

Sunday School Lesson Connection

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Family-Based Youth Ministry

After seeing appalling abuses of the term "family-based" ministry I need to weigh in on the subject.

Some churches have actually scraped their youth ministry and Sunday Schools in preference of their misinterpretation of the concept of a "family-based" ministry. In reality this is actually a reaction to the lack of committed volunteers and/ or their lack of commitment to fund a Youth Pastor staff position. These churches now feel justified in shirking their responsibility to train the youth in Christian principles

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arguing that these separate classes and groups take the youth out of the life of the church body.

In his book, "Family-Based Youth Ministry", Mark DeVries does make the assertion that the current youth group model we have been following, if that is all a church is doing for it's youth, fails the youth by not connecting them with adults within the body of the church. I think these church leaders only read chapter three, found the rationale to be lazy, then stopped reading. At the end of most chapters DeVries actually does suggest suspending the regular youth program but

gives an alternative direction to pursue. By reading only half the sentence and disregarding the new directive church leaders are causing a catastrophe to the Christian church of tomorrow by not seeing to the proper training of the youth today.

I do not think DeVries was intending to give lazy leaders an excuse to stop doing youth ministry. Before scraping your Sunday School class or mid-week youth group read the whole book. In the final chapter DeVries says to begin family-based youth ministry as an "undercover or mustard-seed kind of ministry." Begin to apply his principals slowly.

Many of the suggestions he gives are quite easy to implement. For instance, letting the kids be the greeters, hand out the bulletins, and participate in the praise band. The hardest thing about that is putting aside traditions your church may have developed like insisting that only the elders or deacons can be greeters. The music director might have to be willing to settle for less than a perfect worship performance.

Some of the suggestions are harder, like teaching a parenting class or teaching parents to be the real spiritual mentors of their kids. This may mean that you will need to become an expert in parenting yourself. A commitment of this level may get in the way of other pet projects. It may get in the way of the pastors quiet routine as he slides towards retirement. A real roadblock to this initiative is the deterioration of the nuclear family. As an alternative DeVries recommends several ways we can connect the kids to spiritually mature adults with the greater Body of Christ. This too is conditional on having spiritually mature adults in your church family.

My admonition, in any case, is to suck it up and get off your lazy cabooses. Hired youth pastors and committed volunteers can be a major spiritual influence in the life of a teen. But this influence pales in comparison to the lasting influence parents have in the life of their kids. You must enlist the parents in the youth ministry process. In some cases we must first see to the spiritual growth of the parents before we can expect them to properly mentor their kids. But we cannot let the size of the task stop us from beginning.

So I recommend that you read the book –the whole book. Don't scrap a great Sunday school program until you have a better alternative to replace it with.

