant in their lives (f).

Our goal in youth ministry is to prepare parents and teens for this transition, that it might be as smooth and natural as possible, and that the resulting structure of pastoral authority and parental influence might be as healthy as can be.

OUR METHODOLOGY OF YOUTH MINISTRY

As the highest level of the ministry pyramid, our methodology is the most likely to change over time. We do not alter our methodology on a whim, however, there are times when our methodology changes (while remaining solidly connected to our theological convictions and philosophical moorings).

At King of Grace Church our current methodology includes these primary elements:

1. **A name that describes our purpose and objective: Side by Side** Our name derives from Philippians 1:27, which describes our motive for all we do: *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind **striving side by side for the faith of the gospel**”* This is intended to build teens into Christ by partnering along side parents.
2. **Monthly Youth Fellowship meetings.** These meetings are for high school and middle school students and their parents. These meetings provide the primary teaching platform for the ministry. Parents are asked to come to these meetings. These meetings are intended to build teens into Christ, their parents, and the church.

3. **An annual Side by Side Camp or Retreat event.** This intensive four-day excursion may be the most important single event of the year. The retreat is our annual kick-off, setting the tone and building momentum for the year to come. Parents are asked to come. The retreat is intended to build teens into Christ, their parents, and the church.
4. **Father/Son Leadership Development Group.** Recognizing that one of our church's greatest needs is godly, passionate young men who are equipped to lead, the Leadership Development Group is intended to provide a context for modeling, discussion, and application on the topic of godliness and leadership. This is intended to build sons into their fathers, with Christ centered headship that is actively modeled.
5. **A Side by Side Blog.** The Side by Side Blog is the online presence of Side by Side, designed to extend the shelf-life of the meetings, alert parents to further resources that may be of service to them, and model a redemptive use for the medium. Parents are invited to participate. The blog is intended to build teens into the Christ, their parents, and the church.
6. **Periodic social events.** These provide a further, social dimension to our ministry. Events like bowling, laser tag, and picnics are intended to promote fun and friendships among the teens and parents. Parents are invited to come. These events are intended to build teens into the church.
7. **Periodic equipping of parents through seminars and workshops.** These opportunities take a variety of forms, but are all designed to further equip and serve parents in their difficult parenting task. Parents are asked to come to these events. These events are intended to serve parents.

CONCLUSION

We conclude this paper by recognizing the urgency of youth ministry. As D. A. Carson explained, "the church is never more than one generation away from extinction."⁸ 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 New England 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 charting a course for what we are to 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 celebrating, living by, and proclaiming the Gospel as we partner together in community at King of Grace Church, Side by Side. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

⁸ D. A. Carson, *For The Love of God, Volume 1*, p. ??