

## **SMALL GROUPS: WHAT TO DO WITH OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH?**

**By Bob Young**

Over 30 years have passed since I attended my first small groups conference. Small group efforts have undergone a lot of changes since the early 1990s. One question has persisted -- what to do with the children and the youth.

Children are important to God. Children are important to the church. Children are curious, questioning, at times insightful. Children see what adults do not see. We adults can learn much. The question remains: what to do with children and youth in small groups.

In the early days of small groups, children and youth usually attended small group with their parents. Sometimes children were cared for in a separate room, at times by the youth. The recommended option, the one I preferred and advanced, the one that was more difficult, was to incorporate everyone into an intergenerational small group meeting and study. Some of my fondest memories are of adults sitting in a circle with six or eight children on the floor in the middle of the circle—everyone, including children, sharing in the conversation.

Parents are the primary teachers of biblical truth to children. The church partners with parents in nurturing their children in the biblical foundations of faith in Christ.

I see three levels. First, nurture begins in the home. Parents should nurture their children daily. Parents should not expect the church to do all the nurturing. Second, the church provides nurture through graded Bible classes and activities. Finally, the church provides nurture in larger settings such as congregational worship. Small intergenerational groups are an often-overlooked opportunity for the church to nurture the faith of our youth.

Why encourage children and youth to attend a small group with their parents? They can observe and experience a Christian lifestyle modeled by “aunts, uncles, and grandparents” in the Lord. Most children will gladly participate in an intergenerational study if they are included. Children will hear specific prayers for those they know and care about. There is a great power when children see others pray and share what God is doing in their lives. Intergenerational relationships build a child’s faith, self-esteem, and love for Christ.

When children and youth do not have parents who are connected to the local church, the local church can shine most brightly in small groups. The children who attend small groups with their parents have friends with little or no spiritual guidance. Including these young friends will reap rewards. Non-believing parents are more likely to come to small groups. Be prepared to watch God do great things!