

PERSPECTIVE

NOVEMBER 2019



TEENAGERS
NEED THE CHURCH



THE CHURCH NEEDS
TEENAGERS

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Dustin Butts



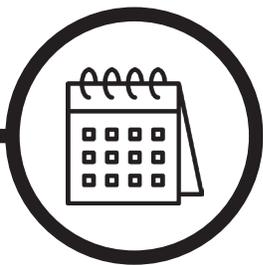
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Teenagers Need the Church & The Church Needs Teenagers

We need the church in every season of life. But there are unique seasons when we are especially in need of the grace of God that comes to us through the church. The teen years are one of these seasons.

Being a teenager is hard. It can be confusing. From the ages of thirteen to nineteen, we are no longer children, but we neither feel like nor are treated like adults. We want responsibility and freedom; yet, we don't want to fully bear the weight of this responsibility and freedom. We are asking questions that don't have simple answers: "Who am I? What am I going to do with my life?" We are wrestling with big life decisions: "Should I go to college? If so, when and where? If not, what's next?" It is a hard season and an awkward one. In this season, we desperately need the wisdom and grace of God that comes through godly parents, but we also desperately need the grace he has designed to come to us through the church.

TEENAGERS NEED THE CHURCH...

To Intentionally Integrate Them into the Life of the Church
Recent studies have revealed that American teenagers are lonelier than ever.¹ With the rise of smart phone and social media use among teens, they are not only becoming increasingly isolated from one another, but they are also more distant from the adults in their lives. Sadly, this is true not only in the secular world but also in the church.

But it isn't just technology that isolates teens from church community. Many churches have embraced a youth ministry philosophy that intentionally separates youth from adults in almost every gathering. Even when youth gather with the church, they often sit separately from adults (on the front row or in the balcony). Separation can have its benefits—providing opportunity for age-specific teaching and peer-to-peer interaction—but it can also communicate to youth that they are not really part of the church, further isolating them from the church community.

At Mount Vernon, we have taken a number of steps to fold youth into the life of the church in order that they might know and be known by our members, a pattern we see clearly portrayed in Scripture (e.g., Titus 2; 1 Jn. 2:12–14). We continue to provide a Youth Sunday School class, but we've intentionally made space for them to meet upstairs in the same hallway as our Adult Sunday School classes so they can engage with adults on the way to and from class each week. We encourage youth to sit with

their families during our corporate gatherings so they can watch and engage with their parents in corporate worship. We've chosen to provide youth specific activities on only one Sunday evening a month in order to encourage the youth to gather with the whole church as we pray and hear from God's Word together. And on Wednesday evenings, our youth gather with the whole church six months out of the year for doctrinal and inductive Bible studies.

We believe these are all steps in the right direction, but none of them are effective means of folding our teens into the life of the church in isolation. They are only effective when coupled with the active engagement of church members with the teens in our midst. We should not expect our teens to initiate relationships with adults in the congregation. Adults must take the initiative to integrate teens into the life of the church. Something as simple as an adult going out of their way to say hello on a Sunday morning, initiating a conversation with a youth in the hallway between services, or engaging the teenager sitting next to them in conversation before Wednesday evening Bible study can go a long way in helping our teens feel like they belong at MVBC.

For those who struggle with knowing where to start, I would encourage you to begin praying through the "Family" section in the back of the church directory. There, you will find the pictures, names, and ages of the children at MVBC. As you come to their families, pray for each child by name. And when you see them at church, try to greet them by name. If you strike up a conversation with a teen's parent and the teen is there, include them in the conversation. You'd be surprised how often teens are overlooked even though present in adult conversations, and how much of an impact you can have by simply acknowledging and including them.

To Lovingly Encourage Them to Make the Faith Their Own
Growing up in the church is a great blessing, in much the same way that growing up in ancient Israel was a blessing. Children who grow up in the church are exposed to the teaching and preaching of God's Word week after week. They regularly get to hear the gospel and see something of it each time that the church observes the Lord's Supper or a baptism. And they are part of a community in which everyone around them wants to see them know and love and live for Christ. These are incredible gifts!

But growing up in the church also comes with some significant challenges. When your parents and everyone you know at church want you to profess faith in Christ, there is a subtle pressure to conform to their desires and the culture of the church, even if only outwardly—to

speak and act as if you are a Christian even if you know that you aren't. On the flip side, when you've spent your whole life in church and can't remember a day that you didn't believe the gospel, it is easy to grow doubtful or apathetic. You could go through the motions without pursuing a deep, vital relationship with the Lord.

As teenagers move toward adulthood, one of the greatest gifts the church can give them is the tender, loving, and at times challenging encouragement to make the faith they profess their own. This requires a significant amount of discernment on the part of those in the church who are relationally connected to the teens in the congregation (which at some level should be all of us). We cannot assume that a teen is a Christian simply because he or she has believing parents, is well-mannered, active in the youth group, and appears to be engaged in corporate worship each Sunday morning. Nor can we assume that he or she is not a Christian.

What we can and should assume is that every teenager in our midst would be blessed to have members of MVBC personally, regularly, and intentionally speaking with them about the faith. This can be as simple as approaching them on a Sunday morning or Wednesday evening and striking up a spiritual conversation. Do they think they are a Christian? If so, why? If not, why not? If they do profess faith, what has the Lord been teaching them lately? What stood out to them from the sermon or lesson they just heard? What do their spiritual disciplines look like? Are they seeking to share the gospel with their lost friends? What are the challenges they face in seeking to live as a Christian at school? All of these questions provide glimpses into the heart of a teen and give us opportunities to either encourage them to press on in the faith or to lovingly exhort them to press into the faith they profess and make it their own.

To Listen Well and Faithfully Point Them to the Truth
One of the things that always amazed me as a high school teacher was the willingness of students to open up to me once I developed rapport with them. From struggles in their relationships with their parents to the deep questions they had about life, they offered more information than I ever expected all because I took an interest in them and was willing to listen to their thoughts and take them seriously.

According to a recent Barna study, more than three-fourths of teens feel like they can "be themselves" at church.² The fruit of intentionally integrating teens into the life of the church and lovingly encouraging them to make the faith their own will be growing relationships between teens and adults. As those relationships grow, our teens will likely begin to open up more and more,

sharing their hopes, fears, doubts, and questions with us. When that happens, we must labor to remember what it was like to be in their shoes and seek to relate to and take seriously the things they share, continuously pointing them to the gospel and the truths of God's Word.

This is especially important as our teens are increasingly exposed to cultural messages that are directly opposed to biblical truth. When social media tells our teens that their value is determined by the number of likes on their latest Instagram post, we remind them that they have been fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and are precious in his sight. When the world tells them that truth is relative, that gender is fluid, and that the only thing that matters is self-fulfillment, we remind our teens that the unchanging God is the source and standard of all truth, his ways are good, his design is perfect, and only true and lasting fulfillment is found in Christ. In an increasingly confused, secular culture, one that has its sights set on the next generation, the church has a unique opportunity and responsibility to provide our teens with the listening ear they long for and the only answers that truly satisfy.

To Model the Christian Life

For good or for ill, teens look up to the adults in their lives. In the church, the Lord means it for good. If you grew up in the church, it is highly likely that you can think of certain men and women who influenced your understanding of what it means to be a Christian in big and small ways. For me, one of those men was my Papaw, a godly man and a grocery store manager who faithfully served the Lord in his work and our local church as a deacon. Another was the local funeral director, Mr. Sneed, who modeled the joy of Christ, knew me by name and greeted me every time he saw me at church and still does whenever he sees me. Another was my fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Davis, who sang in the choir, spoke to me every Sunday, and still seeks me out and gives me a hug every time we go to church with my parents. Another was a couple whose names I've sadly forgotten who invited me over for lunch one Sunday as a college freshman just because I was visiting their church. I am so thankful to the Lord for placing them and so many other faithful Christians in my life to show me something of what it means to live for Christ.

One of the reasons we seek to integrate MVBC's teens into the life of the church is so they can be blessed by knowing and being known and loved by faithful Christians who aren't their mom and dad. Our teens need a living hall of faith, if you will (Heb. 11). They need to be surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses whose faithful lives point them to Christ and serve as models of what it looks like to live for him in every season, every vocation, and every

life circumstance (Heb. 12:1–2). They need to know that, even though the world says they are crazy for following Christ, there are intelligent men and women other than their parents who believe the gospel, take God at his word, and love his church dearly even though doing so comes at a cost. They need to know that you can live for Christ as an accountant, homemaker, doctor, carpenter, or teacher.

Teens also need to see the church being the church. When they see men and women who take church membership seriously—who truly love one another even though they have little in common apart from Christ, who seek to live out the commands of God’s Word in community with one another, who sacrifice for and serve one another, who take sin seriously, who readily extend forgiveness and grace to one another—they see the profound and compelling beauty of the gospel. They also learn the important truth that to love Christ is to love his church.

Teenagers need the church. They need it for these reasons and so many more. But we are not the only ones with something to offer; it is important to recognize that the church needs teenagers too. Now, we have to admit that there is a real sense in which the church doesn’t need teenagers. It doesn’t need you or me for that matter. We all need the church, but it doesn’t need us. That said, a local church without teenagers misses out on the unique blessings that can come through the teens in our midst. In that sense, the church needs teenagers.

THE CHURCH NEEDS TEENAGERS...

To Give Us a Shot in the Arm Evangelistically

Over the last year, I’ve been greatly encouraged to see a number of our teens inviting their non-Christian friends to church and to church related events. Many are seeking to share the gospel at school. I know of one who has started a Bible study with some of his classmates. Several have reached out to me and to others asking for evangelistic resources or answers to tough questions their friends are asking.

Their evangelistic zeal has been so encouraging, but it’s also been convicting. It is a great reminder that we don’t have to know it all to share our faith. It’s a reminder that people are willing to come to church if we are willing to ask. It’s a reminder that people are willing to listen if we are willing to open our mouths and speak the truths of the gospel. It’s a shot in the arm that the church needs, and one we will increasingly receive as we labor to get to know the teens in our midst.

To Model Joyful, Eager Service

Vacation Bible School is the highlight of the year for most of the kids in our Children’s Ministry. It’s also the

highlight of the year for many of our youth because it provides them with an opportunity to serve the church in a unique way. Each year, as VBS comes to a close, I hear at least one sixth grader excitedly say, “Next year, when I’m in Youth, I get to help with VBS!”

Though there aren’t tons of opportunities for teenagers to serve at MVBC, they joyfully and eagerly serve when the opportunity arises, no matter what the opportunity is. From passing the mic on Sunday night, to cleaning up after a Lord’s Supper fellowship, to pointing people in the right direction at Feed My Sheep, our teens are models of what it looks like to serve the Lord with gladness. As we see them serving in this way, they remind us that serving the church is a privilege, something we should do eagerly and joyfully, mindful that any service to the church is a service to the Son of Man who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). That’s a reminder that the church regularly needs and one that our teenagers readily provide as we labor to fold them into the life of the church.

To Pass Down the Faith to Future Generations

This year we’ve been thinking a lot about what it means for Mount Vernon to be one family partnering with parents to show the next generation the way of Christ. Interestingly, when it speaks of passing down the faith, the Bible regularly speaks of more than one generation (e.g., Deut. 4:9–10; Ps. 78:4–8). We pass the faith to the next generation so they will, in turn, pass it on to the next. Teenagers need the church, and the church needs teenagers.

It is my prayer that as we labor to intentionally integrate our teens into the life of MVBC—lovingly encouraging them to make the faith their own, listening to them and taking them seriously, modeling what it looks like to live the Christian life, and receiving the blessings that their presence provides—by God’s grace, in the years to come they’ll do the same, and generation after generation will set their hope in God (Ps. 78:7).

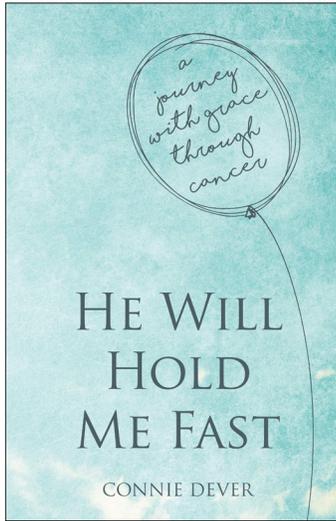
– Dustin Butts

¹ Josh Hussung, “Teens Are Lonelier Than Ever, but Parents and Churches Can Help,” *Facts & Trends* (blog), April 10, 2019, <https://factsandtrends.net/2019/04/10/teens-are-lonelier-than-ever-but-parents-and-churches-can-help/>.

² Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Barna, 2018), 71.

He Will Hold Me Fast

Written by Connie Dever



Blindsided by a cancer diagnosis, Connie Dever began blogging about her daily struggles. After three years in this trial, her friend compiled the blog posts into, *He Will Hold Me Fast*. In this book, Connie displayed how to endure suffering in three ways.

Connie's first reaction was dependence on God. She immediately cried out, "No, God, I can't do this," and knew it was more than she could handle. She learned to "wait, and endure and trust herself to doctors and to the God who answers prayers." Connie felt out

of control and abandoned by God, even though she had known the Lord for forty-five years and believed His Word and promises. God brought Scripture to her mind that said "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 5:5), and He "is able to do far more abundantly... according to the power at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). This reminded her that everything depended on Him, and He supplied the power!

Connie demonstrated her need for God by leaning into the body of Christ for prayer and support. She saw the power of the prayers of the saints as God sustained her thought this trial. She also referenced the writings of many Christian authors that encouraged her with sound doctrine regarding suffering. Her hope was in God who says that whoever comes to Him, in repentance and faith, He will never cast out (John 6:37). Though her posts and this book Connie has likewise encouraged believers and unbelievers to see their need for God, who will hold them fast.

By God's grace, Connie was very transparent about her sin and weaknesses in this book. "Those who put their lives in His hands are just another chance for Him to retell His story in us." Connie's story shows that we can be confident in God, not ourselves, to hold us fast. She knew that "He will never leave me but carry me all the way home!" Connie endured suffering by depending on God, leaning in to the body of Christ, and speaking honestly about her trial. Ultimately Connie's life displays that we can have "victory in suffering that leads to the final Glory!" Praise God for this book that has been so helpful to me. I highly recommend reading it!

— RECOMMENDED BY LINDA SANFORD

Excerpts From the Book

1

"There are days when I know and live in His dependence and others when I ignore my need to rely upon Him. I guess that means my hard days are really my best days in some ways. They are God's insistent reminders that I must start with Him and finish and live in between."

— August 14, 2014, pg. 73

2

"Dependence looks like prayer – worship of Him, confessing our sins, thanking Him, and asking Him for what we need. It looks like God's Word – knowing it, reading it, living off of it."

— August 8, 2015, pg. 228

3

"Repentance is a dying to self, letting go of what you are clinging to, and admitting it isn't working... The goal of repentance is to remind me who God is and how much He loves me and to take me to the cross and straight to his arms. And that is where the party begins... I am forgiven, and my relationship with God is restored."

— Excerpt from *Craving Grace* by Ruthie Delik,
January 30, 2015, pg. 147

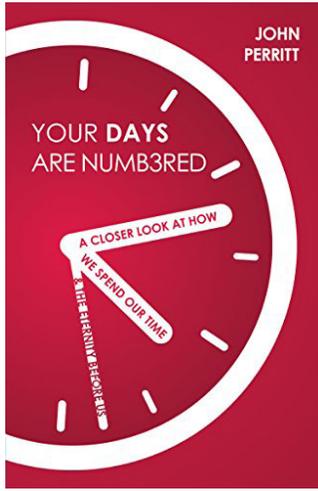
4

"Joy is knowing everything is going to be OK, even when everything isn't OK or might not be OK. And, it is a gift from the Holy Spirit. It has to be. In midst of struggling as I wait for the doctor's appointment tomorrow, God is kindly giving me tastes of joy today. I'm sure your prayers are part of this gift."

— September 30, 2015, pg. 240

Your Days Are Numbered

Written by John Perritt



Your Days are Numbered by John Perritt is, at its core, a book focused on how believers should have an eternal perspective that drives how we act in our day-to-day lives. Perritt begins by exploring how we typically spend our time then unpacks the Biblical practices that help to guide us each day. Finally, he outlines a few practical steps we can take to grow in being better stewards of our time.

In reading this book there were a few key ideas that were especially helpful.

Perritt exhorts believers to examine how they spend their free time. If it is only ever spent on things that have no spiritual significance, we should take that as a sign that we may need to revisit our priorities and re-align them to an eternal goal.

Second, we need to make sure that we treat Sunday as the Lord's day and not just the day we go to church. There should be intentionality and purpose to what we do and how we spend our time, not just on Sunday but also the day before as we prepare to worship. A great example that Perritt gave was his family's practice of planning what they would wear the evening before and getting to bed at a reasonable hour, as it allowed them to be both refreshed and unhurried in their preparation for church.

Lastly, Perritt discussed that, with an eternal perspective, believers must remember that God is God and we are not and nothing we have is our own but instead belongs, wholly, to the Lord. While we most often relate this truth to financial resources, Perritt wonderfully reminds us that our time is *even more* valuable and should be treated with *even more* care.

While many believers today could benefit from a cursory outline of this book, there are two groups of people, in particular, who I think would benefit from it most. First, those who feel as if they are so busy they have no time for anything else. This book will encourage them to reexamine where the things they are doing have eternal significance. Secondly, this book would help those who feel they are not doing enough or are not as disciplined as they ought to be. Perritt practically walks through how our time can be better spent. For people struggling with the sense that they are not doing enough, this book holds tangible instruction.

– RECOMMENDED BY ALEX FREEMON

Excerpts From the Book

1

"We try, so hard, to save our lives by filling them with so many things. So many pleasures, but we have full lives that are wasted"

– pg.36

2

"When we are still and quiet we begin to reflect on matters of great significance. We are reminded of who God is, who we are before Him and that our days are passing us by. We must be seeking and guarding days of quiet reflection, because they remind us of the fact that our days are numbered."

– pg.82

3

"If our recreational pursuits become our one place of peace and comfort, instead of making us long for the new creation, they can quickly become idolatry."

– pg.101

4

"We will one day stand face to face with the God of all creation. Let the awe of that Great Day shape your today."

– pg.145

NOVEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

November 1	Hebrews 3	November 16	Ezekiel 47–48
November 2	Matthew 5:17–20	November 17	Ezekiel 47
November 3	Matthew 5:17–20	November 18	Genesis 12:1–9
November 4	Ezekiel 33	November 19	Genesis 15
November 5	Ezekiel 34–35	November 20	Genesis 17:1–14
November 6	Ezekiel 36	November 21	Romans 4
November 7	Ezekiel 37	November 22	Galatians 3:1–18
November 8	John 10:1–18	November 23	John 8:31–47
November 9	Ezekiel 38–39	November 24	Genesis 12:1–9
November 10	Ezekiel 33:11–14	November 25	Genesis 2
November 11	Ezekiel 40–41	November 26	Genesis 3
November 12	Ezekiel 42–43	November 27	1 Peter 3
November 13	Ezekiel 44–45	November 28	Song of Solomon 4
November 14	Ezekiel 46	November 29	Ephesians 5:15–33
November 15	Ephesians 2:11–22	November 30	Proverbs 31

***Sermons in bold**

TAKE UP & READ



2019 HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

As we enter the holiday season, there will be many events and changes to the regular schedule. More information on each of these events can be found in the bulletin, Courier, and online at mvbchurch.org

Tuesday, November 26 6:30 pm Thanksgiving Service
Come early for dinner. Childcare is available for children ages three and under.

Saturday, December 7 10:00 am Women's Christmas Tea
All women are invited to a Christmas Tea. Tickets are \$10 (plus a processing fee).

Saturday, December 7 6:00 pm Youth Christmas Party
The youth Christmas party will be at the home of David & Charity Roe.

Wednesday, December 18 6:15 pm Carols & Cocoa
We will gather to sing Christmas carols. Come early for a fellowship dinner.

Sunday, December 22 10:30 am Sunday Morning Worship
No Sunday School or Evening Service. There will still be Little Explorers.

Tuesday, December 24 5:00 pm Christmas Eve Service
Childcare is available for children ages 3 and under.

Wednesday, December 25 6:30 pm No Evening Service

Sunday, December 29 10:30 am Sunday Morning Worship
No Sunday School or Evening Service. There will still be Little Explorers.

Wednesday, January 1 6:30 pm No Evening Service

Church Office Closed All Day

The church office will be closed on the following days:

Wednesday – Friday, November 27 – 29

Friday – Wednesday, December 20 – 26

Tuesday & Wednesday, December 31 – January 1





Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH