

STUDENT MINISTRY LAB

There is a clear call to the local church today to shepherd and minister to our youth. However, many are failing in their efforts to minister to this generation of young people. This generation of youth find themselves in the midst of a war they are often unprepared to fight. As we've seen in the last few years, there have been multiple incidents of students taking the lives of other students with violence in schools. As well, teen promiscuity, gender confusion issues, teen suicides, and alcohol and drug related type deaths continue to increase among youth. Growing numbers of teens find themselves deeply depressed without hope. Sadly enough, many so-called "church raised" youth are involved in these issues.

Student ministries in many churches today are failing in the task to lead students toward lives of sanctification and instead, many are focused on pizza parties, amusement park trips, and sleepovers. They have become program run instead of biblically run ministries and are failing to meet the issues involving the hearts and souls of our youth. Student ministries are today becoming youth "groups" instead of *ministries* and are not accomplishing the biblical purpose of the church. Our youth are being labeled as "adolescents" and are being dismissed for their actions because of their age instead of being ministered to as young adults. They are not being shepherded to deal with areas of their lives biblically and instead are being guided to "grow out of it."

Rick Holland, former Executive Pastor at Grace Community

Church in Sun Valley, California and now Pastor at Mission Road Bible Church in Kansas in his article entitled *The Myth Called Adolescence* explains it this way:

“The age group which youth ministry deals with is commonly known as adolescence. Our modern day society has been identified as unique in history for classifying teenagers (ages 12 to 20) as a group of people called adolescents. What is meant by saying that a teenager is an adolescent is that he is no longer a child, but not yet adult. It must be noted here that this state called adolescence is a twentieth century, Western invention. Ours is the only culture in history to see three stages of development to maturity, namely childhood, adolescence, adulthood. All other cultures outside Western culture and its influence, as well as history in general before the twentieth century, see only two stages in development of maturity, namely childhood and adulthood. What we’ve done is create an unnatural state called adolescence where a person is not a child, yet not an adult.

. . . . the teens to whom we minister are not adolescents; they are adults. Granted, they are “young” adults, but they are adults nonetheless. Physically, emotionally, and volitionally they have capabilities commensurate to adulthood. Yet, of all sources, the church (through youth ministry primarily) retards the young person’s spiritual development by not allowing or expecting him to be spiritually responsible or challenging him to the extent of biblical expectations or examples. We are not too different from Saul and the rest of the men of Israel who looked at a young teen named David as an insignificant youth just before he leveled Goliath. If God put such stock in a “youth,” why don’t we?”

As a church we need to call students to a life of holiness and sanctification. These formative years of about 12-24 are the most decisive years in a person’s life. These young adults

(not “adolescents”) are the most overlooked in the strategy of the church today and student ministry must be taken more seriously. The student ministries in the church today consisting of the junior high, high school and college age groups are years of great influence and must be maintained accordingly in the structure of a church. I believe that each of these ministries works alongside each other and is best when closely tied together. The purpose for this is to form a consistent spiritual growth pattern as they are shepherded through the church during those influential years. Specifically, the college years are years of decision-making for students and we must equip them in the church to be people of discernment. The junior high and high school years are the years to shepherd and instill these principles in their lives for the decisions they will make during the college years, which will, in turn, affect them for their future and life.

This philosophy statement will be developed through the following five areas:

1 The Pillars of Student Ministry -Non-negotiable pillars to begin a biblically based student ministry

2 The Purpose of a Student Ministry-The reason for existence

3 The Parts of a Student Ministry-The different parts associated to the ministry and how it takes place

4 The Program of a Student Ministry- How we accomplish the purpose

5 The Practice of living it out- How the purpose is lived out in the people

PILLARS OF A STUDENT MINISTRY

In an individual's ministry philosophy there are areas that one must stand firm on, areas that are integral part of the Christian faith and form a foundation for a biblical philosophy of ministry. These pillars cannot be negotiated or changed. Student (and all other) ministries in the church must stand on the following pillars without compromise:

1 The absolute authority of Scripture

It is crucial that the Word of God direct a ministry in the local church. It is my conviction that the Bible is exactly that and is infallible (without error), inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and sufficient for every need and thing for the believer. I believe that the Bible is the final authority in everything and has everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Within this scope of Scriptural authority is the importance of counseling that is biblically based. In our humanistic culture, the counsel that students receive is often not biblical. It is important that the student ministry not only encourages but also be equipped to give biblical counsel to students who are seeking help in their problems. The counseling must be centered on using God's Word not to simply make outward behavioral change, but inward heart change that brings glory to God.

2 A high view of God

God's character and attributes are revealed in Scripture to us. We must know and understand who God is in hope of bringing Him honor and glory through that ministry. We must realize that God is our creator and sovereign over all things. He is Lord over our lives and anything we achieve in our ministry is a response to Him.

3 A right view of man

Man is created in God's image (Gen. 1:26), yet sinful and depraved. (Eph. 2:1, Rom. 3:10-11, 3:23, Jer. 17:9) Any ministry must understand this and understand that a ministry in a church is to be run by God and not men. It is to be run for the purpose of bringing glory to God. It is when one forgets this that it becomes a man-centered ministry instead of a God centered ministry. Students must be taught to see themselves as God does. They must learn to deny self and take of the cross in order to follow Christ (Matt. 16:24).

4 Personal Holiness and Church Discipline

As a ministry we expect for God's work to be accomplished. We can not get this done by living half committed lives. We must live fully committed lives and lead by example. God had called us to "be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). We must call those in the church to live holy lives. As well, we must deal with sin and unrepentance of those in the church through biblical church discipline.

5 Sound Doctrine

In a biblically centered ministry lies the fact of the absolute authority of Scripture. The teaching of God's Word makes up for sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6). Through the teaching of the Scripture and a message of repentance of sin, faith in Christ's work on the cross, and the Lordship of Christ in one's life, an individual will begin his or her call to a life of holiness.

6 Spiritual Authority

We must understand that at the foundation is that Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22, 4:15), and that He mediates His rule in the church through a plurality of godly eldership. (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1, Acts 20, 1 Thess. 5:13-14, Heb, 13:7, 17) We cannot ignore the necessity of having

godly leadership. Holy men and women are a mandate for Christ to meditate His rule through. The church's selection of its leaders will determine the spiritual gravity of the flock.

PURPOSE OF A STUDENT MINISTRY

There seems to be many different conceptions on what exactly the purpose of the church is. We run into problems when we try to exalt one purpose higher than another one. I believe that the purpose of a student ministry in a church is no different than the purpose of the church itself. The purpose may be worked out differently but should be unified in its goals. I believe God's Word lays out for us a clear three-fold purpose of the church.

The student ministry in a church should fulfill the purpose of the church through:

- **EXALTING:** to exalt, prize and honor God above all else (1 Cor. 6:19-20, Eph. 1:5-6, 12, 14; 1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 4:11)

In Matthew 22:37-38 Jesus said this: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost command"*

Christ's own call was to exalt our Lord first and foremost and as a church that must be the goal and first desire of our hearts. We must come together to worship and lift His name above all names.

- **EQUIPPING:** to encourage believers to live a life of holiness through the teaching and preaching of God's Word. (Eph. 4:11-16, Col. 1:28-29)

As a church we are called to equip and edify believers. We

must use our time as a ministry to give instruction and challenge the people to know and understand God's Word better in hopes of applying it to their personal lives and ministering to others. This is the area in which they will learn through the teaching of God's Word and the fellowship with His people.

Encouraging our youth and church body to know Christ and Him crucified must be a priority in our ministries.

- **EXTENDING:** to proclaim the gospel to others through evangelism (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:14-32; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; 2 Tim. 4:5)

The great commission is clear and we must have this as a part of the church. As we exalt Christ and equip the saints, it should be an automatic response to take every opportunity to share the gospel with others.

There are many churches and ministries today who choose to take one of these three purposes of the church and give it more emphasis than the others. Much of ministry to our Students has embraced models instead of biblical principles. These ministries are failing or not accomplishing all they should for our Lord because of this. Each of these elements is crucial to a healthy church and must be maintained to honor and glorify our Lord.

PARTS OF A STUDENT MINISTRY

The parts that are associated with a student ministry are vital in running an effective ministry. It is crucial to understand that these areas must be right first before being able to effectively minister.

- **BIBLICAL TEACHING**

This is the key to students being equipped in their

lives. Students must get biblical teaching that is accurate so that they can grow and learn to use the tools of Scripture to live out their lives. It is important to use teachers who are equipped and gifted to teach. Forcing people who don't want to teach will accomplish nothing and allowing people who are not gifted to teach will help nobody. It is important to be responsible to the teaching and preaching of God's Word. Our Lord clearly gives instruction that those who teach will "incur a stricter judgment". (James 3:1) It is my desire that as a ministry, the biblical teaching that takes place be expositional in nature and practical in its presentation. My hope would be that through the study of God's Word that one would apply it to their daily lives and result in holy lives.

- **BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND DISCIPLESHIP**

Training in biblical counseling has become necessary for any ministry that wishes to shepherd lives in the church. We must turn to the Word of God as the means of dealing with struggles in our lives. Counseling ultimately leads to opportunities to teach and disciple people in the area of struggle and the church must be equipped to do so.

- **GODLY LEADERSHIP**

Godly leadership is vital to student ministries. The age we are dealing with is the period of life when they are most impressionable. Students are looking for people to model after and we must remember that they are looking at our examples. If we the leaders are not living out lives that are beyond reproach then we cannot expect the students to take and apply to their lives what we are teaching them. I believe that 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 lay out for us the qualifications of a godly leader. It is crucial in a Biblical based student ministry that we have Biblically defined leaders.

- **TEACHABLE STUDENTS**

Without teachable students we will not accomplish our goals. It is important to seek out students who desire to know God. It is those students who will grow in their walks with Christ and bring others to Him. It is my hope that as we challenge students to their commitment to Christ that the group will have students who desire to be more like Him and share with others about Him.

- **COMMITTED PARENTING**

We must recognize that the role of student ministry in the church is to support the shepherding of children who are processing into adulthood. Student ministry within the local church should not take away from the primary role of parenting. Parents who profess a faith in Christ should be responsible to take on their God given responsibility as the spiritual caregiver for their children. The student ministry is to come along side the parent to encourage the parents and not to replace them. The student ministry should seek to teach the student the importance of the family and God's intent in regards to authority in the home through honoring their fathers and mothers. The student ministry should also seek to encourage not only the students, but the parents as well in their roles and responsibilities of the home.

PROGRAM OF A STUDENT MINISTRY

In a student ministry there are so-called "programs." These are the gatherings, tools, events, and activities involved in a ministry. The following are elements I would hope to use in shepherding a student ministry and how they accomplish their purpose.

WORSHIP SERVICE -As stated already, a student ministry

in a local church is a ministry of that church and should not be separated from it. It is crucial for the students to be a part of the entire body and to fellowship together in unity. Even though we may have a separate service, we must be in tune with God is doing in the church as a whole. Students will be encouraged to worship through every form possible.

SUNDAY SCHOOL or SERVICE -This is a Sunday morning event separate from the main worship service. This is a time to study God's Word as a group, and to worship in song and fellowship. It may be smaller Sunday school classes broken up by age and/or gender or a service with all the students meeting together.

STUDENT WORSHIP SERVICE AND STUDY-This service is usually held sometime during the week. Depending on the size of the church, it can be a service held for all the youth (smaller churches) or services of junior high, high school, and college in their individual groups. Worship in song and preaching of the Word to the group are the main dynamics of this meeting. It will also give the students a time during the week to come together for fellowship and encouragement.

DISCIPLESHIP/SMALL GROUP-This is a time for smaller groups to get together in an intimate setting for studying God's Word, sharing, fellowship, and accountability. This happens usually with a leader and students of the same gender. This often takes place in a student or leader's home during the week. There have also been times when I have lead small groups following a mid-week gathering in order to discuss the subject that was taught more thoroughly.

EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH-These are events that are held for the pure purpose of being able to go and

evangelize. This may be open-air evangelism, going to homeless shelters, and on campus events. In preparation for this there should be a form of training time as well. It is also important that these events be connected to the local church and be accountable to it.

ACTIVITIES and EVENTS-In a student ministry of a church there are often activities and events. It is my conviction however, that these activities and events should always have a purpose. They are usually centered on a time of fun with others from the group. However, it should also have the purpose of edifying one another, building unity within the group, and bringing glory to God at the same time. Activities and events should never dominate a ministry within the local church structure. Our call in local church ministry is the shepherding and discipleship of students. We cannot embrace the cultures desire to entertain our youth.

CAMPS AND RETREATS-This is a time when the students get away from the distractions of everyday life. It is a time of teaching, worship and hopefully bonding with others.

MISSION TRIPS- It would be my hope to be able to have resources to take students on a mission trip once a year. This can be done in a number of ways, whether a short trip to Mexico or a longer trip to another country during the summer. I do believe that if the resources are available that this could be a very profitable time for students to learn to appreciate what God has given to them and for them to learn and understand what it means to serve others.

PRACTICE OF LIVING IT OUT

“And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man, and

teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.” Colossians 1:28

That above statement was the Apostle Paul's goal in ministry. It would be my desire to make it my goal as well. It is my hope that in running a Biblical student ministry that we would build up students who model the character and qualities of our Savior Jesus Christ, seeing them grow to be like Christ and striving to live holy lives.

The desire is to see young adults who reflect the character and heart of the Bible's description of men and women who lead the church. In Titus 2, these characters are given and it would be a goal as a student ministry to see students reflect the character qualities mentioned in that passage.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Student Ministries in a church deals with one of the most important and influential years in one's life. As a church, it is crucial that we take advantage of this time and challenge each individual to a life of sanctification. It is my prayer that God would use the teaching of His Word and the ministry of His people to bring students to a closer relationship with and a greater understanding of their Savior. May each individual come to recognize their need for the Lordship of Christ in his or her life and be challenged to live a life of holiness for the sake of honoring their Lord. It is my sincere hope that this would be the case for any ministry I take part in, and that it would be one that is biblically centered in all it does. May God be glorified by the work that is accomplished through it and in it. May His name be lifted above all other names.