

Why They Stray

Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Investments
That Keep Children and Teens Connected to the
Church for a Lifetime

LEADER GUIDE



Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Spiritual Investments

That Keep Children & Teens Connected for a Lifetime

Steve R. Parr & Tom Crites

CONTENTS

Introduction for Group Leaders.....	2
Session One: <i>Why They Stay</i> Introduction.....	5
Session Two: The Driver of a Sticky Faith.....	8
Session Three: The Power of First Steps.....	9
Session Four: Balancing Bonding and Boundaries.....	11
Session Five: The Home Field Advantage.....	13
Session Six: The Necessity of Modeling Church Engagement... 	15
Session Seven: Building a Network of Spiritual Influence.....	17
Session Eight: When Your Faith Becomes Their Faith.....	19
Session Nine: Building a Post High School Bridge of Faith.....	21
Session Ten: Celebration and Reflection.....	23

Introduction for Group Leaders

Congratulations and thanks in advance for investing in the lives of parents and leaders in your church to help them in raising up a generation of believers who will stay connected to church for all of their lives. The Why They Stay Bible Study Series is divided into ten sessions that can be delivered over the course of ten weeks or over ten hours in a retreat setting.

Session one is simply a “get to know you session” that includes a brief introduction and orientation for your participants. The pre-recorded teaching occurs in sessions two through nine (eight weeks or eight hours) and the tenth and final session is intended to serve as a time of celebration and debriefing. While the sessions can be completed in a sixty minute block of time, Seventy-five to ninety minutes will allow for deeper discussion and application. Sessions two through nine are generally organized as follows:

- 1. **Ice-Breaker** (and debrief since last gathering if you are meeting weekly). This will take 5-15 minutes depending on the total time you have allotted.*
- 2. **Reflection/Share Quick Review** This will take 5-10 minutes depending on total time you have allotted. You will share a quick review of the previous session and ask some members to share how they have applied or responded to what was learned.*
- 3. **Instruction** and exhortation by author and speaker, Dr. Steve R. Parr. The teaching component is about thirty minutes each week. You may opt to **stream the video** as the author speaks on the subject or you may choose to prepare the session yourself after viewing the video and presenting the material personally.*

4. **Discussion**, application, and assignments. The balance of the time is facilitated by you as you lead the group to discuss the material, to encourage one another, and to determine how to implement what is learned. We are to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” according to James 1:22. Therefore, determining how to apply the material and then sharing actions that have been taken will be critical to the progress of your group. You should spend all of the following time for discussion based on your small group schedule:

60 minute sessions= at least 15 minutes for discussion.

75 minute sessions= at least 25 minutes for discussion.

90 minute sessions= at least 35 minutes for discussion.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The discussion questions are “suggested.” Feel free to skip some or to add your own. Do not feel compelled to discuss every question. Use your judgment, keep within time frames, and be sensitive to the flow of the interaction.

5. Any remaining time will simply serve as a time of **fellowship**.

6. Before dismissing, **Share Assignments**. Give your participants reading and application assignments to encourage application of what is learned.

Are you ready to get started? To state the obvious, these questions need to be addressed before you begin:

- a. Who will lead the group? That must be you since you are reading this. The bottom line is that someone has to take the lead.
- b. When will the group meet? You will need ten weeks or in a retreat setting, at least nine to ten hours of gathering time.

- c. Where will the group meet? Will you be at the church? Which room? In someone's home? Rotating between homes? Will it be in a retreat setting?
- d. If you will stream the videos, what is the plan? Do you have internet access and a monitor or television that will work? Will you burn the sessions to a DVD and plug them in? What is the plan? Or will you personally teach the sessions?
- e. What is the plan for childcare? You will be working with parents and need to account for the children. If it is Sunday morning, this may be taken care of already. On a retreat? Maybe they are being cared for while parents are away. If in homes during the week or on a Sunday night, how will they be cared for? Someone at the church? Someone you enlist to watch them in the home or outside while the session is in progress? Vouchers from the budget that reimburse parents, when needed for childcare? You need to have a plan or your attendance will suffer.
- f. Will there be any food involved? Having food is not required but if it is part of the plan, what is the plan? Who will lead this element?
- g. Will books be a part of the course? You are not required to purchase the books to teach or participate in this course. However, we sure would appreciate a "shout out" and the books can enhance the teaching. Will they be required, strongly suggested, or just optional? If required, who will purchase and when?

The answers to these questions should be determined in advance and shared at the orientation during session one.

Session One Leader Guide

Why They Stay Introduction

Prepare and bring the schedule to give out to all participants.

Bring copies of the book if they are being utilized to enhance the teaching experience.

Prepare to show Intro. Video

You are the facilitator and this session is 90% discussion. Allow for discussion but you control the pace and move through all questions. Prepare to share the background of the study on #11, points A-J.

1. Ice-Breaker: **Let's not assume that everyone knows everyone else. Introduce yourself and when you do, include the following:**

Men: Share how and where you met your spouse.

Women: Tell us about your children.

2. Discuss: **Do you know someone who grew up in church but has "strayed?" Without giving their name, share what you know about what happened.**
3. Discuss: (One parent of each participating family-) **What is your vision/desire for your children spiritually as they move from adolescence to adult life?**
4. Have someone read Psalm 78:1-7.

5. Discuss: **What are these “sayings, stories, and wondrous works” that the psalmist is referring to in verse 1-4?** *These are the stories rooted in God’s deliverance of his people from 430 years of bondage in Egypt. Notice if verse 5a the reference to “Jacob” and the “law in Israel.” This is a reference to Genesis and then the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.*
6. Discuss: **Do Christians in contemporary times have equivalent stories? What are they?** *The gospel, the resurrection, and our salvation (deliverance from the bondage of sin.)*
7. Discuss: **What stands out about the challenge the psalmist gives in verses 5-6?** *Did you notice “children yet to be born?”*
8. Discuss: **What does it mean by “their children” in verse 4?** *Contrast with “our children” and suggest our responsibility as a church.*
9. Discuss: **Look at verse 7. What goals are expressed here for your children? Reverse them and consider the consequence if we do not share our story (salvation) and they fail to embrace it (faith in Jesus).** *Reversed: They will not put their confidence in God, they will forget the works of God, and they will not keep his commandments.*
10. **Why They Stay: What is it about?**
 - a. **It is based on a book written by Dr. Steve Parr and Dr. Tom Crites.**
 - b. **They surveyed almost 1400 young adults (age 26-39) from across North America.**
 - c. **The key criteria was that they were raised in church.**

**You may teach this section or show video.*

- d. **The respondents were geographically and denominationally diverse.**
 - e. **Instead of looking at why young adults have left the church, they focused on those who “stayed” to determine what caused them to stay faithful.**
 - f. **They also learned important lessons about those who left or “strayed.”**
 - g. **The results were powerful for parents and church leaders and the results are applicable. They discovered areas that you can improve on which increase the likelihood that your children will serve Jesus faithfully as adults in the local church.**
 - h. **Key note: There are no guarantees. *You can do everything right as a parent and things can still go wrong.*** There is no better example than Adam and Eve in Genesis.
 - i. **While salvation is absolutely a work of God’s grace, there is an environment that seems to make hearts softer to the gospel and more receptive to God’s on-going work.**
 - j. **In the next eight weeks, you will learn what that environment is and you will begin to apply them to your family, parenting, and church leadership.**
11. **Share and discuss all logistical information** including the schedule for the sessions to follow. Reference points A-G in the “Introduction for Group Leaders” and cover items relevant for your group.
12. Assignment (if your group members have the book): **Read chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 before the next session (introduction, 3, and 6 if you want to go the extra mile). Suggestion: Consider reading and discussing the chapters together as a couple or if single, with another parent of the same**

Session Two Leader Guide

The Driver of a Sticky Faith

Ice Breaker: Ask participants to share their earliest memory about the Bible.

Show Video: *The Driver of a Sticky Faith*.

Lead Discussion:

1. What are the challenges that you see children and teens facing today concerning the sufficiency of scripture and is it any different from what you faced growing up?
2. How did you parents demonstrate their views of scripture and how did that impact you?
3. In what ways does our church encourage a high view of scripture and how can that be improved upon?
4. What resources and writers have you found helpful in answering difficult questions that our culture presents concerning Biblical issues?
5. What action could you take in the coming week to elevate the value of the Bible to your children?

Share Assignments: Read chapters 20, 27, 28.

1. Be prepared to discuss how you responded and acted on discussion question #5.

Session Three Leader Guide

The Power of the First Steps

Luke 8:5-8

Ice Breaker: Name three to four big milestones in your life.

Share Quick Review:

Last week we learned that a high view of scripture is one of the greatest tangible indicators of whether your children will be in church as adults. One parent from each family tell us something new you initiated, a decision you made based on last week, or something you did this past week in response to what you learned in the previous session.

Show Video: *The Power of the First Steps*

Lead Discussion:

1. What are some things your parents did that helped you in your faith journey.
2. How do we balance sharing the gospel with children without being manipulative or coercive? List some guidelines that you would recommend for sharing the gospel with children.
3. What is the teaching and tradition of your church regarding baptism?
4. What are some ways you can utilize baptism to strengthen the faith of your children?
5. What might you or your church do to make baptism a greater “celebration”?

Time Permitting:

6. How would you counsel someone who was baptized when young and has no recollection of the experience?
7. Share about your baptism.

Share Assignments:

1. Read chapters 7 & 8.
2. Discuss and assess with your spouse the status of the spiritual journey of each child and any actions or changes you need to make as parents in guiding them on their trek.
3. Prepare a special evening (if your children are old enough to understand) where you share your story with them of your salvation, baptism, and journey of faith.

Session Four Leader Guide

Balancing Bonding and Boundaries

Ephesians 6:1-4

Ice Breaker: What was your favorite cartoon when you were a child?

Share Quick Review:

Last week we discussed the power of the first steps. We discovered two things about those who “stayed.” They came to faith in Jesus when young, but not too young and they experienced a post-conversion baptism. You were challenged to evaluate the status of the spiritual journey of each of your children and to consider adjustments or actions you needed to take as parents and to plan a special night to share your faith story with your children. We’ll ask the mom’s tonight to share how you have responded so far to last week’s session.

Show Video: *Balancing Bonding and Boundaries*

Lead Discussion:

1. How would you describe your temperament when you were a child? Very compliant, somewhat compliant, somewhat strong-willed, or very strong-willed? How does that affect your parenting?
2. For those who have or have raised strong-willed children, what words of advice would you share with other parents?
3. What is the most helpful resource you have discovered in helping you understand biblical parenting and biblical discipline?
4. What are some of the greater challenges you are facing in on being balanced in your approach to discipline?
5. What do you need help with that other parents might be able to speak to?

6. How can parents navigate their children toward healthier peer relationships?

Share Assignments:

1. Read chapter's 10 and 11.
2. (For single parents) Determine which person or group you will commit to meet with regularly to give you parental support and share with the group next week.
(For single parent families) Determine a godly couple who have preceded you in your parenting journey. Make an appointment (like a dinner date) to interview them seeking wisdom and counsel for your journey. Consider making this a bi-annual gathering.
3. Ask your children: Describe to them the two sides of parenting in a way they will understand (if four years of age or older). Nurture (encouraging and loving on them) and Admonishment (establishing boundaries and applying discipline). Do this when everyone is in a good frame of mind (not in the midst of tension). Ask them to give you feedback about your balance and how you can do better.
4. Discuss with your spouse (or single parents with another parent) your view of how you are doing now with balancing your discipline and how you need to adjust and adapt moving forward.

Session Five Leader Guide

The Home Field Advantage

Ephesians 5:33

Ice Breaker: What is the dream vacation that you have not ever taken that you look forward to some day?

Share Quick Review:

Last week we discussed the influence of nature (temperament), nurture (parental influence), and niche (peer influence) on the faith development of your children. What did you learn about yourself, your family, your parenting, or your children and what are you focusing on as a parent in context of what you learned?

Show Video: *The Home Field Advantage*

Lead Discussion:

1. In what ways did the marriage and/or divorce of your parents affect the development of your faith?
2. What words of exhortation would you share with parents who have experienced or are contemplating divorce?
3. How do you maintain closeness to a child during adolescence?
4. How do traditions affect families and closeness?
5. What are some traditions that your children cling to?
6. Suppose a family is compelled to move to a new community. How would you advise those parents to help their children with the transition?

Share Assignments:

1. Read Chapter's 9 & 12.
2. Plan your next getaway as a couple.

3. Share with your spouse (or if single, with a trusted friend) what God has been impressing on you through the first half of this series.

4. Option for those who have experienced divorce: Determine how you will strengthen your relationship between yourself and your former spouse (if possible) and how you will build the relationship of your children to yourself and the other parent (if possible).

Session Six Leader Guide

The Necessity of Modeling Church Engagement

Ephesians 4:15-16

Ice Breaker: What do you remember about church and worship when you were about nine to ten years of age (good, bad, or ugly)?

Share Quick Review:

Last week we discovered that a healthy marriage has a positive effect on your child's spiritual development. In addition, we discussed the importance of a close relationship to both mom and dad. One of your assignments was to plan your next getaway as a couple. What's next or when will you plan it?

Option: Single parents- Share what you are willing with the group about your current relationship with your child's other parent.

Show Video: *The Necessity of Modeling Church Engagement*

Lead Discussion:

1. What are the difficulties of having children in the primary worship?
2. What is the children's worship model in your church? What are the advantages and disadvantages based on what you learned?
3. At what point should children be integrated into the primary worship experience?
4. (If your church has a full children's worship and they are not in the service at all) How can you worship more with your children while maintaining support of the children's ministry?

5. How do you balance the amount of time your family spends in church expressing that it is a priority while not frustrating your children by being legalistic about it?
6. What is your spiritual gift(s) and what are your ministry passions? How are you exercising them in your church?

Share Assignments:

1. Read chapter's 13, 16, 22, and 23.
2. Discuss with your spouse and/or determine your approach to worship participation with your children.
3. If you are not currently serving, determine how you will model service in church to your children in the future.

Session Seven Leader Guide

Building a Network of Spiritual Influence

Matthew 19:13-14

Ice Breaker: Other than your parents or grandparents, what other adult(s) influenced you the most spiritually when you were a teenager?

Share Quick Review:

Last week we discussed the importance of commitment and balance in church attendance, the influence of both parents serving in the church, and the advantages of frequently being in the same worship with your children when they are young. One of the assignments was to discuss and determine your philosophy and approach to this (being in worship together) moving forward. Dads: Where are you on this at this point?

Show Video: *Building a Network of Spiritual Influence*

Lead Discussion:

1. What is it that makes a pastor likeable to children? To teens?
2. What are some ways your church can help the pastor connect better with children and teens?
3. Why is the role of longevity in relationships between adult leaders and teens in the church?
4. As a parent, what do you need from the church's children's ministry? Student Ministry?
5. What is your role and relationship currently to the ministries (children or students) that your children are involved in?
6. Other than family members, who are your children's adult mentors?

Share Assignments:

1. Read chapters 14, 15, 24, and 25.
2. Discuss how you can enhance the personal relationship of your family and children to your pastor.
3. Identify your children's adult mentors (outside of your family). If needed, enlist and discover them. If you know them, spend time this week in conversation with them to express appreciation and to evaluate the relationship.

Session Eight Leader Guide

When Your Faith Becomes Their Faith

1 Peter 1:13

Ice Breaker: When you were about 12 years of age, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Share Quick Review:

Last week we discussed the role of the student ministry experience and the influence of the relationship between a child and their pastor. We are now in week eight and have gone through an introduction and six teaching sessions. Two options for reflection: 1. Share something new that you are determined to do to connect your child(ren) more closely to the pastor. Or 2. Share what God is doing in your heart personally as a result of these past couple of months together.

Show Video: *When Your Faith Becomes Their Faith*

Lead Discussion:

1. Would you say your extended family generally falls in the grouping of non-Christian, nominal Christian, cultural Christian, or committed Christian? What role does that play in the development of your child's faith?
2. Share when you took a leap in your faith. When did it become personal for you?
3. What are some resources you are aware of that can help to propel a young person's personal faith?
4. What issues should parents have awareness of that can serve as a major distraction or deterrent to a young person's faith?

5. What are some experiences you have observed that can help propel a young person's personal faith?
6. Why do you think there is a correlation in North America between college attendance and graduation and the likelihood of staying in church?

Share Assignments:

1. Read chapters 18 and 21.
2. Search out and find something new that you can give to your children to strengthen their faith. Plan to bring it to our celebration to present to them in week 10.
3. Read chapters 18 and 21.
4. Search out and find something new that you can give to your children to strengthen their faith. Plan to bring it to our celebration to present to them in week 10.

Session Nine Leader Guide

Building a Post High School Bridge to Faith

Luke 2:52, 4:16, 5:16, 6:12-13

Ice Breaker: What did you do your first year out of high school (college, job, apartment, travel, etc.)?

Quick Review:

Last week was part one of two. You will recall that we discussed the importance of your children “taking hold” of their faith. We were reminded of the value of “personal” commitment and learned that college (in North America) can be a barometer of commitment. Your assignment was to search out and find something new that you can give to your children to strengthen their faith. Let’s brainstorm on that as a group. What ideas have you come up with?

Show Video: *Building a Post High School Bridge to Faith*

Lead Discussion:

1. What are four to six key points your teen should know about finding a new church before they ever leave home?
2. How do you keep your teen accountable when they move away? How does it differ from when they live at home?
3. Does your church have a ministry for college age young adults? How can it be improved?
4. What should be expected of a young adult if they live at home following high school graduation (of if they withdraw from school)?

Share Assignments:

1. Read chapters 17, 19, 29, 30, 31.
2. Go back and review all other assignments. Catch up on one or two of the more important ones.
3. Discuss and/or determine reasonable expectations for your child when they graduate high school. Make a list to draw from later and/or begin discuss with your children now (age 10 and up).

Session Ten Leader Guide

Celebration and Reflection

The final session has no program design. It is up to you, the small group leader to design the final session. Suggestions:

- a. Consider having a “party” to close out the ten weeks.
- b. Carve out time for everyone to share a brief testimony of what God impressed on them through this experience.
- c. Consider bringing the children into the experience.
- d. Consider launching a new subject and inviting the group to continue meeting together.



Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Spiritual Investments
That Keep Children & Teens Connected for a Lifetime

Steve R. Parr & Tom Crites



Dr. Steve Parr serves the Georgia Baptist Convention as the Vice-President of Staff Coordination and Development. In thirty years of ministry he assisted hundreds of churches in strengthening their ministries by motivating and training leaders through seminars, conferences, preaching, and personal consultations. Steve has a Master of Divinity Degree in Christian Education from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry degree in Church Growth and Evangelism from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was featured on the twentieth anniversary of the Billy Graham School of Evangelism of Southern Seminary as one of twenty alumni making a Great Commission impact around the world in 2014.

Dr. Thomas Crites has served and studied churches for nearly twenty-five years. He has the unique opportunity to study church health through his work as the Research Specialist of the Georgia Baptist Convention. He also is able to remain on the cutting edge of recent developments in church life through his teaching and mentorship at Liberty University. He has a Master of Divinity degree and Doctorate of Education degree in Educational Leadership from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has presented research in many scholarly settings and has had his books and research articles read by thousands of ministers across the country.

