

How Parents Can Keep Their Kids Interested in Church

It's a question church experts are desperate to answer: Why are so many young people leaving the church after high school? More importantly, what can be done to stop it? Michelle Anthony and Megan Marshman write in their new book, *7 Family Ministry Essentials: A Strategy for Culture Change in Children's and Student Ministries*, that ministry leaders must discuss the critical role of family in the formation of faith that will transcend childhood beliefs.

While youth spend the vast majority of their free time with their family rather than within the four walls of the church, parents often feel stymied by the distractions and busyness of life and ill-equipped to disciple their children during their formative years. *7 Family Ministry Essentials* asserts this is where the church comes in.

Q: Why do you think *7 Family Ministry Essentials* is such an important book for the times in which we live?

Anthony: Ministry in the local church is changing because the needs of the family are changing. Many ministry leaders feel ill-equipped to handle the kinds of issues today's families are wrestling with, so they often ignore those needs and simply try to entertain or allow family members a venue to "have fun" or "get away" from their issues. The other temptation is to change the programs in the church constantly to try to be all things to all people or because they are not getting the transformational results they are looking for.

What is needed is a strategy that puts family members of every generation in direct and authentic relationship with God and each other. Ministry leaders need something they can build upon year after year, decade after decade, in order to build a

lifetime faith in people. This strategy must be bigger than pizza parties and outreach events; it must be grounded in the essentials of our faith formation.

Q: What do you see as the greatest threat to families in the church today?

Marshman: I believe the greatest threat to families in the church today is busyness and lack of focus. Parents constantly feel like they are not doing enough while simultaneously doing far too much.

Anthony: Yes, and I think families are so busy because we are chasing the allure of the “abundant life” rather than chasing after Jesus and the kind of kingdom He represents. We want Jesus for our families, but we want the world too. This type of distraction takes our eyes off of what’s most important (faith formation) and allows us to settle for a counterfeit (good behavior). We need a strategy that takes our young generation from a mere set of childhood beliefs and helps them own a lifetime faith that is rooted and grounded in God’s Word and His ways.

Q: There has been a mass exodus of young people from the church in recent years. What are some of the reasons behind this trend?

Marshman: Eight years into ministry, God revealed a common thread in the graduated students I met who were “done with God.” It wasn’t that church services no longer entertained them. It was that the good feelings, peace and emotional highs they had when they worshipped God in middle school or high school had ceased.

Without realizing it, they had made the gospel by-products their gods. When the pursuit of good feelings became the goal, these students unknowingly placed themselves and their desires at the center of their lives. Once young people believed God stopped serving them, they, in return, quit serving God. They

falsely adopted the view that the church exists to serve them rather than recognizing they exist to serve the church and the world. They leave church once they leave high school because the “big church” services don’t cater to them quite like their youth ministries did.

Anthony: I also think when these young people leave, they don’t leave authentic faith and relationships behind ... they leave in search of them. If the church truly has these things, then our problem isn’t our content; it’s our messaging and our practices. How can we establish a new order of “being” the church in a way that is meeting the needs of our young people? This will not be merely a content-driven ministry paradigm (which it has been in the past) since our young people have more access to “information” than ever before. Truth will need to be instructed in “life-on-life” discipleship, which has eluded the church for decades. Going to Sunday school and youth group does not transform lives, but what leaders do with those hours to build relationship bridges between young people will make all the difference.

Q: What role do parents play in raising young people who fully live out their faith and how much responsibility should fall with the church?

Anthony: Parents play a huge role. Long after young people leave our children’s and youth programs, they will be in relationship with their parents ... to some degree, for better or for worse. To invest in parents is to invest in the lives of young people far beyond the access we will have to influence them. Parents feel ill-equipped to disciple their children and teens in our world. Ministry leaders are wise to steward the years in which they have a voice in the life of a young person, but they should also go to great pains to ensure the parents are a vital part of knowing and modeling faith at home.

Q: Can you explain what you mean by writing that family ministry is the means to the gospel, not the end?

Marshman: The goal of every church program/ministry is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and inspire, equip and support the church to share the gospel with others. Family ministry can be the conduit to share the gospel with the world.

Q: What vision do you have for how this book will impact families and the church?

Marshman: Simply, our aim is to articulate God's vision for family ministry—a vision that empowers families to take spiritual leadership in their homes, form lifetime faith in their children, teach Scripture as authoritative, understand the role of the Holy Spirit, engage in God's redemptive story, make God central in daily living and work within a community to further God's will. I envision leaders, students and families who can discern God's voice and are responding to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Anthony: I believe this book will also help release us from the burden of feeling the entire weight of a generation either accepting or rejecting Jesus. It's not our job to manage this. It will also give leaders a strategy and common language to change a culture that is satisfied with spiritual mediocrity and apathy. Our ministries can be so much more than programs ... they can be change agents for transformation.

Learn more about **Dr. Michelle Anthony** at [\[link\]](#), on Facebook or by following her on Twitter. Learn more about **Megan Fate Marshman** at [\[link\]](#), on Facebook or by following her on Twitter.