



parents night



Parent's Night Message August 16th, 2010 – by Mark Howard

Last fall we embarked on a new chapter of our journey in Peake Youth. And it was an exciting year, filled with challenges and victories. But this new chapter started last summer by asking some hard questions about our youth ministry and youth ministry across our country.

We asked questions like, **“Is youth ministry, across our country, working?”** Are we really seeing this generation of youth noticeably changed by the gospel of Christ? Are our youth leaving large, active youth ministries, like ours, and continuing a life-long journey with Christ?

In a recent TIME magazine article, research found that 61 percent of adults polled had once been involved in church activities, but no longer are. Josh McDowell estimates over 69 percent of youth leave church after high school; USA Today reported that only 35 percent of youth who stopped attending church in college ever returned after college.

But it's not just about kids attending church after high school. Teen's knowledge of the bible seems to be falling as well. In a George Barna survey in which 70 percent were active in church youth group, he found that 63 percent believed Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians all pray to the same God. 50 percent believed Jesus did commit sins and didn't actually rise from the dead.

Then there are the statistics on the sexual purity of teens today...do I really need to go into that? Almost half of teens leave high school having had sex. Virtually all high school boys experiment or become addicted to pornography. Sexual purity seems to be a thing of the past.

These are troubling facts for a youth pastor, despite large, growing, dynamic youth ministries. So where have we gone wrong? Why are we really not seeing a larger impact on youth?

Last summer I spent some time studying the history of youth ministry. When did we start needing youth ministry and where did it come from? Did Moses lead a ski trip each year? Did John the Baptist do a Beach Retreat in the desert? After almost 2000 years of Christianity, why did we suddenly NEED youth ministry?

By the way, for those of you who have heard me teach on this topic before (like last year's Parent's Night) I want to encourage you to not mentally check-out. Own these values and truths and become an expert in them so you can teach and share them with others.

Without going into too much detail, I believe the largest change leading to modern day youth ministry began in the mid 1800's during the Industrial Revolution. When families began to be separated on a consistent basis to work away from the home, the family unit began to change drastically. Churches and communities began to respond to this new family culture in order to fill in the gap that parents and families once filled...like education & bible knowledge.

Then fast forward to the 1940's and 1950's and para-church organizations like Young Life and Youth for Christ created strong momentum for youth ministry in our country. Pastors and youth committees began programming specifically for youth activities and outreaches. But it wasn't until the 1970's and 1980's that we finally see full-time youth pastors coming on the scene on a large scale. That's just a little over 30 years ago! Youth ministry is very young...and that's why it's so important to be asking the question..."are we even on the right track?"

So last year we brought to light a harsh yet critical truth: *the breakdown of the American family has birthed youth ministry in order to try and fill that gap that families once filled: to raise and train up children in the ways of the Lord.* The role of parents in their children's lives has drastically changed, and youth ministry has tried to help fill in the gap. ***What parents had once been doing, churches are now trying to replicate on their own.***

Because of the overwhelming number of youth who aren't being taught how to know, love, and serve God in their homes, it's very easy for youth pastors (including myself) to essentially say, well, if parents aren't doing it, then we as the church better do it for them. **Even if unintentionally, this has given parents permission to delegate their spiritual privilege and responsibility to the church.**

This is the place my research, thinking, prayer, reading, and conversations with dedicated Christian parents, including my own, led me last summer.

And so we turned to God's word to guide us; what does the bible have to say about youth ministry? HOW does the Bible prescribe the ways that we, as the body of Christ, should help teach and grow our children to live like Christ?

Moreover, WHO does the Bible say is primarily responsible for teaching and modeling to our teens what it means to live like Christ?

Deuteronomy 6:5-9

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus quoted this verse - to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. It embodies our ultimate goal as Christians!

And **PARENTS** are given the responsibility to pass this God-honoring life on to the next generation.

Psalms 78:1-7

I will utter hidden things, things from of old - what our fathers have told us...we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He...established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them...

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The bible clearly places the PRIMARY responsibility of children understanding the ways of the Lord into the hands of their PARENTS, not the church.

Someday as we stand before God, who will answer for what has been taught, or not taught to our children? Us...parents.

That seems like a “well, of course” type statement, but stop and let that sink in. Is our HOME the primary place our children learn and see the truths of the Bible? Or do we **unintentionally leave it “to the experts”** and hope our church makes our kids “*spiritual*”?

Take a moment to do an honest evaluation of your home. In your actions, who have you claimed to be primarily responsible? The Bible is extremely clear about our privilege as parents.

And I would sum that responsibility up in two roles...**teachers and modelers**. We have a clear responsibility to teach the truth of God to our children. To impress them on our kid's hearts...‘shenan’ them as the Hebrew text of Deut. 6 says; to slowly sharpen their minds and hearts over time to understand and know God. It's our job to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ, to teach them how to read God's Word, to teach them how to pray to God, teach them how to make God-honoring decisions, teach them how to live a God-honoring lifestyle, teach them how to have God-honoring relationships, and on and on.

It's not about being a Bible scholar...in fact I think learning right along side your child is so powerful. Learn together! You don't need all the answers; just know where to find them... together.

But I also hope we are all aware of the impact of our actions and life style. If our words and lifestyle do not align, we have little chance of teaching our teens anything. Our kids are watching us...they pick up on hypocrisy immediately. We've got to MODEL the holy life God has called us to in our love and knowledge of Him. That's why we have been called to be teachers AND modelers.

As most of you know, last year I joined the ranks of parents with the birth of my twins, Kai and Riley. Wow, what a ride this past year has been. It's been so hard, but so rewarding.

PHOTOS – Kai & Riley, stories

14 months old...walking, starting to talk, and just becoming little sponges. Literally everyday they are learning something new. And honestly...it's kind of intimidating! “Normal” is being defined right now! How Tracy and I talk to each other, how we spend our time, how we play, how we shop, how we read...you name it and they are seeing it. Just the other day I realized that I really shouldn't yell at other idiot drivers on the road!

But seriously, I know it's a huge responsibility, but I can't imagine anyone else defining life for my kids than me. I want my values and priorities and lifestyle to be theirs too. And I can't wait to teach my boys about who Christ is, what He has done, and what it means to live for him. I can't imagine anyone else doing it...I'm their dad! I love them like no one else, I know them like no one else, and I have the time opportunity like no one else. And the Bible has declared me as primarily responsible for their spiritual growth. I gladly accept that responsibility.

BUT, at the same time, I also understand the teen culture these boys will grow up in. I understand that in this world, in order for me to help them to live for Christ, I will need all the help I can get.

A few months ago I was privileged to be a part of a 13th birthday / welcome to Christian manhood celebration. It was really, really special. Myself and 9 or so other men all wrote personal letters to him, signed a beautiful claymore sword his parents had symbolically given him, and we prayed for him, and encouraged him to be the man that God has called him to be. It was a powerful scene. And I give his parents all the credit for strengthening his faith and setting that night up...but the reality is that I left there praying my sons would have the same circle of Godly men supporting and surrounding them some day.

And I hope that when they are teenagers they have a place like Peake Youth to come and connect with other Christians their age, *and have the truths I am teaching at home be reinforced through effective programs, creative and fun experiences, and genuine fellowship.*

And that's what we want our youth ministry to be...a place that **supports, partners with, and adds to** what parents are already teaching and modeling at home. When parents teach and model at home and a church supports their efforts, our youth have an enormous opportunity to succeed and follow God's calling for their whole life.

And this is why youth ministry as a whole, nation-wide, hasn't really been that effective. **We just can't replace what parents can do in the home.** Through the PARTNERSHIP of parents and the church, we can really make a lasting, life-long impact on our youth.

For those of you who might be hearing this message for the first time, you might be thinking something like this..."but my kids don't want to listen to a thing I say, how am I supposed to be a spiritual teacher in their life?"

First of all, you ARE the primary influence in your child's life whether you realize it or not. Even the secular world recognizes that, not just the church. Listen to this...

"Studies have shown that parents are the primary influence on their children's choices and decisions." – Anheuser Busch

"Parents are seen as an overwhelmingly positive influence in the lives of most young people. Remarkably, nearly half of teens mention at least one of their parents as a hero." – MTV & Associated Press

In a study of 272,400 teens conducted by USA Today Weekend Magazine, 70% identified their parents as the most important influence in their lives, compared to just 21% who said their friends were the most important influence. Only 8% said the media was the most important influence in their lives.

Just this past May I did a survey of 87 of OUR youth at Journey. And the results from one question in particular really encouraged me. When asked, "If your parents were to teach you something about living for Christ, how likely would you be to listen or apply it to your life?" 51 percent said "very likely". 44 percent said "I might listen". Only 5 percent said definitely not. **That's 95 percent that were willing to at least listen.** That's huge!

Now, outside of parents, I think we'd all agree that our kids friends, and the media culture of tv, movies, and music are two of the biggest influencers on our kid's lives. And those are big influences...but don't forget that our influence as parents also extends to those arenas.

As a parent, you also have the power to affect the other influences in your child's life. Your influence in their life should include what friends they hang out with, and what images and words are pumped into their brains. That's a part of our job as parents!

So the bottom line is...**we as parents hold the keys to how our child is being shaped and molded.** And they may not act like it, and may not even truly realize it consciously themselves, but it really is true...**our kids are watching us and becoming like us.**

So, I hope I've built a strong case that the Bible says it, a beer company says it...parents have the best and most effective opportunity to be the primary influences in their children's lives.

As a youth ministry, we just can NOT effectively do it on our own.

What then does all this mean for Peake Youth? It impacts us significantly. First and foremost we must recognize the role and influence of parents and then go from there.

OUR MISSION:

To glorify God in raising up a holy generation of youth while supporting and acknowledging parents as their primary teachers and modelers.

To glorify God...

Psalm 63:3

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

As Jesus says in the book of John...

John 12:28

Father, glorify your name!

This is the point of it all! Every ministry, every person, ought to have one goal in life: to acknowledge and bring fame to the worthiness of God.

I hope you all were able to experience the amazing service celebrating our Honduras mission trip. If you didn't, please listen to the podcast. I truly hope and pray that our service didn't leave you giving glory to Peake Youth, or to Chris or Bekah, or the drama, or me, or our church.

That service was a celebration of the **kind of change that happens in our lives because of the gospel** of Jesus Christ and a life lived as He intended it. It's all about Him and for His glory!

...in raising up a holy generation of youth...

How do we glorify God? By living the holy life God has called us to.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

God's will is for you to be holy...

Leviticus 11:44

I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and **be holy**, because I am holy.

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight

The word holy appears 583 times in the bible!! But it appears in many various forms and specific meanings. But here's what we need to understand...holy is not just about moral excellence or sexual purity. Its meaning is so complex we should be studying it our whole lives.

But in short, its meaning is more like this: being **set apart, being sacred**, being completely devoted to all that God is...and that's much more than just moral excellence. Holiness is **all the attributes of God**, all together – his power, his knowledge, his purity, his grace, his kindness, his love. Our role is to pursue those same attributes in our lives.

Leviticus 20:26

You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

The whole story of the Bible can be summed up like this: **a holy God has called a specific people to be his holy people**. God has called us to be holy like him. Therefore, our mission as a youth ministry is to raise-up this generation of youth as a *holy generation* of the holy God. Everything we do should help us strive towards living the holy life we're called to.

*“To glorify God in raising up a holy generation of youth **while supporting and acknowledging parents as their primary teachers and modelers.**”*

As we just talked about, our job as a youth ministry is to support what you are doing at home. I whole-heartedly recognize that we need each other in order to raise these teens in today's culture. It's a twisted and broken place...so I hope that Peake Youth truly reinforces, adds to, and strengthens the values you are teaching at home.

OUR VISION:

Parents and youth glorifying God in their journey to become like Jesus Christ.

What does it look like to glorify God and live that holy life we've been called to? Simply put, to become like Jesus. The incarnation of Jesus Christ gives us the best example of the type of life we have been called to and therefore we model our lives after Him.

HOW DO WE ACCOMPLISH OUR MISSION?

- Proclaim the Biblical responsibility of parents
- Connect Christian youth to each other
- Connect Christian parents to each other
- Share the Gospel to non-Christian youth
- Encourage and equip parents to grow in their ability to disciple their children
- Provide experiences or events for youth, and youth together with their parents, to serve, learn, worship and fellowship.
- Teach additional biblical knowledge to youth

Now with this mission & vision and these values in mind, we can move towards our programs that help us accomplish all this.

But first, I want to acknowledge I know there are many families or parents for whom this just is not a reality yet. I whole-heartedly recognize that this is not an easy road to pursue. I feel like we are bush-whacking our way through an uncharted path in the jungle. But that doesn't make it the wrong path. Choosing the right path can not be based on the culture around us, what seems to work or not work, or what just makes sense in our minds. It must be based on the solid, timeless foundation of God's ways as taught in the Bible.

For many of you, this road might **start literally tonight**. And **that's ok! Start NOW!**

And yes, a big piece of this puzzle is still teaching and growing youth **who come from families without spiritual influence**. Another big piece of the puzzle is finding ways to encourage and inspire those parents to understand and own their biblical responsibility. And those are extremely difficult tasks to accomplish!

But we press forward, following the leading of God and relying on Him as parents and as a youth ministry.

So, here's what Peake Youth will look like this year to accomplish our mission & vision:

OUR PROGRAMS:

Journey

- Wednesdays 7:00-8:30pm starting Sept. 22
- 6-12th grade youth
- Community time in Journey Room and lobby, plus new high school room
- Program, or service, in the auditorium including worship and large-group teaching
- Occasional specific 6/7th grade programming including small groups

Journey Home Groups

- Small groups of 8-12th grade youth, lead by a caring and trained adult leader, to talk about and encourage the daily application of living life for Christ.
- Monday nights starting Oct 11 in 2 host homes, 8-10 grades and 11-12 grades
- Guys and girls meet in the same home but divide into small groups by age and gender

Matt's Place

- Thursdays afterschool 2:30-5:30pm in the Journey Room starting Sept. 23.
- For those who may not know, Matt's Place began to honor the tragic loss of Matt Bertolaccini 6 years ago. The Bertolaccini family wanted to use the funds donated in Matt's memory to impact the lives of OTHER youth for Christ.
- The vision for using those funds has morphed over the years, but the intent has always been the same...to impact teens for Christ. The Matt's Place funds have made our amazing Journey Room possible. Then we turned the Matt's Place resources towards programming and launched Matt's Place after school last year.
- This year we are making subtle, yet significant changes to continue to refine our desire for Matt's Place to be a program of Peake Youth that helps youth grow in their journey to become like Christ.

- This fall, youth attending Matt's Place will be attending to take a specific class. The first class we are offering is called FUEL. Our youth will fill-up for their journey with Christ by learning the basic foundations of their faith, the Bible, and our church. After the six week FUEL class, we will offer "Generation Change"...Financial Peace U. for teens.
- But remember, a class by Peake Youth is no ordinary class. It's more of a workshop with hands-on activities and learning.
- So youth attending Matt's Place will all participate in the current class, but still have plenty of time to hang-out and play after school, still have access to our beautiful Mac computer lab, still have other fun practical programs like Food Slam...but all youth attending are coming to be in the Fuel class. Or the Generation Change class.
- Our other change to Matt's Place is it is open to 6-8th graders.
- 9-12th graders are invited to something new...to become volunteers AND participate in all classes/programs at Matt's Place. This is a unique opportunity to make an impact on others while enjoying the Matt's Place programming.
- Matt's Place is still FREE and still offers transportation from many of our schools.
- Go to the "programs" page of peakeyouth.com for more info.
- Please SIGN-UP your youth to participate in Matt's Place at peakeyouth.com.

Sunday Morning Youth Discipleship Classes

- Beginning Sunday Sept. 19 FUEL will be offered for 6-8th grade youth.
- **Therefore, youth can take FUEL on either Thursdays at Matt's Place or Sundays.**
- Beginning Sunday Oct. 31 Generation Change will be offered for 9-12th grade youth.
- We encourage these youth to come to class from 9-10am and then attend 2nd service.
- If you're planning to take the FPU class during second service, you can attend first service while your youth is in FUEL or Generation Change. Or volunteer in one of a hundred ways on Sunday mornings while your youth is in class.

Parent's Programming

- This fall we will not run the "Parent's Journey" program.
- Please be a part of a Financial Peace University class instead.
- That is a huge part of teaching and modeling a life lived for Christ in your homes. And we all know finances are a huge source of conflict in our families...let's get that out of our homes. Let's teach our kids how to honor God in our finances.
- We will have an FPU class here on Wednesdays during Journey for your convenience.
- My hope is to then host a "Revolutionary Parenting" study this Winter/Spring after the FPU classes conclude. Stay tuned for more info on that.
- Pick up a copy of the book "Revolutionary Parenting" now if you like, it's extremely challenging and helpful in our journey to be the kind of parents God has called us to.
- Lastly, we want to continue to integrate parents more and more into all that we do:
 - o Like last year, having our parents join us at our purity series at Journey
 - o The Amazing Race event for parents and youth
 - o I want parent's involvement in the growth of our youth to become NORMAL

Events

- This fall "Whitewater Rafting Trip" – MS: Sept. 10-11 / HS: Sept. 11-12
- Stay up to date at peakeyouth.com

So that's a taste of what Peake Youth will look like this year, in order to accomplish our mission and be our vision. Here's a short video to give you a glimpse of what Peake Youth looks like...***Peake Youth Highlight Video 09 / 10 (Watch at peakeyouth.com on the "videos" page)***

I just have two last pieces, and we'll wrap up...

6TH Graders and Parents of 6TH Graders

On Sunday mornings – we welcome, and honestly expect, our 6th graders to join us in the auditorium for our main service.

I really do understand this can be a very difficult transition...which is why ultimately only parents can make it happen successfully. Here's the value that's worth fighting for – our youth **MUST** understand they are a part of the larger congregation. It's in an "adult" service that they will spend the majority of their life learning in on Sundays. They **MUST** learn how to learn in that environment, and see themselves as a part of the church as a whole.

One of the greatest faults of youth ministry historically has been to separate youth out of Sunday mornings services, and graduate kids who don't have any idea how to learn in an adult service. Which is one of the factors why youth leave churches...they don't want to be in an adult service. Besides, let's face it...our service is awesome!

Don't you want your 6th grader to see services like Sunday's Honduras celebration?

It's not a far stretch even for a 6th grader. Almost every one of our high schoolers genuinely **WANT** to be in our services, because they learned early how to learn there in middle school.

But also, be strategic. Try it out together, find ways to make them feel like it's an honor and part of growing up. Go to lunch afterwards and talk about service, make it a treat. If your child is really fighting you, consider letting them serve every other week in children's ministry or parking team or something and attend service the other Sundays for a season. Be strategic, but press forward and make sure your teen knows the end goal is non-negotiable.

And Of course, 6th graders are welcome now at our middle school events and at Journey.

Also, I plan to continue to have some 6 and 7th grade specific programming from time to time at Journey when the topics are particularly difficult for them to connect to. I know that for a 6th grader in particular, **FUN** is really important, so I look forward to having some specific activities or teachings just for our 6th grade youth to enjoy.

We also plan to have small group time on Wednesdays on a regular basis so they can begin to connect with caring adults and other Christians their age. This will help prepare them for Home Groups in the 8th grade and up.

Lastly, we need to answer to the question, **how can I get involved and serve here in Peake Youth?** As parents, here are the most valuable ways you can support us as a youth ministry:

Parent Partnership

1. Know the Youth Calendar – make it visible
 - Sign-up for and **READ** the Peake Enews
2. Use the parent's page of peakeyouth.com
3. Take FPU or help make an FPU class happen
 - Take the parent's class or Bible study we will offer in the Winter/Spring
4. Join a Service Team

Service Teams – Visit the “volunteer page” of peakeyouth.com for more info.

These are truly exciting days in our youth ministry. God has called us, and by his power, we can do this. And we can do it because we will do it TOGETHER. Together we will figure this out; we will learn and grow in our ability to raise-up this generation to be a holy people of God.

As much as I hope you’ve hung on every word I’ve said...I know I’m not a parent of teens so I hope the story of another parent just like you might encourage you and inspire you on this journey.

Melissa Russell Testimony

Stories from the audience

Mark the moment - prayer to commit to beginning the journey to own our biblical responsibility as parents – TOGETHER.