

7 Ways to Minister to Today's Youth

In *7 Family Ministry Essentials*, written for church leaders who have a passion to disciple kids and teens in partnership with the Holy Spirit and the family, Michelle Anthony and Megan Marshman capture the guiding essentials to build a strategy for life-changing family ministry in this ultimate leadership resource. These seven essentials emphasize:

1. Empowering families to take spiritual leadership in the home
2. Forming lifetime faith that transcends childhood beliefs
3. Teaching Scripture as the ultimate authority of truth
4. Understanding the role of the Holy Spirit to teach and transform
5. Engaging every generation in the gospel of God's redemptive story
6. Making God central in every biblical narrative and daily living
7. Participating in community with like-minded ministry leaders

In the interview below, the authors share more about the mission of their book.

Q: *7 Family Ministry Essentials* calls for a strategy change for children's and student ministries. What are some of the most common practices that need to be changed in these ministries today?

Anthony: The practices that need changing are the ones that

don't bear fruit. Just because we have always done something one way doesn't mean it will be effective in this generation. We need to be willing to re-imagine ministry based on meeting the needs in our generation. Tradition is a wonderful thing but not when it gets in the way of transformation. Yet change for change's sake is also hollow. Leaders are best when they initiate change to breed a cultural change—meaning one that permeates the culture in such a way it remains long after we are gone and bears fruit.

Marshman: I would add that specifically within student ministries, leaders tell parents they are the primary disciplers of their children but oftentimes do nothing about it. Leaders have the opportunity not only to encourage parents to live out that role, but equip and support them with the resources to do so.

Students need space to meet with the living God *during* student ministry gatherings. Students also need opportunities to speak about their faith experiences within their faith community. It's key for students not merely to agree with what their youth leaders are saying but to begin to live out and speak about the reality of their own personal faith inside and outside the walls of the church.

Q: What are some practical ways parents can make spiritual deposits into their child's life?

Marshman: First and foremost, parents can make spiritual deposits into their child's life by loving Jesus deeply. As parents deepen their love and dependence upon the Lord, it becomes easier to entrust their children into His hands. In moments of struggle, parents can surrender their children into the hands of a gracious God. In moments of triumph, parents will praise and worship God as the ultimate, generous gift giver.

Additionally, parents can put their honest faith journey on

display. Admitting their weaknesses and showcasing their own dependence upon the Lord through every season can radically impact their child's life by modeling true discipleship.

Q: Why are parents quick to pick up a book about potty training or discipline, but hesitant to try to learn about how to teach their children spiritual discipleship? How can ministry leaders help them overcome their fears?

Anthony: We all want a quick fix. We all want to be in control of the outcomes of our children. Spiritual discipleship is neither of those. It is supernatural. Only God can change a heart or transform a life. We need His wisdom and His power. This requires us to be in an intimate relationship with God. Often parents' faith is not that vibrant at the time of child-rearing, and it is impossible to give away something they don't have. And even when it is vibrant, it is difficult to relinquish control and trust God to transform a child's life when and as He chooses. Parents are required to be faithful and role models; they are not required to make their children spiritual.

Marshman: Ministry leaders can help parents overcome their fears by informing them of their role as a spiritual parent, to create environments for faith formation to come alongside what the Holy Spirit is doing in the life of their children. God doesn't call them to change their children, God calls them to love Him, love them and entrust Him with the transformation.

Q: How can a youth or children's minister foster the leadership a parent should have in their family, if that parent is overwhelmed and spiritually immature themselves?

Anthony: Baby steps. Meet them where they are at and disciple them just as we would a child or a teen. We must help them see the connection and then lead them one step at a time. Often we overwhelm them with all they should be doing. It's not

attractive for parents to think they are failing at yet another thing. We need to give them a small win!

Q: When one thinks about the state of the family, even within the church, it can feel hopeless. But you say it could change in as little as one generation. Why?

Marshman: We are in the midst of a movement. Typically, movements are things we look back on in the past. It's critical to see in the past five years, family ministry has begun to take ground within churches. Church staffing structures are changing to include an emphasis on the families, youth pastors are joining in on the efforts, and children's ministry leaders are impassioned like never before to recognize their jobs reach far beyond children. It could absolutely change in as little as one generation because *God is on the move* through family ministry. When you feel hopelessness, remember God is in the habit of using broken families for His glory.

*Learn more about **Dr. Michelle Anthony** at , on Facebook or by following her on Twitter. Learn more about **Megan Fate Marshman** at , on Facebook or by following her on Twitter.*