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Perspective

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Perspective is a monthly journal with articles and book reviews. It is part of the equipping ministry of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, where we exist to KNOW, EQUIP, and SEND one another for the worship and glory of God.

SERMON SCHEDULE

February 2

The Dark Is Rising

John 12:27–36

February 9

The People Become What They Worship

John 12:37–43

February 16

The Son and the Father Are One

John 12:44–50

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The One Who Came to Serve

John 13:1–20

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Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:12 (ESV)

What Teenagers Need

Aaron Menikoff

To be a teenager is to think you'll live forever. This may be an overstatement, but it contains a lot of truth, doesn't it? I still remember my own high school years. The future was a blank book, and I was sure that nearly any story could be written on its pages. At the time, I had absolutely no idea that I would wind up working in Washington, studying in Louisville, and pastoring in Atlanta. But I was excited about the road ahead and eager to know what my role in the world might be.

What can we do as a church to prepare our teenagers to be godly adults in a difficult age? This generation of youth is savvier than every prior generation; with the click of a mouse or the swipe of a finger they have access to the whole world. But being savvy or knowledgeable about the world is not the same thing as being wise. And that must be our goal: to help our children grow in wisdom. After all, what did Solomon want for his son? "To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity" (Prov. 1:2-3). By God's grace, the church can prepare teenagers to be wise.

It is God Who Saves

But first, we must recognize the limits of our influence. What you're about to read is a difficult truth, but it is one that every parent must grasp: *The salvation of our children is not finally in our hands.* As much as we might wish that we could guarantee that our children would be born again, the fact of the matter is their soul rests in the hands of God. Some children from the best Christian homes grow up to reject Jesus, while others, who grew up without any knowledge of the Savior, are born again and follow him forever.

Take just a moment to read John 3:1-15. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. It seems he is very interested in the young rabbi's teaching, but too ashamed to seek Jesus during the day. He is curious but cautious. He's heard the people say that Jesus knows the way into the kingdom of God, and he's come for answers. Jesus tells his distinguished visitor that if he wants to see the kingdom, he must be "born again" (v. 3). Nicodemus is incredulous because he knows a man can only be born once. But Jesus is not referring to a physical birth, and so he tells Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of

God" (v. 5). The birth that Jesus is talking about is a spiritual birth. It cannot be purchased or worked for—it must simply be received: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (v. 8). God is at work, through the Spirit, blowing into the lives of unbelievers everywhere. We cannot control or corral the Holy Spirit. Conversion is in the hands of the Lord.

What does that mean for us?

First, we cannot guarantee the salvation of anyone. "The wind blows where it wishes." God's Spirit is not at our beck and call. God is sovereign in salvation. He works where he chooses. As much as we might like to think that we can ensure their salvation if we do the right things, send our kids to the right camps and ensure they have the right friends—none of it can guarantee that they will truly know the Lord. They must have the Spirit, and the Spirit is not ours to command.

Second, we can share the gospel. This much is in our control. God has called us to be messengers of his Good News. He has ordained preaching to precede salvation. The Spirit chooses not to work where the Word is not preached. And so our responsibility is simple: share the gospel with our children (see Rom. 10). One of the best things parents can do is know the gospel so well they quite naturally speak about it all the time.

As I'm writing these words, Atlanta is under a blanket of snow. I heard of a father and his two young kids trapped in their car on one end of an icy bridge. Their neighbor and friend, a Christian, ventured out to help this family get home. This unbelieving family was stunned by their neighbor's risky deed. He sacrificed time and comfort to help. The mother, waiting at home for her husband and girls to come home, was in tears. Why would her neighbor be so kind and helpful? This question presented a natural opportunity for this woman to hear the gospel. Jesus sacrificed his life for us, how can we not sacrifice for others?

Every day parents have unique and natural opportunities to share the gospel with their children. A teenager might be bullied at school. A parent might overlook a teenager's

attitude. A disappointment might hit a teenager's family. What lessons about sin and grace and death are embedded in these daily events? How does the gospel shine forth in the midst of the mundane realities of everyday life? The Good News should never be a message heard only on Sunday. The Spirit blows where the Word is shared. So let's daily share the gospel with our teenagers.

Third, we can pray for our children. It is good to pray for the salvation of our kids. Prayer is an exercise of faith that God is in control, that he can do anything and that we depend upon him for everything. Paul prayed and requested prayer so that his evangelistic efforts would be successful. He believed that his ministry needed prayer (Rom. 10:1; 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:18-20; Col. 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:1). Therefore we should pray for our evangelistic efforts. Not because it guarantees success, but because God chooses to use prayer to save sinners.

I hope you see the implications of this for your parenting and for our church. Faithful parents need not blame themselves should their children reject Christ. We can only plant and water gospel seeds—God must grant the growth (1 Cor. 4:5-8). Faithful churches must not expect that games, lights, music, and food will produce gospel growth in the lives of young ones. Kids need the gospel and the Spirit.

Where Churches Go Wrong

David Kinneman in his book, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church*, explains in detail how youth ministries that emphasize size and activity have actually failed the very teenagers they attempted to help:

Despite their size and reach, institutions can serve outcomes that are antithetical to genuine discipleship, especially to the approach found most often in the Scriptures. Yes, the Bible records instances of large events in which many made a commitment to follow Christ, and it is absolutely clear about the need for sound teaching, which can and should be delivered to groups large and small. But compare the mentality of today's Western church to Jesus's work with his disciples, which was characterized by life-on-life mentoring and apprenticeship. Can we really conclude that by embracing an industrialized, more-is-better approach, we have improved on the Lord's results? (pg. 121)

Churches go wrong when they sacrifice genuine discipleship at the altar of entertainment or when they conclude that God must be a work because a youth group

is very large. In fact, entertainment-driven, size-oriented youth ministries leave many students disillusioned with the local church. The following six reasons, largely gleaned from Kinneman's research, explain why so many young people are leaving the church:

First, the church provides shallow answers to deep questions. Some of the hardest questions ever asked are formulated in one's teenage years. So many kids are exploring the meaning of life, the existence of evil, and the nature of a sovereign God. These are profound questions, and they can't be treated superficially. Obviously, not every answer will satisfy the skeptic. But the Bible is a very deep well, full of insight. Kids want to know their hard questions are being treated with respect.

Second, the church doesn't give youth the freedom to doubt. At least that's how kids feel. Doubts are real. Every Christian, at some time, has them (see Mark 9:24, John 20:27). The church should be the best place to express doubt. It was Augustine who described the Christian life as faith seeking understanding. And yet, so often, young people (and I would add old people, too) are left feeling guilty when they doubt. If the church can't lovingly, tenderly and honestly deal with the doubts of its students, who can?

Third, the church seems more like an institution and less like a family. Just a little time in the Bible leaves one with the impression that the church should feel like a family. We are called to love one another (John 13:34-35), serve one another (Gal. 6:2), say the hard thing to one another (Heb. 2:13), and gather with one another (Heb. 10:24-25). But somewhere, in the machinations of church life, this sense of family gets lost. Kids hear references to budgets, fundraising campaigns, building programs, and staff quarrels—and the church seems more like a business than the world, more like a company than an outpost of the kingdom of God.

Fourth, the church doesn't encourage relationships between generations. Kids can spend their entire lives in the church without seeing how the gospel brings different generations together. They grow up in an age-graded world with their peers, but have very little interaction with saints of all ages.

Of course, parents are right to want their kids to have friendships with students their age. And a good youth ministry will provide opportunities to build these relationships. But it is healthy for teenagers to spend time with adults, too.

More than anything, I want my own kids to grow up to be godly adults. I know that the Spirit must blow into their lives, and I can't control that. But I can put them in the path of godly men and women who will model a love for Christ and for the local church. If we want our teenagers to grow up to be holy, pure, and confident men and women, then they need to spend time with examples. As a parent, I'm called to be their primary example. But praise God for a family of faith that will join me in modeling for my kids what it looks like to walk with Christ. Too many teenagers in the church today have few models to follow, and they graduate out of their youth ministry ill equipped to enter an adult world.

Fifth, the church encourages the compartmentalization of the Christian life. Deep down, most kids know that if the truth claims of Jesus are true, it changes everything. The demands that he makes really are radical:

- ➔ Matt. 19:24, "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."
- ➔ Mark 9:35, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."
- ➔ Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."
- ➔ John 12:25, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

But somehow, kids gain the impression that the Christian life is something that can be lived Sunday morning and Wednesday evening with very little effect on their lives the rest of the week. After a few years, they wonder if Christianity or the church really matter at all . . . and they walk away. Somehow, we need to show them how the gospel affects all of life, not just our schedule.

Sixth, the church seems to have very little to say about secular vocational life. They know that Christianity matters if you are a pastor or a missionary, a Sunday school teacher or a deacon. But how does the gospel affect your life as a housewife, a plumber, an engineer, or a doctor? The lives of most people are spent in a secular job. But it's at this very point that the gospel goes AWOL. A gospel that doesn't speak to the daily lives of most people must be weak indeed.

A couple months ago my nephew came to stay with us in Atlanta. He was twenty at the time, a young college student and very curious about how to embrace Christianity in the real world. He knew the demands of the gospel mentioned above (Matt. 19:24; Mark 9:35; Luke 14:27; John 12:25), but somehow he had concluded

that if he was really serious about the faith it meant he had to be a missionary or pastor. He was so relieved to come to MVBC and see examples of men who really loved the Lord and the church but devoted their lives to the secular workplace. Just seeing these models freed him up to pursue the Lord without assuming that the really "religious" people are all in vocational ministry. The church managed to teach him a lot about secular vocational life.

It is at these six points that many churches fail. Praise God that he is not limited by our failures. Scores of young people have been born again and thrived spiritually in churches that have dropped the ball. Salvation is in the hands of the Lord. And just because a church fails in some areas (don't they all?) doesn't mean it can't do spectacularly well in another area (God's grace at work). Nonetheless, youth ministries marked by these six weaknesses are not set up to produce lasting fruit. This should challenge all of us to find a better way to reach out to the teenagers in our midst.

A Way Forward

What can churches do to encourage faithful youth ministry? How can we distance ourselves from what Kinneman describes as the "industrialized, more-is-better" approach while providing a structure that ministers to teenagers in a powerful and winsome way? The following four statements summarize the kind of youth ministry that I pray continues to emerge at our church.

First, a family-focused ministry that prioritizes the role of parents in the lives of their youth.

Teenagers need to trust that God normally works through parents. It is evident from passages like Deut. 6:5-9, Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21, and 2 Tim. 1:5 that parents have both the responsibility and power to influence their children. Churches cannot and should not replace the role of the parents. It is tempting for parents to drop their kids off with a Sunday school teacher or youth pastor and expect that their children will grow in grace simply by hanging out with a mentor or children their own age. But the reality is that parents influence their children more than anyone else.

A family-focused youth ministry strives to come alongside parents to help evangelize, teach, befriend, and disciple their kids. A church with this mindset will constantly emphasize the weighty responsibility parents have to lead their children, and will let these parents know that they aren't alone. Most parents want other

adults involved in the lives of their kids—that’s a good thing! But the influence of a parent is irreplaceable.

A local church with a family-focused mindset will encourage parents to teach their teenagers the Bible, have intentional conversations about the faith, spend time serving together at church and in missions, and partner with other parents walking the same road.

And where a teenager comes to us without a Christian family, a family-focused ministry will seek to establish the local church as this teenager’s family of faith. We should thank God that he provides us with fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters in Christ (Mark 10:29-31).

Second, a Bible-saturated ministry that displays confidence in God’s Word.

Teenagers need to see that God’s Word is really powerful. God’s people have always trusted in his Word to bring life and peace. Whether it’s Abraham heeding God’s call to leave Ur or to sacrifice Isaac or Gideon charging into battle with only a handful of soldiers, or Jeremiah who continued to minister the Word of God in the face of a hostile people, or Jesus who wielded only God’s words against Satan—believers have always had to trust in the Word of God.

When I was a young child, I thought my Dad could do anything. I had child-like faith in his ability to protect me from every evil. As our kids get older, we want them to know that this is how they should view God. He is a powerful, mighty Lord. And he works through his Word. We can’t expect to live in a fallen world without trouble. But we can expect that God’s Word will protect our hearts forever.

A Bible-saturated ministry doesn’t lead us to worship the Bible, but to worship the God who inspired it. It leads men, women and even children to see that the God who speaks is the God who acts. Look at the very end of Jude, and notice the great confidence Jude has in the Lord:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever (24-25).

This is the kind of confidence I want my kids to have. And the only way to get it is by diving deep into God’s Word and resting in his great promises.

Third, a gospel-driven ministry that emphasizes grace, not works.

Teenagers need to know that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Christian Smith coined the now famous phrase, “moralistic-therapeutic deism” to describe the faith of America’s youth. Their god is generic (deism). Their goal is personal growth (therapeutic). Their understanding of religion is works-based (moralistic). A youth ministry that is faithful to the Bible will present the Triune God in his glorious fullness. It will argue his glory is the purpose of our existence. And, finally, it will revel in God’s grace as the only source of salvation and as the only means of genuine holiness.

So much “Christian” teaching is so bland that it fits into Smith’s category. The Bible is approached as a collection of morality tales that exist to help us get a better job or be a better person. So, for example, the account of David and Goliath is nothing more than a tale of courage and the Parable of the Talents is simply a story promoting wise stewardship.

But the Bible is about so much more than that. The gospel rings from every page. Everywhere in Scripture we see man’s fallen condition—we are sinners in need of salvation. In each verse we find pointers guiding us to the arrival of a Savior. A gospel-driven ministry will not leave teenagers thinking they are okay if they go to church, read their Bibles, or stay in school. A gospel-driven ministry will highlight their minute-by-minute need for a Savior who brings redemption by the power of the cross and holiness by the presence of the Spirit.

Fourth, a joy-filled ministry promotes the passionate pursuit of a glorious God.

Teenagers need to see and experience that the gospel isn’t just the most rational explanation of reality, but it’s the only fountain of everlasting joy. This kind of joy cannot be falsified or fabricated. Where the gospel is, there is joy:

- ➔ Psalm 4:7, “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.” Believers should experience a delight in God that is deeper and richer than anything the world has to offer.
- ➔ Psalm 34:8, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” God is not merely to be understood, he is to be experienced and enjoyed. He draws close to his people.

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- ➔ Isaiah 12:6, “Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” When God is with us, we cannot help but be thrilled.
 - ➔ John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” When Christ’s words hit the heart of a believer, true joy wells up. He is profoundly thankful for everything God is for him in Christ and eager to share that with others.
 - ➔ 2 Cor. 7:4, “I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.” Christian joy exists in the midst of pain and disappointment.

Many youth ministries are looking for fun. But they should really be looking for joy. You can play all the games you want, sing lots of music, and even take great trips. But if all this happens absent the passionate pursuit of a glorious God, there will be no joy. C.S. Lewis put it well in his famous sermon, *The Weight of Glory*. It’s easy to point our youth to fun with the hope they find Christ when we should point them to Christ with the conviction they’ll find joy.

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Let’s not treat our youth as if they were half-hearted creatures. Let’s creatively, earnestly, and passionately point them to our great God and leave it to his Spirit to stir their hearts to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Conclusion

In the youth ministries of most every church are teenagers eager to start life. They are full of hope mixed with anxiety. They see a world, they know they belong in it, but they are not quite sure how. These are precious souls, made in the image of God and in desperate need of a Savior. Let’s commit to invest in them, encourage them with the gospel and give them everything we possibly can so that, in Christ, our teenagers find everything they truly need.

-- Aaron Menikoff

Resources to help minister to your teenager:

What is the Gospel?

By Greg Gilbert

Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens

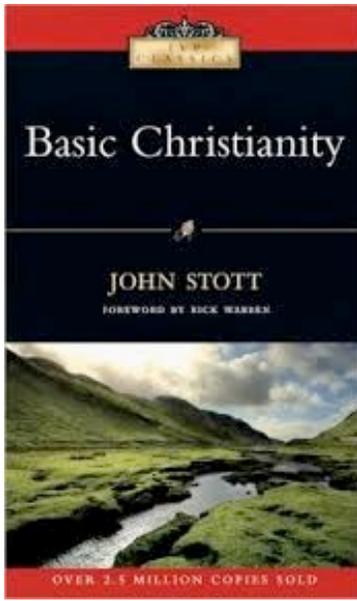
By Paul David Tripp

You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking the Faith

By David Kinnaman

Thoughts for Young Men

By J.C. Ryle



Book Review

Basic Christianity

By John Stott
Reviewed by Doug Young

When I hear the word “basic,” I tend to think low level or simple, possibly even boring. But being confronted by the person, claims, and demands of Christ is hardly boring.

Furthermore, the character, deeds, and words of Jesus are more than “basic” to Christianity. They are pervasive in a profound way. When we hear of a book entitled *Basic Christianity*, we might not expect the deep things of God. But that’s what we get. It may be more helpful to think of “basic” as that which is central to Christianity. Just as a fiery molten core is central to the earth, so is the person and work of Jesus Christ to Christianity.

Basic Christianity by the late John Stott was first published in 1958. *Christianity Today* named it “Book of the Century.” James Sire noted that “[This slim volume] has introduced more people to Christ than any book I know other than the Bible.” Thus, it is a Christian classic in its purest form, and I was excited about the opportunity to re-read it and possibly introduce it to you for the first time.

Written with the non-Christian in mind, Stott divided it into parts: “Who is Christ,” “What We Need,” “What Christ Has Done,” and “How to Respond.” Stott examines evidence for the deity of Christ, the sinners desperate need for reconciliation to a holy God and then, in simple words, unfolds the salvation Christ has won for his people. Lastly, he examines the question “What must I do to be saved?”

Here are a few highlights to give you a taste of this classic work.

More Than a Teacher

In company with C.S. Lewis, Stott explains why Jesus could never merely be a good teacher. Jesus taught profound truths but so much of his teaching pointed to

himself. “If people would only come to him, he promised to lift the burdens of the weary, to satisfy the hungry and to quench the longing of the thirsty soul. More than that, his followers were to obey him and to make no secret of their allegiance to him” (36). Stott describes one of Jesus greatest claims as “breathtakingly egocentric” when Jesus said “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” And yet here is the epitome of humility and self-sacrifice. It only makes sense if this man is also God the Son, and that is Stott’s point.

The Character of Jesus

The four gospels give a robust view of Jesus’ teaching and his character. His character supports his claims. His words and actions are utterly unique. Stott explains, “It is this paradox that is so amazing, this combination of the self-centeredness of his teaching and the unself-centeredness of his behavior. In thought he put himself first; in deed last. He exhibited both the greatest self-esteem and the greatest self-sacrifice. He knew himself to be the Lord of all, but he became their servant. He said that he would one day come to judge the world, but he washed the feet of his friends” (60). Here is a portrait of a man who is God in the flesh – the Son of God.

The Resurrection of Jesus

When Stott examines the resurrection, he interacts with the counter-claims of the skeptic. He offers some very helpful considerations and evidence for the fact and reasonableness of Scripture’s claim. Doing the work of an apologist, Stott lays out the evidence convincingly. He begins this section by using a little sanctified logic. “The argument is not that his resurrection establishes his deity, but that it fits with it. It is only to be expected that a supernatural person would come to and leave the earth in a supernatural way” (62). In other words, it is by the fact that Jesus *is God* that he was able to conquer death through the resurrection.

Incentives to Deny Self and Follow Christ

Stott explains that while Jesus makes heavy demands, he also gives compelling reasons for them. One being that we should follow Christ *for our own sake*. As stated in Mark 8:35-37, “What good is it for you to gain the whole

world, yet forfeit your soul.” Stott puts it simply and profoundly, “Of course it costs to be a Christian; but it costs more not to be” (157). He then argues that we should follow Christ *for the sake of others*. “The best contribution anyone can make to putting the world to right is to live a Christian life, build a Christian home and radiate the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (157). And lastly, he argues that our greatest incentive is *for Christ’s sake*. “‘Whoever loses their life for me...will save it’ [Matt 16:35]. When we are asked to do something particularly hard, our willingness to do so depends very much on who asks us” (157). Here is Stott’s exhortation: “Once we catch a glimpse of the greatness of his love in willingly suffering such shame and pain for us who deserved nothing but judgment, only one course of action will be open to us. How can we deny or reject such a lover” (158)?

The Point of Decision

Stott finally leads the reader to the point of decision. He spends a good bit of time helping the seeker to count the cost. As I read this section I could not help thinking of Robert Irvine from the food network’s *Restaurant Impossible*. Failing restaurants invite Irvine for two days to turn their establishment around. But that invitation also means that Irvine is invited into every nook and cranny of the business, including the owners’ personal lives. His visits are very intrusive. But how much more are Jesus’s, who has permanent access to the door of his children’s souls? This is how Stott puts it, “Jesus Christ will also enter as our Lord and Master. The house of our lives will come under his management, and there is no point in opening the door unless we are willing for this to happen. As he steps across the threshold, we must hand him our whole bunch of keys, granting him free access into every room” (164). If more believers would count the cost this way, how much stronger would the Church of Christ be?

Who Should Read this Book?

My first recommendation is that the *un-churched seeker* read this book. It will confront him or her with the sweeping and stark realities of the gospel. It will help the seeker see the bigness and grandeur of Jesus himself. I would also recommend that *believers use it as an evangelistic resource*. Its content is a good reminder of what the un-churched needs to hear. It would also be an excellent book to *read with a friend or family member* who is not clear on the gospel. The claims and demands of Christ have far-reaching implications and this would be an excellent book to generate good conversations.

Basic Christianity is like the molten core at the center of the earth because Jesus is at the center of Christianity. This book will help the un-churched, the new believer, and

even the mature believer see that what God has done through his Son is the flaming center of his love. This is “basic” Christianity.

Leadership

An important announcement about the Elders' leadership recommendations from the recent Church in Conference.

Church family,

On March 2, we will have a specially-called Church in Conference. Our goal will be to vote on two new lay Elders and to seek your affirmation regarding a Pastoral Assistant/Education. This is a change from our original recommendation of an Assistant Pastor/Education. So let me explain.

We are looking for a man to come alongside Doug Young and assist with the youth ministry here at MVBC. We are also looking for someone to help me oversee our many teaching and discipleship ministries (Sunday School, Equipping Matters, Covenant Groups, etc). The Elders believe that Dustin Butts is an excellent fit for this position, and that he meets all the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. That's why we nominated him to be both an Assistant Pastor and an Elder.

We brought this recommendation for your consideration and feedback on January 26. One of the comments I received from more than one member was concern about the Assistant Pastor immediately being an Elder. It has been rightly pointed out that our Constitution does not require staff pastors to serve as Elders. Furthermore, our most recent hire, Doug Young, joined staff not as an Elder but as the Family Ministry Coordinator. I appreciate the concern. After all, a staff Elder is not up for re-election (as lay Elders are). Therefore, this is a big decision that deserves special care and attention.

So why not simply call Dustin as an Assistant Pastor and delay his nomination to join the Elder body for a few months? Wherever possible, I think it wise to keep the pastor and Elder positions together. Even though our Constitution allows the two offices to be separated, that should be the exception and not the rule. It would be better for us to see that when we call someone to the office of pastor we are, typically, calling him to hold the office of Elder as well.

I think there is an easy solution. Let's first consider Dustin to serve MVBC as a Pastoral Assistant. He will be a staff member and he will serve the body of Christ here at Mount Vernon in much the same way we previously

intended. However, he will not hold the office of Elder. This will allow the whole congregation to continue to get to know Dustin better and it will provide Dustin and his family some time to acclimate to church staff before bearing the additional weight of the office of Elder. As you prepare for our specially-called Church in Conference, please keep our revised recommendation in mind.

Bio of Dustin Butts



Dustin grew up in Central Texas and attended Angelo State University. While in college, he was befriended by a Christian who began inviting him to the Baptist Campus Ministry and to church. Over the course of the next few years, Dustin began to grow in his understanding of the bible and, toward the end of his senior year, he repented of his sin and believed the good news of the gospel.

After a year of teaching high school math in Pflugerville, Texas, Dustin was encouraged by his pastor to attend Southern Seminary. He attended Southern from 2006 to 2009 and graduated with a Masters of Divinity in Missions and Evangelism. After graduation, Dustin accepted a position as a high school math teacher at Christian Academy of Louisville and taught there for two years before moving to Atlanta and joining Mount Vernon in 2011. Currently, Dustin works as a grant administrator at Georgia State University. Since coming, the Butts family has been actively involved in the life of the church. Dustin is currently serving as Deacon of Youth and Jamie serves in the role of Women's Ministry Team Leader. Dustin and Jamie are both very excited about the opportunity for him to serve Mount Vernon on staff.

Regarding Lay Elder Nominations

At the same specially-called Church in Conference on March 2, you will be asked to vote on the following the five men we nominated to the office of Elder. Three are

currently serving as an Elder – John Hall, Jim Heiskell, and Hank Sturgess. We recommend John and Jim for an additional three-year term and Hank for an additional one-year term. We also recommend two new men to the office of Elder – Rodney Barry and Larry Chandler.

We believe that each of these men meet the biblical qualifications of an Elder as set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and elsewhere. We also believe that each are well-suited to being an Elder and are already serving the church.

Below you will find a brief bio of each man. Please take the next few weeks to get to know these men if you don't already. Read 1 Timothy and Titus and prayerfully consider if they meet the biblical qualifications. Talk to them about their desire to serve. Talk to the other Elders, especially if you know of any reason why they would be disqualified. We pray and trust that God will guide us by his Spirit and his Word as we consider these nominations.

For a man to be elected an Elder, it requires 75% approval of all voting members at a Church in Conference. A lay Elder may serve a three-year term and may be re-elected for an additional three-year-term subsequent to the same terms.

Rodney Barry (New Elder Nominee)



Rodney grew up in a Christian home in Jacksonville, AL where his family attended a Southern Baptist Church. He came to faith in Christ at age 12 through the witness of his parents and grandparents. Rodney married Priscilla while in college, and they have lived and attended churches in 9 states over the past 32 years.

Rodney has served at previous churches as a Deacon and Sunday School teacher. Since coming to Mt. Vernon in October 2009, he has served as the Deacon of Bookstall and taught Equipping Matters.

Larry Chandler (New Elder Nominee)



Larry grew up in Sandy Springs with a moral father and believing mother. Following a college career full of sinful choices, the Lord invaded his life and saved him on Saturday, May 5, 1984. Larry has been married

to Shirley for 25 years. They have two children are Jaynie (20) and Jacob (18). Prior to coming to Mount Vernon, Larry taught Sunday School since the late 1980's and was a Deacon. He also has a passion for missions and evangelism. Since coming to Mount Vernon in 2011, Larry has been

actively involved in discipling and teaching a number of adult Sunday School and Equipping Matters classes.

John Hall (Existing Elder Nominee)



John grew up in a Christian home in Savannah, GA. He came to faith in Christ as his personal Savior at a young age but grew deeper in his commitment at the age of 22. John and wife Jane have been married for 39 years and have two children and two

grandchildren. They were members of Mount Vernon from 1983-1991 until they relocated to Florida. They returned to Atlanta and MVBC in 2003. John has served the church in a number of ways including teaching Sunday School, working with the finance teams, Deacon, and currently as the vice-chairman of the Elders.

Jim Heiskell (Existing Elder Nominee)



Jim grew up in Atlanta and came to faith in Christ as a college student through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. He and his wife Connie have been married 42 years and have five

children and thirteen grandchildren. He has been a member of Mount Vernon since 1999. Since joining, he has served as Director of Adult Sunday School, an Equipping Matters teacher, Deacon, and currently as the chairman of the Elders.

Hank Sturgess (Existing Elder Nominee, 1-year term)



As a child, Hank attended Baptist Sunday Schools and occasionally went to church. In his youth, he would have been considered a nominal Christian. In 1950 at Rock Springs

Presbyterian Church he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. While a member of Rock Springs, he taught Sunday School and served three terms as a Deacon and four terms as an Elder. Twenty years ago, he was baptized by immersion at Northside Baptist Church. He joined Mount Vernon in 1994 and has continued to teach Sunday, served as a Deacon, and an Elder.

With much love,

Aaron Menikoff
On behalf of the Elders

Knowing & Being Known

SCHEDULE HIGHLIGHTS

CHURCH-WIDE

Sunday, February 9 5:30 pm Lord's Supper & Fellowship Meal
We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationships with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection. Immediately following the service, we will have a time of food and conversation.

Sunday, February 23 4:30 pm Scripture Readers' Workshop
The public reading of Scripture is a vital part of our weekly worship gatherings. Members interested in participating in this ministry are invited to attend the next workshop where we will pursue ways to effectively communicate the power and message of God's Word. RSVP [David Carnes](#).

ADULTS

Monday, February 17 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon
Everyone ages 50 and older are invited to a time of food and fellowship. Please bring one side dish.

MISSIONS

Tuesday, February 11 – Monday, February 17 Dominican Republic Trip
A small team will be going to La Florida in the Dominican Republic.

WOMEN

Saturday, February 22 2:00 pm Guobaitis Baby Shower
The women's ministry will be hosting a baby shower for Michael & Victoria Guobaitis at the church. For more details and how to be involved, contact [Cheryl Coen](#).

Friday, February 28 7:00 pm Women's Retreat
Saturday, March 1 9:00 am
Ladies, please join us as we strive to better understand biblical contentment with guest speaker Jodi Ware. Cost is \$40 and includes dessert on Friday and breakfast and lunch on Saturday. Contact [Jocelyn Davis](#) or [Deana Menikoff](#) with questions.

FAMILY

Friday, February 21 6:30 pm Youth Friday Night Fellowship
All youth are invited for a night of fun and fellowship with other youth and family. Contact [Doug Young](#) for details about location and to RSVP.

BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Bob McCallum
- 2 Jim Voyles
- 4 Jeanette Ripley
- 8 Isabelle Carver
Jenna Langmack
Mary Roth
Sarah Anne Voyles
- 9 Richard Carron
- 10 Amy Brewer
Jackie Marler
Lynne Warren
- 12 Rick Roth
- 17 Sandy Wellman
- 19 Mary Cherbonnier
Jacob Hall
- 20 Jeff Case
Diane Neal
Sweden Swilley
- 21 Dorothy DeFreese
- 22 Austin Nable
Larry Norwood
Khady Sy
- 24 Marni Daniel
Doug Langmack
David Pattillo
- 25 Delaine Brannen
Howard Kauffmann
Kerns Sage
- 26 Stacy Dennis
Paula Mosby
- 27 Brent Reid
Michael Stephens
- 28 Sharon Luck

NEWEST MEMBERS

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

Joel & Alina Cocian
Bill & Jennifer Cook
Katie Brewer*
Jonathan Cobb*

*Subsequent to their baptism

