

2021-2022

PARENT

HAND BOOK





HEY THERE!

So you're the parent of a teenager, huh? Congratulations! You have one of the most important (and sometimes the most difficult) jobs on the planet.

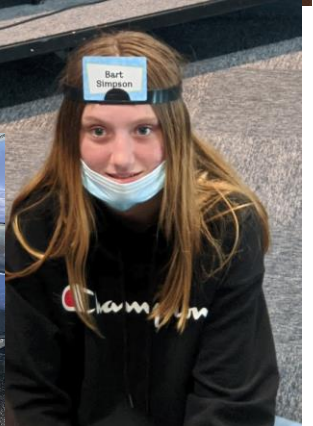
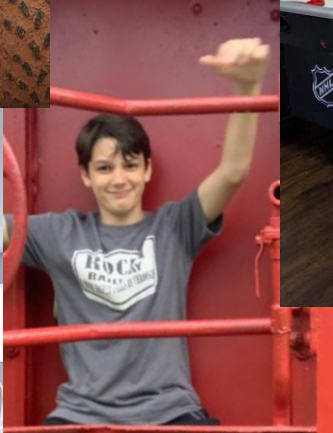
We know your job isn't always easy, but here's what we want you to know: we're here to help, in any way we can. Sure, we're a "youth" ministry, but teenagers aren't the only people we care about. We care about you too.

No matter how connected (or not connected) you are with our church, this Parent Handbook will show you some of the ways we're trying to care for your kid and serve you at the same time.

Thanks for letting us be another voice in the life of your teenager. Your trust and partnership means a lot to us.

We can't wait to see what this year has in store!





WHAT'S INSIDE

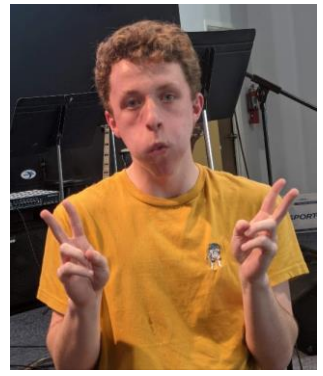
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THE BASICS

OUR STAFF



Cliff Ford

Student Pastor

(417) 455-6370

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Professional cat herder, babysitter, hardcore devil stomping ninja, and a disciple making disciple of Jesus.



Stephanie Ford

Student Pastor's Wife

(417)455-6470

stephanieford4201@gmail.com

Cliff's better half. Works with the girls and keeps Cliff in line.

Let us know if there's anything you ever need. We're here to help!





OUR MINISTRY

OUR WEEKLY PROGRAMS

SMALL GROUPS | SUNDAYS AT 11AM

Our students meet every Sunday for small group bible study.

AFTER SCHOOL | WEDNESDAY AT 3:00 PM

The youth building is open for our students to hangout, or do homework until worship starts. We eat dinner at 5:00PM

THE RIVER | WEDNESDAYS AT 6:00PM

Our students meet every Wednesday for fun, worship, teaching, and small groups.

OUR ENVIRONMENTS

There are three environments for teenagers in our ministry. Each one is designed to strategically invite teenagers on a journey into deeper relationships with their peers, leaders, and Jesus. Each environment is designed with every teenager in mind.

EVENTS: Throughout the year, we'll host several big events designed to help teenagers connect with their peers and small group leaders. Events like lock-ins, Nerfgun battles, camps and retreats. Events are often the environment where teenagers will walk into our ministry for the very first time.

WEEKLY PROGRAMS: Our weekly programs happen every single week. They're designed to help teenagers grow in four key areas. (We'll get to those in a minute.)

SMALL GROUP: Small groups are the most important part of what we do. They happen every week in our programs, but the relationships built in small groups extend outside the walls of our church. They're designed to connect every teenager with a consistent trustworthy adult and community of their peers.



OUR BIG WIN

It's hard sometimes to know when you're winning with teenagers, you know? Like, is anything we're teaching actually sinking in? Are teenagers really growing in their faith? That's why we decided to go ahead and define the big win for our ministry. It's the one thing that we, as a ministry, want to achieve. It's the goal we want to keep in mind at all times. And it's what motivates and guides everything we do. It goes like this...

WE WIN WHEN A TEENAGER TAKES A STEP TOWARD OWNING THEIR FAITH.

TAKING A STEP

Now, we say "takes a step" for a reason. It's because there's no finish line or certificate of completion when it comes to spiritual growth. Instead, spiritual growth is a journey (a life-long journey) and no two journeys are identical. That's why our big win doesn't have anything to do with a specific skill or achievement. Instead, we win anytime we see a teenager take a single step closer to owning their faith.

OWNING THEIR FAITH

What, exactly, does it look like for a teenager to own their faith? Well, we believe there are four things that both lead to, and are a result of, spiritual growth. We call these four things our four spiritual habits.

1. **SPEND TIME WITH GOD:** This is an obvious one, right? Sometimes it's the only spiritual habit we can name. After all, isn't "growing spiritually" synonymous with "spending time with God"? Well, not exactly, but it's still pretty important. After all, if teenagers are ever going to make their faith their own, they've got to start spending time with God on their own. It means opening the Bible on their own, having conversations with God on their own, and discovering how they best connect with God through worship on their own.
2. **SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS:** Engaging in healthy community can, and should, be a spiritual habit we help our students develop. But "healthy community" doesn't just mean hanging out with Christians. This spiritual habit is about growing in Christlike relationships with everyone.
3. **USE THEIR GIFTS:** Teenagers need to know that God made them unique, and special, and with really specific gifts, talents, passions, and resources. Then they need to use those gifts to love God, love others, and influence the world around them. Because when teenagers begin to discover who God made them to be, and then use their unique identity to love both God and others, they grow.
4. **SHARE THEIR STORY:** Teenagers need to learn how to talk about God. Sharing your story is the spiritual habit of making faith a regular, everyday, go-to topic of conversation in our lives. Because when we talk about God and His place in our story (or, more accurately, our place in His story), it helps us believe, helps us understand, and helps us take ownership of our own faith.

We count it as a win whenever a student takes a step toward owning their faith by practicing one, or maybe even all four, of these spiritual habits.



DISCIPLING TEENAGERS

Do you know the last thing that Jesus said to His followers while he was on earth? Some people call it The Great Commission: “Go and make disciples.” Duplicate yourselves. Go and make more of you. Take your faith and pass it on to someone else. When we talk about helping teenagers begin to own their faith, we’re really just talking about discipleship. So what is discipleship? Here are three thoughts...

DISCIPLESHIP IS ABOUT LIVING, NOT LEARNING

Rather than asking, “What can we teach a teenager about God?” we ask, “How can we help a teenager live out their faith?” It’s not just about teaching them about Jesus - it’s about modeling what faith in Jesus looks like. That’s why our small groups spend time together outside of church. Because discipleship isn’t taught in a classroom - it’s modeled in everyday life.

DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS IN COMMUNITY

In the Gospels, you don’t really see Jesus doing one-on-one discipleship. That’s because discipleship happens best in a community of people. That’s why we focus so much energy on getting teenagers plugged into consistent small groups, why we emphasize the role of parents and families, and why we surround teenagers with tons of Jesus followers. Because discipleship takes all of us!

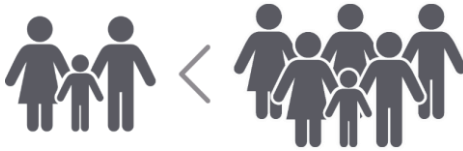
DISCIPLESHIP IS A PROCESS

Discipleship is never really complete because learning to live out our faith is a life-long process. And because we know discipleship takes time, we want to put people in the lives of teenagers who are in it for the long-haul. That’s why our small group leaders don’t bail on their teenagers after a few months, but stick with them for several years - because it’s a process.

ENGAGING WITH SMALL GROUP LEADERS

As a parent, you are making a huge impact in your teenager's life. The impact you're making is far more significant than any impact we, their church, could ever hope to make. You are the most important voice in your kid's life, both now and for a lifetime.

But in all of our time caring for teenagers, we've learned something really important. (We drew a picture to help you remember it.) We believe that, in every teenager's life, this is true: your best chance at influencing your teenager's faith and future is to recruit other adults to influence them with you.



Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, authors of *Sticky Faith*, encourage parents to “develop a sticky web of relationships” for their kids. We love that idea!

Especially during the teenage years, when your kid is beginning to pull away from you in their search for independence, we want to come alongside you by creating a pool of trustworthy adults who can help you influence your teenager.

That's why our ministry is so committed to small groups. Small groups are about more than just good discussions. Small groups exist to connect your kid with an adult you can trust so you can better influence their faith and future.

So, this year, engage with your kid's small group leader. They can be a powerful ally for you and your family!



THE FINE PRINT

SAFETY GUIDELINES

The safety of your teenager is a priority for our ministry, so we wanted to get you in the loop on how we plan to care for and protect them.

WE SCREEN VOLUNTEERS

Before any volunteer is permitted to serve with us, they undergo a rigorous application and interview process, including a criminal background check.

WE SET BOUNDARIES

We have set a number of guidelines for our youth ministry staff and volunteers. As a parent, you can help us make sure your child is well-cared for by helping us maintain these boundaries.

- No staff member or volunteer should initiate a one-on-one meeting with a teenager without the knowledge and consent of you, their parents.
- No staff member or volunteer should transport a teenager in a vehicle alone. If a teenager needs a ride, we must arrange to have another adult or teenager accompany them.
- All staff members and volunteers must maintain appropriate physical boundaries with teenagers at all times.

WE REQUIRE PERMISSION SLIPS

We will ask for your consent in order for your teenager to attend any event, retreat, or gathering outside of our regular weekly program.

WE REPORT DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

Every staff member and volunteer in our ministry is a mandated reporter, which means we are legally required to report any dangerous or potentially dangerous situations immediately, including...

- If a student is being harmed, neglected, or abused.
- If a student is harming or abusing someone else.
- If a student is harming or at risk of harming themselves.

WE ARE ALWAYS AVAILABLE

If you ever have a concern about your teenager's care or safety, please reach out to us. We're just a phone call or email away!



CONTACT US

LET'S STAY IN TOUCH

This year, we'd love to stay in conversation with you. Here are a few ways we're hoping we can keep the lines of communication open.

TEXT REMIND

We like to keep you as updated as possible on everything youth group related. In order to do that, we use Remind. It is like a group text message excepted you don't have to see anyone else's responses. You can join by texting **@thriverpa to 81010**.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We post photos, videos, and updates from our ministry each week. Follow along at . . .

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/groups/gostudentministry

YOUTUBE: The River Student Ministries

INSTAGRAM: [theriverstudent](https://www.instagram.com/theriverstudent)



THERIVERSTUDENT



YOUTUBE



FACEBOOK

Thank you again for letting us be a part of your teens spiritual growth.