

What Congregations Owe Their Teenagers

Hiram Kemp
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Reading Time: 5 minutes

The teen years are some of the most challenging and yet formative years of a person's life. As friends are made and habits are formed, it is important that a good foundation is laid in the teen years. While many have written about the exodus of young Christians once they get to college, there are things that can be done beforehand to better ensure continued faithfulness once they get to college. Congregations should demand that members are active and doing their part, but there are also some things that congregations owe their teenagers.

Good and Challenging Bible Classes and

Sermons

It is a shame that the school system will often challenge our teens more than the church will. They take in-depth math, science, and language class only to be spoon-fed Noah's Ark and Daniel in the Lion's Den continually in Bible class. The psalmist believed that a young person could cleanse his way by paying close attention to God's Word (Psa. 119:9). We should not think that our children will remain faithful in the post-teen years if we have equipped them with a bite-sized faith to begin with. It is true that we must all grow in grace a little more each day, but we must not underestimate our young people (2 Pet. 2:2). May it never be the case that we just randomly select any warm body to teach the teen Bible class. If you needed a lifeguard in a swimming pool, where do you think the strongest lifeguard should be? Should the strongest lifeguard be where people swim pretty well on their own or where people are beginners and are more likely to struggle or drown? Those who teach these classes must be prepared and not simply rush in late and read word for word from a Bible study quarterly. This communicates to teens that the class is unimportant, serious Bible study is a joke, and that their class is not worth preparing for.

Congregations should seriously evaluate who teaches the teen Bible classes and make sure that sound doctrine is being taught that will build their faith (Tit. 2:1; Heb. 5:12-14). Likewise the sermons should be biblical and thought-provoking (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:11). Teens should expect to hear the Bible preached but also to be challenged in their thinking as they learn Scripture. Eloquence is not the goal, but teens should grow up knowing that Christianity is not a mindless religion but instead one that requires wrestling with the greatest thoughts the human mind can contemplate--God, faith, hope, love, truth.

A Chance to Serve

The old saying, "If you want something done right, do it yourself" is a terrible leadership motto. When we do all of the work and fail to equip teenagers to serve, we are crippling the church for years to come (cf. Acts 6:1-4). Perhaps young Christians will not do it perfectly the first time. The mistakes that inexperienced or young Christians make can be frustrating, but to sideline them in the work of the church is a huge mistake. Paul told Timothy (who was not a teenager though he was young) that he should not let anyone look down on him because of his youth (1 Tim. 4:12). Teenagers can be an example in many ways but only if we allow them an opportunity to serve and work (1 Cor. 12:12-24).

When teenagers feel a part of the congregation and are given chances to participate in the

Lord's work, this makes the church special to them. The active teenager will view the church more as something he or she is personally a part of and not simply as something their parents or grandparents force them to do. Teenagers should be encouraged to be involved with evangelism among their peers (2 Tim. 2:2). Teenagers can be active in restoring some of their peers who have drifted away as they express sincere concern for their souls (James 5:19-20). Teenagers can be involved in serving during worship services or even leading devotionals. Teenagers must not be made to feel like the spiritual "B Team" or they may one day grow up and see their faith as optional or unimportant.

A Listening Ear

Teens have a lot of questions and sometimes we are so quick to give answers that we do not listen as well as we should (Prov. 18:13). In Bible class we should listen to the types of comments that are made and the questions that are asked. When we listen closely, we will see the things that our teens are struggling with and be able to respond accordingly. There are too many caricatures that are formed about today's teens, and, while they may be cute and funny, they are not helpful. We will always give the wrong answers if we do not hear the questions being asked.

Listen for the things that concern our teens. Many teens today are looking to be involved in various social justice movements. We must show them that Christianity is the greatest cause in the world and through being faithful Christians and actively loving our neighbor we can do the most eternal good (Matt. 7:12). We should open our ears to our teens and listen then give well-reasoned responses.

Solid Foundation

There are certain areas that every congregation should cover several times over with their teens. Our teens should know the basics about why we believe God exist, why we believe the Bible is the Word of God, and why we are convinced that Jesus is the Son of God (1 Pet. 3:15). Furthermore, they should know the difference between the New Testament plan of salvation and the false plans offered by man (Acts 22:16). The New Testament church should be clearly explained and taught so that they know the difference between the church Jesus built and denominationalism (Matt. 16:18-19). Moral issues and purity must be emphasized so that worldliness is easily detected as they see it expressed in movies, music, and other forms of recreation. They must not have our permission to fall in love with the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17). A solid foundation must be laid concerning the grace of God and the security of those who walk in the light so that they are not crushed by the burden of

perfectionism or legalism.

As we teach all of these things, we must not forget to teach the why. We do these things because we love Jesus and want to glorify Him (Gal. 2:20). Rules and prohibitions detached from the gospel message will exhaust those who try and comply. However, when teenagers are told that we do the things we do out of love for our King who died for us, they will see Christianity not simply as a list of do's and don'ts but as a system of grace and faith. God extends His grace to us and in faith we live for Him.

A Message to Parents

Parents are given the primary responsibility for bringing their children up in the proper way (Deut. 6:6-9; Eph. 6:4). While congregations should help and not hinder these efforts, in the end it is the parents' responsibility. Too many have asked youth ministers and deacons to do in a few hours a week that which it takes a lifetime to do--cultivate spirituality in their children. Parents, let's get serious about our teens' spiritual status. Have meaningful conversations with them about eternal matters. Teach them the Word in formal and informal settings and saturate their hearts with God's truth. God has assigned parents the role of teaching their children and anything else the congregation does is "icing on the cake."

Congregations must not overlook teenagers. Teenagers can play a vital role in the local congregation. They must be equipped, challenged, and involved in the work of the kingdom. The world tries to influence children as early as possible for evil, and we must influence them as early as possible for good. Congregations owe teenagers their very best because that's what God would have us to give them.