



teen
DISCIPLESHIP
philosophy

EQUIPPING AND ENCOURAGING PARENTS
TO REAR THEIR CHILDREN BIBLICALLY

Spring Creek Bible Church

overview

The vision of SCBC is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is the ministry divinely mandated by Jesus Christ for His church. Therefore, regardless of age, SCBC's primary goal in the life of every parishioner is to teach him/her to be an obedient disciple of Jesus Christ.

While the local church is responsible to make disciples of every member, the specific charge for bringing up children is given to parents, not “the church.” God calls parents to be the primary disciplers of their children. Therefore, the best “youth ministry” the local church can provide is one that equips and encourages parents in a mature walk with Christ that overflows in the discipleship of their own sons and daughters.

Herein lies the precarious task for church leaders—to provide assistance to parents without usurping their role or facilitating the abdication of their privilege and responsibility. It is so easy to unwittingly allow youth programs to replace parents. This has been the common practice in most churches over the past fifty years. Therefore, the status quo of church youth ministry is rarely questioned, let alone corrected. Most people are content with this standard evangelical arrangement mostly because it is what we are used to and also because it is easier on church leaders and parents alike. But all the while the church, parents, and teens have robbed themselves of a greater blessing had we patterned our youth discipleship methods more closely to Scripture.

At SCBC we do not want to lend mere lip service to our philosophy of teen discipleship. We want to facilitate our parents being personally, intentionally, and unwaveringly involved in discipling their sons and daughters, beyond having them delegate this task to others. We believe the best youth group is the family, and the best youth ministers are parents.

“THE SCRIPTURES COULD NOT BE MORE CLEAR: THE CHARGE FOR BRINGING UP CHILDREN IN EVERY AREA IS GIVEN PRIMARILY TO PARENTS. RESPONSIBLE YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH, THOUGH PERHAPS DIFFICULT TO EXECUTE, IS SIMPLE TO UNDERSTAND—IT INVOLVES TEACHING AND EXHORTING PARENTS TO RAISE THEIR CHILDREN BIBLICALLY.”

Christopher Schlect

distinctives

OF SCBC TEEN DISCIPLESHIP

Here are five SCBC Teen Discipleship distinctives that counter the weaknesses of typical youth ministry (noted in Appendix A). These distinctives serve as a guide for all that we do relative to teen ministry.

I. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INVOLVEMENT:

We believe that before God, parents, not churches, have the primary responsibility for the spiritual nurturing of their children. Therefore, SCBC is committed to building strong families, not a youth group. The vast majority of SCBC “youth ministry” should take place in individual homes where parents invest the time and creative energy necessary to develop and execute a comprehensive plan for the spiritual, mental, social, and vocational development of their children. A one-size-fits-all church youth program is not the best way to disciple teens. It is easiest, but not best. It is biblical, and hence better, for parents to discern the unique bents of their own sons and daughters and tailor fit a personal “program” to them. This puts parents firmly in the driver’s seat in terms of the people, teaching materials, social calendar, and other influences they deem best for their child at any given time in his/her development. We want to biblically counter the problem of teens being segregated from their parents and other mature adults. Whatever is officially provided by SCBC in terms of ministry to teens will always be done with a heart to involve and support parents.

2. CROSS-GENERATIONAL:

At SCBC we attempt to cultivate an environment that mingles all ages together as much as possible. We are building the body of Christ, not cultivating a separate youth culture. Our Teen/Parent Discipleship is one example of this. Additionally, most of our corporate activities are “church” activities, not “youth” activities. However, our cross-generational mindset does not preclude occasional activities and events designed for specific age categories. Segregating young people from adults is the invention of secular humanists, not biblical Christianity. However, most local churches have bought into the alleged value of grouping young people together for inordinate amounts of time on a regular basis. Typically speaking, wisdom and maturity are not developed through interaction

with youthful peers. Segregating young people from adults often does more to foster foolishness than spiritual maturity. While the concern of some parents is that their teens don't spend enough time with friends their own age, the tenor of the Bible's teaching on "socialization" promotes cross-generational interaction. Older saints are admonished to teach the younger, and the younger are admonished to humbly receive this instruction. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

3. NOT ACTIVITY-CENTERED:

With the exception of occasional official activities designed for teens and parents, SCBC encourages families to organize their own activities (see the activity guidelines on page 7). There is certainly nothing wrong with having fun with other families, but it is not the responsibility of the local church to facilitate this. Our emphasis must remain on promoting discipleship. Filling the church calendar with youth activities will hinder parents from investing meaningful time on a consistent basis to nurture intimacy in personal and spiritual ways with their own sons and daughters. Most families struggle with having too much in their schedule. As a church we do not want to exacerbate this problem. This is one reason for limiting the amount of official church activities, and leaving the planning of the social calendar up to individual families.

4. SOLID BIBLICAL TEACHING:

Clear Bible teaching is absolutely essential in leading people to salvation and growth in sanctification. Teens need more than lessons on felt needs. We desire to cultivate an appetite for the meat of God's Word and an expectation that teens will engage in meaningful study of the Scriptures. While being sensitive to the levels of comprehension at any given age, we must guard against "dumbing down" the Bible. In our official instruction of SCBC teens, we seek to provide teachers who are spiritually qualified and skilled in communicating and applying the Word of God. To ensure biblical integrity, any curricula must be approved by the elders.

5. CHURCH-CENTERED:

We want to motivate our young people to view themselves as part of the entire body of Christ, not a youth group. We desire to foster a mindset in our young people that enthusiastically serves and participates in whatever the church is doing even if it is not specifically designed for teens.

“IF YOU ARE GOING TO FUNCTION AS GOD’S INSTRUMENT IN THE LIFE OF YOUR TEEN, YOU NEED TO KNOW THAT GOD INTENDED THE FAMILY TO BE HIS PRIMARY LEARNING COMMUNITY, PARENTS TO BE HIS PRIMARY TEACHERS, AND FAMILY LIFE TO BE JUST THE RIGHT CONTEXT FOR LIFE INSTRUCTION TO TAKE PLACE.”

Paul David Tripp

disciplining teens

Making disciples of Jesus Christ is the heartbeat of SCBC. Whatever SCBC provides in terms of disciplining teens must meet the following criterion:

- It must truly seek to assist, equip, and involve parents in the personal discipleship of their teen. No group should usurp the place of parents, or provide an easy avenue for parents to abdicate their discipleship responsibility to others.
- It must utilize solid biblical resources. Much of the material written for teens is of little or no value.
- Any group must be led and taught by spiritually mature adults, and thus avoid being a peer-driven pooling of opinions. Preferably, any small groups will be led or co-led by the fathers and mothers themselves.
- In the small group context, young men and young ladies should be taught separately. A co-educational group would be the exception, not the rule, and would only be formed temporarily for compelling reasons. This will avoid awkwardness that can distract young people from the primary goal of studying God’s Word. Other venues are available for co-educational interaction.
- Small groups under the official auspices of SCBC are under the authority of the church elders. The elders have the final word in the approval of leadership and curriculum. Leaders will be accountable to the elders in terms of embracing and promoting the Teen Discipleship Philosophy of SCBC.

“Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that Sunday School (or youth group) is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

C.H. Spurgeon

“For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should teach them to their children.”

PSALM 78:5

OFFICIAL DISCIPLESHIP (CHURCH PROGRAMS):

- **Sermons:** Listening to biblical preaching is an important part of discipleship. Notes taken on the outlines that are provided can be used for family discussion later on.
- **Teen/Parent Discipleship:** This occasional class provides solid teaching that acknowledges the age level of the teens without dumbing down the Bible. The class is intended to draw parents and teens together around a common study of Scripture and provide parents a foundation to build upon outside of class.
- **Small Discipleship Groups:** Biblical discipleship should include the preaching and teaching of God’s Word in a larger context (i.e. sermons and Sunday School), and a smaller, more personal venue for instruction and application of the Bible. SCBC regularly provides preaching and teaching, but we also want to encourage more intimate instruction and interaction around the Word of God in the lives of our teens. We encourage these small discipleship groups to be initiated and facilitated by parents. Men and women desiring to lead in this manner should submit their plan to the elders for approval.
- **Men’s and Women’s Classes:** Occasionally adult groups (i.e. Men’s Morning, Women’s book studies, etc.) can include an invitation to the teens without considerably altering the material to cater to young people.
- **Adult Functions:** Occasionally activities/events that are typically limited to adults (18 years and older) will include younger people. These decisions will be made at the discretion of the committees that plan the particular events. A decision to include younger people at any particular adult function will not set a precedent for the future planning of that same event.

“AND, FATHERS, DO NOT PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN TO ANGER; BUT BRING THEM UP IN THE DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD.”

Ephesians 6:4

UNOFFICIAL DISCIPLESHIP (NOT A CHURCH PROGRAM):

When we think of discipleship, we automatically envision curricula, booklets, and highly structured methods and programs. And such things can be helpful. However, in the spirit of Deuteronomy 6, we encourage parents to individually seek God through their personal spiritual disciplines and allow what they are learning to spill over to their children in the normal course of daily events. This requires no special gifting, only a sensitivity to the Spirit's promptings, and a willingness to share spiritual things freely with our children. This is the biblical design and not beyond the ability of any parent who is willing to embrace this calling and make the necessary sacrifices. Disciplining a son or daughter is not a program. It is life on life—experiencing the vicissitudes of life together as a family and processing it all through the grid of the Bible. There are few relationships more intimate than the parent-child relationship. Who knows a teen better than the parent? Who knows a parent better than the teen? Our strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures are most clearly observed in the home which also provides the best environment for mutually growing together spiritually. God's mandate to dads and moms to disciple their own children is an important tool He uses in a parent's own spiritual development. It crowds parents to Christ. It forces them to faithfully study the Bible, not just for themselves, but also for the purpose of grasping and communicating its truths and applications to their children. As family members interact around the Bible it creates an atmosphere of mutual accountability and growth. Viewing discipleship in this light makes it a less ominous task for parents. Parents do not have to be spiritual giants or gifted teachers to disciple their sons and daughters. They just need to be obediently soaking in God's Word and squeezing it out to their children.

IDEAS FOR UNOFFICIAL DISCIPLESHIP:

- Strategically invite people into your home (old and young) who possess skills, experiences, and/or character that you would like to build into your children. Give forethought to questions you can ask.
- Systematically read through the Bible together as a family. Memorize verses together that address specific areas of doctrine and/or character.
- Lead your teens through the *Fundamentals of the Faith* course or some other solid Bible study program. What parents have learned they should pass on to their children.
- Read and discuss good literature (non-fiction and fiction) as a family that promotes biblical values.
- Think of creative ways you can serve others in the church body or reach out to unsaved friends.
- Pursue avenues of training and service that are suitable to your teen.

As has been sufficiently stated, we encourage dads and moms to aggressively engage in the discipleship of their own sons and daughters. However, this does not preclude soliciting the help of others. Parents possess the freedom to pursue individuals whom they feel could play a temporary or long-term role in the spiritual and practical development of their teen. As parents assess the unique bents, strengths, and weaknesses of their child, God may lead them to pursue a particular godly man or woman to come alongside their child and minister as they see fit. This could include a wide range of issues such as Bible study, practical skill training, advice on a specific topic (i.e. courtship, Christian service involvement, etc.) We strongly encourage parents to take such initiative as they prayerfully custom fit a personal discipleship program for their family.

“Who you are with has more power than any other factor in what you become.”

Gregg Harris

ACTIVITIES: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TEEN ACTIVITIES:

1. We promote parental planning, oversight, and involvement in all official church teen activities.
2. We promote the planning of a limited amount of official activities in order to protect church and family calendars from over-busyness.
3. We promote the family and church body, not the cultivation of a youth group mentality.
4. We promote the mindset that all-church activities such as the SCBC Campout, Mariners Outing, All-Church Picnic, Christmas caroling, etc. are legitimate teen activities.
5. Adult Functions: Occasionally activities/events that are typically limited to adults (18 years and older) will include younger people. These decisions will be at the discretion of the committees that plan the particular events. A decision to include younger people at any particular adult function will not set a precedent for the future planning of that same event.
6. We promote families organizing unofficial activities as they so desire.
7. We promote an atmosphere of moral purity, and forbid any romantic physical contact between teens at church activities.

“HE WHO WALKS WITH WISE MEN WILL BE WISE, BUT THE COMPANION OF FOOLS WILL SUFFER HARM.”

Proverbs 13:20

“WE NEED TO EVALUATE THE CHOICES WE MAKE FOR OUR FAMILIES AND THE DEGREE OF BUSYNESS WE PERMIT AS THE NORM. YOU SIMPLY CANNOT MENTOR, PASTOR, DISCIPLE, OR DEVELOP CHILDREN WHEN YOU ARE SELDOM AROUND.”

Paul David Tripp

OFFICIAL CHURCH ACTIVITIES:

It is our desire that occasional activities be planned and participated in by the parents of the teens. If a parent cannot attend a particular event, the teen, of course, is still welcome to attend (see Appendix B, page 13). However, the spirit and goal of official events will always be parental involvement. Providing these official activities will ensure that no one is excluded from the opportunity to occasionally socialize with other teens and adults in the congregation. The nature and date of all prospective activities should be submitted to the elders for approval before any significant planning begins. The elders reserve the right to prohibit the planning of any activity they deem inappropriate for an official church function.

UNOFFICIAL ACTIVITIES:

Of course, individual families are free to do whatever with whomever they desire outside the auspices of SCBC. We see the majority of activities falling under the category of “unofficial.” This provides the following freedom...

- free to do activities that the church may not feel comfortable officially sanctioning.
- free to allow your teens to do activities that are not chaperoned or with limited adult supervision.
- free to invite whomever you choose...invite as many or as few teens/families as you want.
- free to do as many things as you want. Some families are more activity-oriented than others.

CHURCH CALENDAR:

When unofficial activities are being planned that would include a significant amount of SCBC families, we would appreciate it if those who are planning would check with the church office first to see if the date conflicts with the church calendar. Conversely, once notified, we will do our best to respect the plans being made by not scheduling a significant church event. Sensitivity on the part of everyone will help to prevent frustration, but we should all realize that there may be occasions where calendar conflicts are unavoidable.

participation

IN TEEN DISCIPLESHIP

We should all recognize and accept the broad spectrum of personal philosophies and convictions regarding youth ministry that will always exist among SCBC families. These differences include the amount and type of groups/activities that are planned. Each family should be allowed to participate as much or as little as they desire without anyone presuming ill-motives on their part. “Through presumption comes nothing but strife...” (Prov. 13:10). Let us all beware of becoming preoccupied with what other families are or are not participating in. Rather let us seek the Lord’s direction for ourselves personally and allow others the liberty to do the same. Such an attitude will protect a spirit of love and unity that Satan so aggressively seeks to destroy among God’s people. The Bible warns us of the folly of comparing ourselves with others, and instead directs us to focus on Christ (2 Cor. 10:12). Comparison with others is a cancer that produces such sins as pride, jealousy, bitterness, gossip, etc. All the ministries of SCBC are made available to people to participate in at their own discretion. None of our programs are viewed as compulsory, and ministries related to teens are no exception. Judging or criticizing the decisions of others is a two-edged sword that when wielded will eventually swing back and cut us. There are times when every Christian is compelled by the Spirit and personal conviction to make decisions that are unpopular and potentially hurtful to others even though that is not the intent. No one appreciates having their motives misunderstood or judged. The “golden rule” (Matt. 7:12) is an apt principle to apply when we are tempted to be censorious of others decisions. The bottom line is we need to graciously cut one another yards of slack concerning the issue of how much or how little we participate in at SCBC.

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Ephesians 4:1-3

“EVERY CHRISTIAN FAMILY OUGHT TO BE AS IT WERE A LITTLE CHURCH CONSECRATED TO CHRIST, AND WHOLLY INFLUENCED AND GOVERNED BY HIS RULE. AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND ORDER ARE SOME OF THE CHIEF MEANS OF GRACE. IF THESE FAIL, ALL OTHER MEANS ARE LIKELY TO PROVE INEFFECTUAL. IF THESE ARE DULY MAINTAINED, ALL THE MEANS OF GRACE WILL BE LIKELY TO PROSPER AND BE SUCCESSFUL.”

Jonathan Edwards

summary

Discipleship of teens is the responsibility of parents, not the church. A parent must spiritually hemorrhage if they want their kids to bleed. The contemporary norm of youth ministry is pragmatic, but not biblical. Recent generations have become so accustomed to professional, institutional youth ministry that to insist that parents disciple their own sons and daughters is viewed as an abdication of responsibility by the local church. However, to find the best youth pastor for their teens, parents only need to look in the mirror. God has designed and assigned parents to actively shepherd and disciple their own children. What God commands He also gives the power to do, if we humbly surrender to His will.

We exhort SCBC parents to not look to “the church” to do this privileged task, but to passionately seek God—His wisdom and grace—to disciple and grow along with their sons and daughters. Embracing and discharging this blessed parental responsibility will produce good fruit in both parents and children. It is our confident expectation that as the body of SCBC implements the principles contained in this booklet, our families will effectively rear an army of men and women who zealously love and serve Jesus Christ to the glory of God.

“You must remember, we are all creatures of imitation: precept may teach us, but it is example that draws us. There is something in us all, that we are always disposed to catch the ways of those with whom we live; and the more we like them, the stronger does the disposition grow. Without our being aware of it, they influence our tastes and opinions. We gradually give up what they dislike, and take up what they like, in order to become closer friends with them.”

J.C. Ryle

appendix a

WEAKNESSES OF TYPICAL YOUTH MINISTRY

The intent of this section is not to disparage other churches, nor are we implying that any or every one of the following traits is true of all youth groups. However, in order to better communicate the discipleship philosophy that we are promoting at SCBC, it is helpful to point out some of the weaknesses commonly found in contemporary youth ministry that SCBC wants to avoid.

I. ISOLATION FROM PARENTS:

This may be the biggest flaw of modern youth ministry—churches usurping and dads and moms abdicating the privilege and responsibility to disciple sons and daughters that the Bible has clearly given to parents. Minimal (if any) effort is made to involve parents in truly significant ways in the youth program. In most youth groups the church staff and volunteers run the program, and parents are relegated to being chauffeurs and deep pockets to fund activities. Many parents believe the insidious lie that they cannot relate to their own children, and that somehow professional and lay youth leaders will understand their children better than they do. Consequently, a deep sense of insecurity, inadequacy, and (in some cases) laziness paralyzes parents leading them to surrender their children to a group of peers and a youth worker(s) in hopes that they will develop them into men and women of God.

2. PEER DEPENDENCE/PRESSURE:

Peer dependence is the inevitable consequence of limited participation on the part of parents. Friends will naturally fill the vacuum vacated by parents. Eventually peers become more influential than parents in shaping the lives of their teens. This bears undesirable fruit in most young people. With minimal parental involvement, youth groups become a hot bed of youthful foolishness and lust.

Quite often the cutest, funniest, coolest, most sanguine teens become the unofficial leaders of the youth group and set a less-than-desirable moral and spiritual tone for the program. It is terribly naïve to think that minimally supervised young people are a positive influence on one another just because they are Christians and/or the program is sanctioned by an evangelical church.

“The church today does not expect what it ought to from children and their parents, and this can be attributed at least in part to a flawed concept of youth ministry.”

Christopher Schlect

3. A BUSY SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES:

Most youth ministries are activity-centered. This ministry philosophy is driven by the misguided belief that keeping teens busy doing fun things with other Christian kids will keep them out of trouble and somehow develop them into godly men and women. However, the key to developing genuine godliness in young people is confronting their hearts with the Word of God. Unfortunately, we deem the best youth programs the ones where kids have lots of fun. Based on this flawed gauge of success, youth workers spend more time planning creative activities than they do studying Scripture and preparing solid lessons to disciple young people. A full youth group calendar exacerbates the problems of isolation from parents and peer dependence.

4. WEAK BIBLE TEACHING:

An emphasis on activities goes hand-in-hand with a de-emphasis on solid Bible teaching. However, the problem of watered-down Bible teaching is not isolated to youth ministry. The church at large has exchanged an emphasis on teaching the Word of God for clever programming designed to entertain people. In the teen realm, we've bought into the lie that kids can't be taught solid doctrine. Therefore, the focus of teaching is on felt needs and hot topics such as dating, self-esteem, music, sex, drugs, etc. Weak teaching includes both the methods and the materials employed. The clear presentation of the Bible by gifted and prepared teachers has given way to the mere pooling of ignorance in discussion groups. Youth curricula abound that dumb down the Bible and/or outright contradict it. There is no hope of raising a generation of zealous disciples of Jesus Christ if the Bible is not truly the centerpiece of the program.

“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons . . .”

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7

5. A CHURCH OF ITS OWN:

The typical youth group does not quietly blend into the overall ministry and body life of the church. When youth are isolated from parents, segregated with their peers, starved of solid doctrine, and entertained by endless activity, the youth group becomes a church of its own. They have an agenda of their own that is very youth-centered. They rarely serve unless the spotlight is on “the youth group.”

6. COMPLAINTS:

Many parents look to the church to disciple and entertain their teens. However, the church often does not do the job to the parents' liking. Complaints run the gamut. Ironically, parental and teen complaints are directed at people who are attempting to do the God-given job of parents which they have abdicated. Is it any wonder that the average youth pastor's tenure is less than two years? It is disheartening to try and do a parent's job for them and then be criticized for the way it is done.

appendix b

TEENS WITHOUT PARENTS

The question could be asked, “With all the emphasis on parental involvement in the discipleship of SCBC teens, what about the teen whose parents are unsaved or simply refuse to participate in the manner we prescribe?”

Parental involvement is not mandatory for a teen to participate in the ministries we provide. If a dad and/or mom choose not to involve themselves in either the discipleship or activity aspects of SCBC's teen discipleship, the teens are still strongly encouraged and warmly welcomed to join in. It is hoped that other parents might catch a vision to “adopt” such young people. However, even if that does not occur, the lone teen is still far better off (in our opinion) in the cross-generational atmosphere we are providing than he/she would be in a typical youth group environment.

The primary goal of our teen discipleship is to equip Christian parents and young people, not to evangelize. Our focus is building up the saints, not drawing the lost. We gather to worship and edify/disciple, and we scatter to evangelize. When people choose to attend SCBC, we are committed to equipping and exhorting them in the paths of obedient discipleship.

We refuse to cater our ministry to unregenerate or spiritually apathetic people. It is our conviction that building healthy saints is the best way to promote biblical evangelism and discipleship that reproduces people (young and old) that glorify the Lord.

“And he (Elijah) will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers”

MALACHI 4:6

recommended READING

- *Critique of Modern Youth Ministry*, by Christopher Schlect. This booklet is articulate and brief in addressing the problems and biblical solutions relative to contemporary youth ministry.
- *Spiritual Junk Food*, by Cathy Mickels and Audrey McKeever. This is a must-read for Christian leaders and parents. It addresses the importance of utilizing biblical methods and resources in disciplining young people.
- *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*, by Paul David Tripp. This book uncovers the heart issue affecting parents and their teenagers during the often chaotic adolescent years.

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