

Why They Stray

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

PARTICIPANT GUIDE



Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Spiritual Investments

That Keep Children & Teens Connected for a Lifetime

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What Is This All About?

Do you want your children, not only to come to saving faith in Jesus, but also to serve Him faithfully into their adult lives?

What is it that compels those who grow up in church to “stay” instead of “stray?” That is what this small group experience is all about. By reading the book and by participating in this small group Bible study, you will discover actions you can personally take that will make a difference for your children.

In his book The Great Evangelical Recession, John Dickerson notes the two leading causes of erosion in North American church attendance. First is the failure to effectively evangelize in the current culture and the second is the fact that we are not retaining our own children. If we fail to disciple and keep our own children, who will be there to take the message to future generations?

Much has been written about why young adults are leaving the church. Why They Stay has engaged those who have remained faithful through a national multi-denominational research project to discover what keeps them connected. This research addresses a critical issue for parents and church leaders who desire their own children to remain devoted to church into their adult life. The

small group will be more than research and data. You will hear from the author, be guided by a skilled leader, and will interact with peers to study God's word, to develop new skills, to encourage and be encouraged to provide an environment that can soften the hearts of your children to God's work in their lives. Groups have already preceded you and the testimonies have all reflected renewed faith, stronger relationships, and improved parenting and leadership skills.

Here is what national leaders have said about this research:

Much has been written about the next generation leaving the church. Not enough has been done to help us see why they stay. Parr and Crites help masterfully here. What they learned from their study is both useful and encouraging. –Dr. Alvin Reid, Professor of Evangelism, Southeastern Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC

This book excites me! Parents – read this book as a prescription for future parenting practices. As you focus on the positive factors you can have confidence you are doing your best to give your children the opportunity to remain faithful throughout their lifetime. - Dr. Jeff Iorg, Gateway Theological Seminary President, California

Please visit: www.whytheystay.com

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CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|
| Session One: | <i>Why They Stay</i> Introduction..... | 4 |
| Session Two: | The Driver of a Sticky Faith..... | 5 |
| Session Three: | The Power of First Steps..... | 9 |
| Session Four: | Balancing Bonding and Boundaries..... | 14 |
| Session Five: | The Home Field Advantage..... | 19 |
| Session Six: | The Necessity of Modeling Church Engagement... | 23 |
| Session Seven: | Building a Network of Spiritual Influence..... | 27 |
| Session Eight: | When Your Faith Becomes Their Faith..... | 32 |
| Session Nine: | Building a Post High School Bridge of Faith..... | 36 |
| Session Ten: | Celebration and Reflection..... | 39 |

Session One

Why They Stay Introduction

Notes and Reminders....

Session Two

The Driver of a Sticky Faith

Ice Breaker: First Memory of the Bible

Introduction:

Summary of research: 15 things that made a huge difference and 10 smaller issues in the likelihood that your child will be in church as an adult.

Today we will consider the key driver.

Today's Text:

Psalm 119:97-105

His word is a _____ for your feet and a _____ for your path.

It provides _____. (v. 97 & 102)

It gives you wisdom. (v. 98)

It gives you _____. (v. 99)

It gives you understanding. (v. 100 & 104)

It gives you _____. (v. 101)

It gives you satisfaction. (v. 103)

2 Timothy 3:15-17 reminds you that it is _____, profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness and will equip you for every good work.

God's word is a lamp for your feet (reveals your next _____)

God's word is a light for your path (points you in the right _____).

What the Research Revealed:

1. **Your child's _____ of _____ is one of the largest indicators of whether they will be in church as adults.** Those who are still in church as adults hold to a “_____” of scripture.
2. **Your view of _____ and your influence is shaping their view.**
3. **It is important what you believe about the Bible and what your _____ believes about the Bible.** Not surprisingly, the research revealed a correlation between the one who stayed and what their parents and _____ believed about the Bible.
4. **Those who hold to the lowest view were _____ times more likely to have strayed compared to three other groups (low, mid, mid-high, and highest).**
5. **Those who held to the highest views were _____% more likely to be in church as adults.**
6. **Four views from lowest to highest:**
 - a. **The Bible is nothing more than literature, fables, and some history.**
 - b. **The Bible is the word of God but has been corrupted through translations, has some errors, and is not to be taken literally.**
 - c. **The Bible is the inspired word of God and the stories contained therein are true.**
 - d. **The Bible is the inspired word of God and applies to my life every day.**
7. **A recent Gallup poll notes that the lowest view has increased among Americans since 1976 from 13% - 21%.**
8. **The same poll notes that the highest view (represented by “c” and “d” right above) has decreased from 38% - 28%. Those with the mid-view are about the same. Note that this also mirrors closely with regular church attendance.**

What This Means for Parents

1. _____ must take the lead.
2. It begins with the way they see you _____ with the Bible and what they hear you _____ about the Bible.
3. Because of technology, _____ is more important than ever and need at a younger age than in the past.
4. The third most common self-described reason for straying was “intellectual doubts.”
5. “If students can handle trigonometry, they can handle _____.” – Alvin Reid
6. It is not a _____ to beat people up with, but rather a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

For 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 your 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?

Assignment:

1. Read chapters 20, 27, 28.
2. Be prepared to discuss how you responded and acted on discussion of question #5.

Session Three
The Power of the First Steps

Luke 8:5-8

Ice Breaker:

Name three to four big milestones in your life.

Introduction:

Last time: The driver of a sticky faith. Now, the power of the first steps.

The research revealed an environment that seems to soften the heart of a child toward God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Some environments seem to make the heart harder towards God's work in someone's life.

Three examples:

3. Jesus said it was hard (though not impossible) for a _____ person to come to faith. (found in Matthew 19)
4. Jesus said it is impossible for someone to come to faith when they do not acknowledge their _____. (Luke 13:3 Unless you repent you will perish.)
5. Jesus said that to _____ the Holy Spirit will keep one from salvation. (Mark 3, Jesus says it cannot be forgiven.)

Today's Text:

Luke 8:5-8

- a. Notice in the text that some soil is more _____ and productive and some soil is hardened and _____.
- b. No doubt the soil of our culture has grown harder with over ____% now unchurched and over ____% without personal faith in Jesus.

c. In this text you have the seed, the sower, and the soil.

_____ = Word of God

_____ = Heart of Man

_____ = Witness of the Gospel

d. What do you do if you want to “soften the soil?” You use a _____.

_____ = Tool Used to Break Up the Soil

e. That is what the issues you learn about from “Why They Stay” are used for.

f. Let’s keep this in mind as we consider today’s issues:

The heart grows harder when:

1. A person grows _____.

2. A person is not exposed to the _____.

3. The pleasures of _____ take root.

What the Research Revealed:

First, those who “stayed” **came to faith in Jesus when _____, but not too _____.**

a. 2/3 who stayed were younger than _____. 75% were younger than _____.

b. On other side, if younger than age _____, they were 32% more likely to have strayed than the others.

c. Not surprisingly, those who proclaimed they were not _____ or had never had a “salvation experience” strayed with rare exceptions (0.18%).

Second, those who “stayed” **experienced a post-conversion**

_____.

- a. Christian denominations share in common the importance in _____. They differ in regard to timing and mode. The research revealed an issue regarding timing.
- b. Options presented in the research: I have not been baptized, I was baptized as an infant, I was baptized prior to my salvation experience, I was baptized soon following my salvation experience, or I was baptized long after my salvation experience.
- c. Not baptized at all were _____% more likely to have strayed than the rest.
- d. Baptized as an _____; _____% more likely to stray than those baptized at other times. *A word about their parents...*
- e. Those baptized _____ salvation were 16.6% more likely to have stayed than to have dropped out.

What This Means for Parents:

- a. We need to guide our children to the gospel but with great caution when they are very _____.
- b. We need to be sensitive and attentive to God working in their hearts rather than us getting them to respond at our _____.
- c. Be purposeful in making life decisions and expressions that do not _____ the gospel to your children.
- d. The opposite error is failure to _____ them to the gospel or to have an attitude of “I will let them _____ for themselves.”
- e. _____ must be our guide, not church or denominational tradition.
- f. Encourage obedience in baptism following _____ for any and all believers.
- g. Make baptism a _____ experience.
- h. Tell your _____ to your children.

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

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

Balancing Bonding and Boundaries

Ephesians 6:1-4

Ice Breaker:

What was your favorite cartoon when you were a child?

Introduction:

Have you ever noticed that some really good parents have children who do bad things or go in the wrong direction? Likewise, some children from dysfunctional homes turn out really great. Why do you think that is?

Children are shaped by three big issues and the research revealed how those issues affect the likelihood that children who grow up in church will be there as adults. Here are the issues children are shaped by:

4. Nature: The _____ they are born with.
5. Nurture: The way they are _____.
6. Niche: The influence of _____.

Note: _____ is the most influential component. That influence gives way to a large degree to “niche” during adolescence and ultimately reverts back to “nurture.” One component of “nature” we discovered can serve as an overwhelming factor, but take heart, it can be affected positively!

Today’s Text:

Ephesians 6:1-4

- a. Verse 4 reminds you of the tendency parents have to “_____” their children.

- b. The text points out two elements of parenting: training and _____ *of the Lord or in the Lord.*
- c. Training is the _____ side of your parenting. It includes fawning over, loving on, encouraging, having _____ times, and supporting your child.
- d. Instruction is the _____ side of your parenting. It includes drawing boundaries, admonishing wrong behavior, implementing discipline, and allowing your child to experience the _____ of poor choices.
- e. Children get frustrated and can even _____ spiritually when parents struggle to apply and _____ each of these elements of parenting.

What the Research Revealed:

1. Nature: Those who described themselves as “very strong willed” as a child were _____% more likely to have “strayed” than those who described themselves as “very compliant, somewhat compliant, or somewhat strong-willed.”
2. Nurture: Those who described their parent’s disciplinary style while growing up as “_____” were much more likely to have “stayed” in church. As respondents described the style as very strict to abusive on one end or as very loose with an absence of boundaries on the other end, they were clearly more likely to have _____.
3. Niche: While this was a “lesser issue” than the previous two, the research did show that when an adult described their closest friends while going through adolescence as “_____ _____,” they were somewhat more likely to have “stayed” in church as adults.

What This Means for Parents:

1. Be encouraging to other parents and cautious about _____ them.

2. If you have a “very strong-willed” child, the other fourteen larger issues in the study become even more _____ to you as a parent.
3. Become a student of “_____.” If you have a “very strong willed” child you will need every skill possible and you will still _____.
4. _____ parents are important to maintain balance and provide support. Single parents, particularly, should be _____ in connecting regularly with a support network.
5. Be cautious of losing your balance when you get frustrated by your child as they enter _____ or as you respond to one with a strong willed nature. Constantly _____ yourself on maintaining bonding and boundaries.
6. Understand the difference between discipline (which is the aim) and _____ (which can be detrimental).
 - a. The purpose of punishment is to inflict _____.
 - b. The purpose of discipline is to develop _____.
7. While you cannot choose your child’s _____, you can be intentional in navigating them into environments that tend to steer them toward healthier relationships.

For 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?

Assignment:

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 two 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

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?

Introduction:

Today's session is "The Home Field Advantage."

How can we give that advantage (_____) to our children? Our research reminded us...and you find it in God's word.

Today's Text:

Ephesians 5:33

- a. According to verse 22, the wife expresses her respect by _____ to her husband.
- b. This is not a command to _____.
- c. This is voluntary deference to the _____ of the husband.
- d. Illus. When we get in the car, I _____...
- e. Men respond to being _____. It makes them better husbands and dads.
- f. The husband's challenge in the text is uniquely different. It is to "_____ his wife." You see that this is an _____ act based on verse 33 as well as verse 25 where he is told to "love his wife as Christ loves the church and gave himself for her."
- g. Women respond to expressions of _____ and _____ (not to be confused with intimacy). It makes them better wives.

- h. This is not an exhaustive look at _____ but just to introduce the topic and to show you a connection.
- i. Notice what these acts have in common: _____, discipline, and _____ (because they are not always deserved).

What the Research Revealed

1. A “_____ marriage” gives your children a home field advantage!
 - a. The study revealed that young adults whose parent’s marriages failed were _____% more likely to have “strayed.” That number _____ if a divorce occurred when the child was in high school.
 - b. No condemnation here. But let’s not avoid the facts.
2. A close _____ to _____ mom and dad give your children a home field advantage.
 - a. The study revealed that a young adult was more than _____% more likely to have “strayed” if they were not _____ to either their mom or to their dad.
3. The _____ of community you live in and minimizing family _____ (to new communities) can provide a small advantage.
 - a. Those in “very rural” and “very urban” areas were slightly more inclined to _____. This does not suggest you should not move but perhaps it should be taken into consideration if you ever have to move.
 - b. Children who experience multiple _____ growing up were slightly more inclined to stray. Ironically, if they moved a “whole lot,” it did not seem to matter as much. Again, the point is not that you should never move, but that you should weigh all of the implications.

What This Means for Parents:

- a. Children who have _____ in their home life, particularly during adolescence, are more inclined to “stay.”
- b. When these issues are combined as a _____, they represent without question, a greater likelihood that a person who grows up in church is still there as an adult.
- c. Therefore, regarding point three of the research, while it should not determine what your family decides, it should be _____ into the decision making process.
- d. Which comes first? The needs of your _____ or the needs of your _____? Scripturally and practically; The marriage is the _____.
- e. When you fan the flames in your marriage you are also fanning the flames of your _____.
- f. Where _____ has occurred: First- take extra care in applying the other 14 points. Second- consider the implication of point #2 in the research above.
- g. Contemplating _____? Consider the consequence to your child’s faith development.
- h. A close relationship to _____ mom and dad is important. Reflect back on last week: nurture and admonition. No matter the circumstances, do not neglect either. Are you spending time with your children? Are you having _____ with your children? Are you nurturing the relationship of your children to their other _____?

For 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?

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

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?

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

Introduction:

In the next couple of weeks, we will see how the “_____ experience” affected faith when growing up. In the course of the survey, when we asked those who were no longer in church to describe “why they strayed,” the number one answer was “a bad _____ experience.”

Today's Text:

Ephesians 4:15-16

Everyone benefits, including your children when:

- a. ...you _____ in every way.
- b. ...people speak the truth in love. _____ *is to tear down but healthy _____ seeks to build up.*
- c. ...the growth of the body (the _____) is supported.
_____ *church is important!*
- d. ...each individual (in the church) does their _____.

- e. The context of the text is the application and implementation of one's _____ *. This occurs when you intentionally apply*

your blend of _____ and abilities to the needs of your _____ and community.

- f. _____ are given to believers for the purpose of strengthening and building the body. That makes the church _____ and in turn makes it a better experience for all.

What the Research Revealed.

- a. This was a lesser issue but the number of hours in church each week made a small difference. The sweet spot was ____ - ____ hours each week.
- b. Attending a church with a strong _____ and a strong _____ ministry was a common denominator for those who “stayed.”
- c. Those who were still in church as adults attended services when growing up that did not _____ them from their parents. Those who attended services that _____ them from their parents when growing up were ____% more likely to have strayed.
- d. Those who were still in church as adults said that both their mom and dad _____ in the church when they were growing up. Data from both ends: Those whose mom’s attended but did not serve were ____% more likely to have strayed than with those whose moms did serve. If dad held a definitive leadership role they were ____% more likely to stay than if they could not recall.

What This Means for Parents:

- a. If church is not really a _____ for you it will not likely be a _____ for your children. While not being _____, you must be fully engaged.
- b. A regular _____ group experience plus an intergenerational _____ experience divided by personal investment through _____ (exercising of gifts) equals a likely lifetime connection.
- c. Note that when _____ mom and dad serve, it makes a great impression. It models to them that you love God with all of your _____.

- d. Children's ministry is valuable. Children's leaders are key assets. Children's worship may be in some instances _____ if it separates them from their parents for the entire church experience week in and week out. *Note: This is about grades K-5, not preschool.*
- e. Not every model of Children's ministry is _____ and none of what was discovered reflects negatively on the heart of a church or leader that seeks to make a difference in the lives of boys and girls.
- f. Your children need to see you _____ and see you _____.
- g. If they do not see it when they are children, they may not care when they reach _____.

For 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?

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 If you are not currently serving, determine how you will model service in church to your children in the future.

Session Seven

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?

Introduction:

As a parent, it is important that you maneuver _____ people into your child's life who will tell them what you would tell them if they would _____ to you.

Who are those "people?"

Today's Text:

Matthew 19:13-14

- a. Notice that the disciples rebuked the _____ for which Jesus rebuked the _____.
- b. Examples of Jesus and children in scripture:

Matthew 18:10

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 18:2-5

And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

- c. When performing the miracle of feeding the 5000 he used the loaves and fishes of a “lad.” He brought a child to life from the dead. We sing of his love: *Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

Matthew 18:6

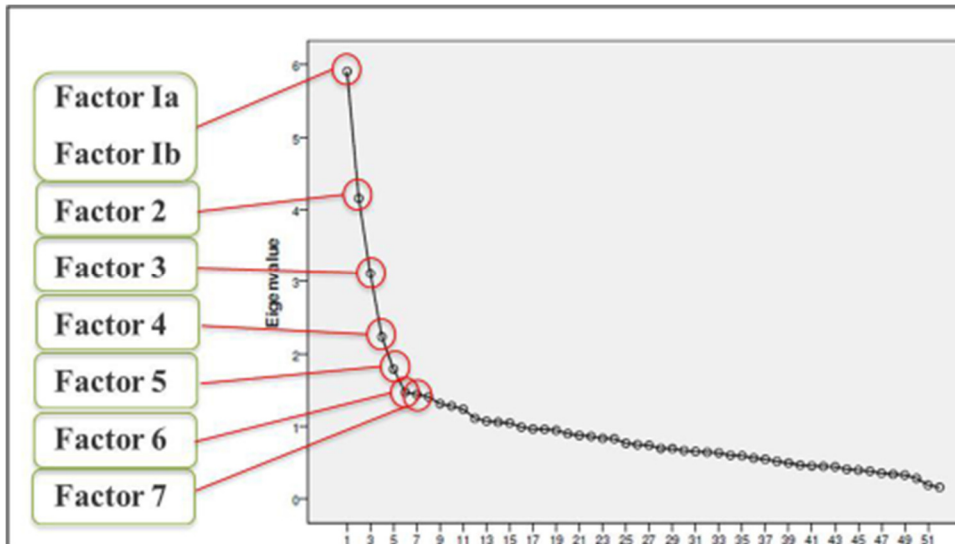
"But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me--it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea!"

- d. We are to love children and teens _____ and as a church. Seeking to guide them into personal faith in Jesus and growth as a disciple who serves God for all of their lives.

What the Research Revealed:

- a. While the research showed no correlation between having a vocational student pastor or not, if one was present, his or her _____ made a difference. If they had a Student Pastor, they were ____% more likely to have stayed if they “liked” him or her.
- b. The research showed that having _____ Student Pastors during teen years is more detrimental than having _____ at all. *Not multiple on staff but a string of different leaders.*
- c. The researched revealed a small correlation between having attended Christian _____ as a teen and the probability of staying in church as adults. In addition, the _____ attended, the higher the probability.

- d. Student ministry issues only came up once among the fifteen greatest factors. However, when looking at all subjects in clusters, the student ministry experience was the _____ greatest factor influencing whether one “stayed” or “strayed.”



- e. A young adult who grew up in church was ____% more likely to have strayed if they did not like their _____ when growing up.
- f. The more _____ one had growing up, the more likely they were to have strayed.

What This Means for Parents:

- a. Always remember that your child views your _____ as God’s representative and that relationship is influencing their spiritual development.
- b. You would do well to be proactive in connecting your child personally to your _____, supporting him as much as possible, and addressing _____ with him personally rather than in front of your children.
- c. A vocational student leader is advantageous but not a _____ for spiritual development. Where one is in place, _____ and sustainability are important features.

- d. _____ leaders are critical whether vocational or volunteer. They give the words of the parent's _____ and reinforcement during the struggles of adolescence.
- e. A vibrant student ministry experience is not built on _____ but rather on _____ leadership and consistency.
- f. Intensive experiences like _____ seem to fuel faith development. Progress is made in seasons where you _____ the spirit and _____ the flesh.
- g. SUMMARY: If a person growing up attended a church with a good children's ministry and a strong _____ ministry, had a close relationship with multiple _____ volunteers, but had minimal _____ in the leadership, they liked the leaders, and attended Christian _____ and retreats as a teen, then he or she was much more _____ to be in church as an adult.

For 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?

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
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?

Introduction:

The task is not complete when your child graduates from high school. The research revealed that the experience your child has between ages 18-22 is _____ in their faith development. How can you guide them from adolescence into adulthood and joyfully experience your _____ becoming their _____?

These next two sessions address that issue and are essentially part one and part two.

Today's Text:

1Peter 1:13

- a. Simon Peter: Who are you? He was an apostle who walked with _____. He struggled with his faith but remained committed and ultimately gave his life for his _____. What he wrote in his letters to the churches should capture our attention. *Consider this verse.*
- b. His point: Take your faith _____.
 - a. What that does not mean:
 - i. That you can't have _____.
 - ii. That you can't enjoy _____.

- c. Example: If someone takes _____ seriously, does not mean they do not enjoy it. It means it takes proper _____ in their life.
- d. How about your faith in Jesus? Does it take proper _____? Is your life _____ on your relationship with Jesus? Do you take it _____?
- e. You must ___ what you desire your children to _____.

What the Research Revealed:

- a. Those who stayed were ____% more likely to say they had made a “personal” commitment to _____ in their faith. It was initiated by placing their faith in Jesus (salvation) and solidified by a personal commitment which came _____ in their journey.
- b. It is estimated that 1.2 billion people are “_____” Christians.
- c. 70% of high school grads go to college and ____% of high school grads will complete a degree.
- d. Those who did not attend college or those who attended and never graduated (in North America) were more than _____ as likely to have _____.
- e. The top five self-described reasons they stayed: Family upbringing, obligation to _____, the grace of God, love for God and Jesus Christ, it is a _____ and I am personally committed.
- f. Those who attended a Christian college were ____% more likely to have stayed than those who did not.

What This Means for Parents:

- a. The goal is for your child to grow up to be a “_____” Christian. “Nominal” Christians affiliate _____ but not actively. They are

Christian in name only. “Cultural” Christians are second generation and beyond. They possess the vocabulary, participate in sacraments, traditions, and sometimes in attendance but do not _____, invest, share the gospel, or impact anyone for Christ.

- b. College will not and does not make your child a believer or cause them to grow spiritually but it may reflect what they have learned about _____.
- c. Your aim is to balance high _____ with growing _____ to make personal decisions for which they experience the rewards or the consequences of the _____.
- d. _____ for your child is *an* issue but not *the* issue.
- e. Put _____ colleges on your short list.
- f. Why some adults “stay” even when things go wrong at church or with a leader: They are _____, not to _____ but to God, to Christ, and to his body, the church.
- g. Committed Christians experience salvation and if young, often have a personal experience of “_____” of faith later on. Not because of mom or dad but because of Christ. _____ is the fuel and personal commitment (a “no quit” attitude) is the _____.
- h. You cannot do this for your child. You do all you can to pray and provide the _____ for it to take place. It tends to stream out of the _____ you are learning about. How about your commitment?

Questions for 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?

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.

Session Nine

Building a Post High School Bridge of 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.)?

Introduction:

The study revealed a major flaw in the way churches and parents approach the release of their children into their young adult lives. Mark this down...High School graduation is not a _____ but rather the _____ to perhaps the most important six months of their faith development.

Today's Text:

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

- a. 2:52 Jesus' growth was socially, intellectually, physically, and spiritually _____.
- b. 4:16 Jesus interacted with God through weekly group _____ experiences.
- c. 5:16 Jesus interacted with God through personal _____.
- d. 6:12-13 Jesus interacted with God with a _____ _____.
- e. C + B + D = _____

- f. The desired result is found in Luke 8:1. *Soon afterward He was traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him.*

What The Research Revealed:

- a. _____% of those who strayed dropped out between ages of 18-22 (the college years).
- b. They were _____% more likely to have stayed in church as adults if they connected with a church immediately following high school graduation. *Transitioned at home or found a new church.*
- c. They were _____% more likely to have stayed if their home church had a ministry targeting college age young adults.
- d. Less than _____% of churches provide ministry targeted to college age young adults.

What This Means for Parents:

- a. The timeframe where our children are _____ likely to stray corresponds to the same time that a church is _____ likely to be providing ministry.
- b. Every church should provide ministry to every life stage including _____ age young adults.
- c. It does not require resources. It requires a _____. If your church does not have one, the solution is _____. Get started.
- d. Myth: You need to have a local _____ to have a college age ministry. Not true! Every community has young adults present.
- e. Ministry to this life stage is _____ and yet critical.
- f. Teach your child how to find a _____ before they ever leave home.
- g. Remind your children about this truth of parenting no matter their age or where they reside: “As long as we _____, we have a _____!”

You do have a right to maintain expectations and accountability for their _____ involvement.

Questions for 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)?

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

Celebration and Reflection

My testimony of what God impressed on my through this experience....



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 Mission Board 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 Mission Board. 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.

