



Birmingham Theological Seminary
2200 Briarwood Way
Birmingham, Alabama 35243
(205) 776-5650

PS1940 Ministry to Children, Youth, and Families Syllabus

Semester: Summer 2025

Course: PS1940 Ministry to Children,
Youth and Families

Class Meeting Dates and Times: Monday, August 4th, 2025 - 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Tuesday, August 5th, 2025 - 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Wednesday, August 6th, 2025 - 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Room: A201/Virtual Class

Professor: Dr. Ben Birdsong

Credits: 2

Email: ben@benbirdsong.com

Phone: (205) 907-6623

Course Note: This is an intensive course focusing on helping church leaders more effectively minister to children, youth, and families.

Course Description: This course is a study of the principles, methods, and materials especially appropriate for the Christian education and development of children, youth, and families in the local church.

Course Objectives: This course is an overview of the principle, methods, and approaches designed to help students to understand the biblical approach to age-group ministry in the local church.

Upon the successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Define the biblical foundation and basis for children, youth, and family ministry in the local church.
- Understand the need for intentional, theological, and relevant youth and family ministry and how current worldviews affect our approaches.
- Discover and determine methods, models, and purposes for ministry to children, youth, and families.
- Determine a direction for programming, planning, and implementing children and youth ministry in the local church with the focus on the whole family.
- Discover how to develop a leadership team and staff for children, youth, and family ministry.

Required Texts (Must Be Read Prior to the Intensive):

McGarry, Michael. *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church*. Nashville: Randall House, 2019.

Powell, Kara, Jen Bradbury, and Brad M. Griffin. *Faith Beyond Youth Group: 5 Ways to Form Character and Cultivate Lifelong Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023.

Root, Andrew. *Relationships Unfiltered: Help for Youth Workers, Volunteers, and Parents on Creating Authentic Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Required Text Selection: Please pick **one** of the following books for a book response:

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. New York: Penguin, 2024.

Lukianhoff, Greg and Jonathan Haidt. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 2018.

Recommended Texts:

Clark, Chap, ed. *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Clark, Chap, ed. *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

Cole, Cameron and Jon Neilson, eds. *Gospel Centered Youth Ministry: A Practical Guide*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.

Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Kinnaman, David and Mark Matlock. *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019.

Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016.

Robbins, Duffy. *Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples: A Small Book About a Big Idea*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

Robbins, Duffy. *The Ministry of Nurture: A Youth Worker's Guide to Discipling Teenagers*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1990.

Robbins, Duffy. *This Way to Youth Ministry: An Introduction to the Adventure*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

Root, Andrew. *Relationships Unfiltered: Help for Youth Workers, Volunteers, and Parents on Creating Authentic Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Root, Andrew. *Taking the Cross to Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Root, Andrew. *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Root, Andrew. *Unlocking Mission and Eschatology in Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Root, Andrew. *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Smith, Christian and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Smith Christian and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Course Requirements and Assessments:

In preparation for class discussion for the intensive, the entirety of *A Biblical Understanding of Youth Ministry*, *Faith Beyond Youth Group*, and *Relationships Unfiltered* should be read. These texts will serve as a foundation for our class discussions for the intensive.

All papers should be submitted in Microsoft Word format via email to ben@benbirdsong.com by midnight on the due date.

Book Critique of one of the required course texts will be a 4-5 page paper. Students will select either: *A Biblical Understanding of Youth Ministry*, *Faith Beyond Youth Group*, or *Relationships Unfiltered* as their focus text for the paper. The critique should include: (1) a brief summary and overview of the main ideas of the book, (2) your major agreements and disagreements with the authors' ideas, (3) an interaction with the strengths and weaknesses of the book, (4) a description that describes how you perceive the effectiveness of this book as a resource, and (5) a conclusion exploring how the ideas from this book can be applied in your ministry context. This critique should focus on not merely describing the books ideas but an interaction with the ideas in the book. This critique is due by the first day of class on Monday, August 4th, 2025.

Cultural Reflection Paper will be a will be a 4-5 page paper. Students will select one of the following: *The Anxious Generation* or *The Coddling of the American Mind* as their focus text for the paper. The reflection should include: (1) a brief summary and overview of the main ideas of the book, (2) your major agreements and disagreements with the authors' ideas, (3) how you have seen the ideas of the book in the children, students, and parents to which you minister, (4) a reflection of how to most effectively minister despite these cultural realities, and (5) how the ideas from this book can be applied in your ministry context to educate parents and more effectively disciple students or children. This reflection should focus on not merely describing the book's ideas but an interaction with the ideas in the book. This reflection is due by midnight on Friday, August 15th, 2025.

Interviews and Oral Report will be conducted by students interviewing 3 youth, children or family ministers from at least two different denominations and report your findings to the professor. Interviewees must not serve on the same church staff as you do, and at least one of the people interviewed must serve in a role different than the role you serve in.

For the interviews, students will ask the following questions:

1. What is your philosophy of ministry?
2. What is your strategy for ministering to church members and non-church members?
3. What does your weekly and annual programming look like for your ministry?
4. What is his or her plan for Sunday school? How is it structured? What curriculum are they using?
5. What is his or her discipleship or small group plan? What curriculum do they use?
6. To whom does this person report? How much freedom is there in planning and leading their ministry?
7. How many staff work with their children, youth, and family ministries? What are these staff member's positions? Are they full-time or part-time?
8. How many volunteer leaders are there in the ministry? What is the training and recruiting process for these volunteers?
9. What role do parents play in your ministry?
10. What are the difficulties and challenges that he or she experiences in the ministry?

Oral presentations will be scheduled via phone call or Zoom with the professor after the intensive. Oral presentations must be completed by Friday, August 22nd, 2025.

Philosophy of Ministry Paper will be a 4–5-page paper that states and biblically defends your personal philosophy of ministry for youth, children, or families. This paper should include scripture citations to demonstrate the biblical ground for your philosophy as well as ideas gained and explored throughout the class and your interviews. The philosophy of ministry paper is due by midnight on Friday, August 22nd, 2025.

Final Oral Report will be a discussion with the professor where you will present a 5–7-minute summary of your conclusions of your philosophy of ministry and how the ideas in this class have shaped/will shape your ministry. Be prepared for questions from the professor and to be able to defend your views. This will be completed after class in a one-on-one discussion with the professor via Zoom or phone call. Final oral reports must be completed by Friday, August 22nd, 2025.

Grading Weight and Comments

COURSE REQUIREMENT	GRADE WEIGHT
Book Critique	20% of Grade
Cultural Reflection Paper	20% of Grade

Interviews and Oral Report	20% of Grade
Philosophy of Ministry Paper	20% of Grade
Final Oral Report	20% of Grade

BTS Format, Style, and Writing Standards:

All research papers must be formatted in accordance with Turabian Chicago standards including the title page. All papers are to be #12 font Times New Roman and Double-Spaced. Any paper not conforming to these standards will automatically be dropped one letter grade. Please see the BTS Turabian Style Guide for more information on turning in papers and assignments.

The BTS Turabian Style Guide and other resources are available on the BTS Writing Center webpage: <https://www.btswritingcenter.net/>

In addition, the Writing Center runs 2-3 Writing Workshops every semester. They are very helpful and highly recommended.

BTS Plagiarism / Generative AI Policy

Unless clearly directed by the instructor, the students should submit their own work, independent of artificial intelligence tools. Use of generative AI to write papers or to write significant portions of assignments is considered an ethical violation of our Student Code of Conduct and to be a violation of general academic integrity, which could result in a zero on the assignment and/or a lowered letter grade for the course by the professor. If determined to be an egregious violation, it could lead to further sanctions administered through the Academic Committee, including expulsion from BTS.

Course Schedule:

DAY	DATE	AGENDA/TOPIC
Monday	8/4	Biblical Theology of Family Ministry History of Ministry to Next Generations in the Church Philosophies and Approaches to Youth, Children, and Family Ministry Ownership/Discipleship Strategies for Ministry Developing a Ministry Philosophy
Tuesday	8/5	Family Discipleship Effective Approaches to Holistic Family Ministry in the Local Church Discipleship of Children and Youth Relational Ministry with Children and Youth

DAY	DATE	AGENDA/TOPIC
Wednesday	8/6	Building and Leading a Ministry Team of Volunteers Problem with Students Walking Away from the Faith Hot Topics in Youth, Children, and Family Ministry Understanding Generation Z and Generation Alpha

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to demonstrate punctuality and attend all class sessions. Any absences should be communicated to the professor beforehand. Students may miss up to three classes with impunity.

Class Policies and Procedures:

- BTS highly recommends using handwritten note taking methods in class and keeping computer usage to a minimum.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.
- All assignments must be submitted by email by 11:59 (CDT/CST) on the due date.
- Late assignments will incur a -3-point deduction per weekday after the due date, except in cases of emergency communicated to the professor.
- Missed tests/exams may only be made up with an excused absence, preferably in advance of class. Excused absence tests/exams must be made up before the final day of the semester.

Video Conference Policies and Procedures:

- Please utilize the BTS “Best VC (Video Conference) Practices” information for the course.
- Laptops/Desktops are the preferred method of attending a video conference course. Information will be shared on the screen, so phones will be less useful.
- In Video Conference, it is preferable for the student to keep their video on (when possible) so that students and faculty may engage with one another. Extended periods of dark screen will result in follow-up and potential removal from class.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.

Course Bibliography / Extended Bibliography

Burns, Jim and Jeremy Lee. *Pass It On: Building a Legacy of Faith for Your Children through Practical and Memorable Experiences*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015.

A practical guide for parents on how to use rites of passages and spiritual markers in the ongoing discipleship of their children.

Clark, Chap. *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.

This book presents Clark's research study from spending extended time with students in a public high school exploring students' needs and struggles and offering how youth

workers can engage students and point them to hope in Jesus.

Clark, Chap, ed. *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

With a variety of authors, this book offers a collection of essays about how churches should approach leading emerging generations to be a part of the life of the local church.

Clark, Chap, ed. *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

This work presents five different approaches to student ministry from proponents of each approach and responses from other authors to the positives and negatives of each approach.

Cole, Cameron and Jon Neilson, eds. *Gospel Centered Youth Ministry: A Practical Guide*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.

This book seeks to present a holistic approach to a gospel-centered youth ministry with multiple authors addressing different challenges and areas of focus in bringing a gospel-centered approach to student ministry in the local church.

Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

In response to Christian Smith's research in *Soul Searching*, Dean seeks to explore how the views of students in Smith's study on faith and religious beliefs are simply what parents have disciplined them to believe.

Elmore, Tim. *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future*. Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010.

As an expert on generational trends, Dr. Elmore presents a helpful book on challenges with the current generation of students and thoughts on how parents and youth workers can helpfully lead and shepherd them.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. New York: Penguin, 2024.

The latest research on mental illness, anxiety, and its effect on the next generations.

Kimmel, Michael. *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men: Understanding the Critical Years Between 16 and 26*. New York: Harper, 2008.

This book explores the developmental and cultural challenges that 16- to 26-year-old men face growing up in today's world.

Kinnaman, David and Mark Matlock. *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow*

Jesus in Digital Babylon. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019. This recent work seeks to explore ways that churches can help effectively disciple emerging generations to live for Christ in today's culture.

Lee, Amy Fenton. *Leading a Special Needs Ministry: A Practical Guide to Including Children and Loving Families.* Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2016.

Fenton presents a great resource full of ideas for churches in ministering effectively to families with children with special needs.

Lukianhoff, Greg and Jonathan Haidt. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure.* Baltimore: Penguin Books, 2018.

This book offers compelling research and rebuke for the culture's approach to parenting and teaching children and its long-term effects.

McGarry, Michael. *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church.* Nashville: Randall House, 2019.

An introduction to the biblical foundations for youth and family ministry in the local church.

Mueller, Walt. *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

Mueller is an expert on youth culture, and he presents a helpful volume on engaging student's cultural views with the truth of the gospel.

Mueller, Walt. *The Space Between: A Parent's Guide to Teenage Development.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

This is a good introduction to teenage development and is a helpful resource for parents and youth workers.

Parr, Steve R. And Tom Crites. *Why They Stay: Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Investments That Keep Children and Teens Connected to the Church for a Lifetime.* Bloomington: WestBow, 2015.

This book explores how churches have effectively sought to engage and keep emerging generations connected and involved in the church after high school.

Powell, Kara and Steven Argue. *Growing With: Every Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019.

This is a helpful book that encourages parents with strategies and approaches for discipleship of their kids as they grow into the teenage and emerging adolescent years.

Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016.

Based on research of churches who have effectively ministered to students, the Fuller Youth Institute team offers strategies that emerged from their research that can be applied to a local church ministry setting.

Powell, Kara, Jen Bradbury, and Brad M. Griffin. *Faith Beyond Youth Group: 5 Ways to Form Character and Cultivate Lifelong Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023.

The latest research on churches and ministries who help develop life-long disciples in youth group graduates and applications and best practices for churches in student discipleship.

Powell, Kara E. and Chap Clark. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith into Your Kids*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

An effective resource for parents to help them embrace strategies to disciple their kids for a long-term faith.

Powell, Kara. *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

A follow up resource to *Sticky Faith*, this book helps parents embrace more ideas on how to disciple their kids.

Robbins, Duffy. *Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples: A Small Book About a Big Idea*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

Robbins presents an important work on how to practically and effectively design a ministry that builds disciples in and through the local church.

Robbins, Duffy. *The Ministry of Nurture: A Youth Worker's Guide to Discipling Teenagers*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1990.

An introduction to discipleship and building a discipling ministry for youth workers.

Robbins. Duffy. *This Way to Youth Ministry: An Introduction to the Adventure*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

A textbook that introduces the practice and strategy of youth ministry in the context of the local church.

Root, Andrew. *Relationships Unfiltered: Help for Youth Workers, Volunteers, and Parents on Creating Authentic Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

This work describes the importance of relationships in ministering to emerging generations and how to thoughtfully and biblically approach building relationships with students.

Root, Andrew. *Taking the Cross to Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Part of Root's four-part series on theology in youth ministry, this volume seeks to address teaching the cross and gospel to students.

Root, Andrew. *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Part of Root's four-part series on theology in youth ministry, this volume seeks to address teaching theology to students.

Root, Andrew. *The End of Youth Ministry?: Why Parents Don't Really Care About Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do About It*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020.

A current reflection on the status of youth and family ministry and how churches can effectively minister in today's world.

Root, Andrew. *Unlocking Mission and Eschatology in Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Part of Root's four-part series on theology in youth ministry, this volume seeks to address teaching missions and eschatology to students.

Root, Andrew. *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Part of Root's four-part series on theology in youth ministry, this volume seeks to address teaching the Bible effectively in student ministry.

Sales, Nancy Jo. *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2016.

This is a researched study that follows the lives of several teenage girls regarding their decisions and choices around sexuality, life choices, and religion.

Smith, Christian and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

This is the definitive study on youth and religion in which Smith determines that the religious beliefs of students are moralistic therapeutic deism rather than a biblical faith.

Smith Christian and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

This is Smith's follow up study to *Soul Searching* with a focus on the changing beliefs of students as they move into college and early adulthood.

Tripp, Paul David. *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles that Can Radically Change Your Family*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.

Tripp presents a very helpful resource for parents seeking to effectively disciple their children in a gospel-centered home.

Twenge, Jean M. *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy - and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017.

This book is a compelling look at technology and its effects on kids and their development.

White, James Emery. *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017.

An introduction to the characteristics of Generation Z and strategies on how to effectively minister to them.

GRADING CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

A to A-	B to B-	C to C-	D to D-
Correct spelling and grammar/punctuation	Minor errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation	Multiple errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation per page	Difficult to read due to English writing errors
Smooth writing that provides for effective and efficient reading	Writing is acceptable, but not as organized and coherent	Writing is not smooth, sometimes confusing and inconsistent	Writing lacks clarity, focus, structure, and is incoherent
Person and format are proper for assignment	Person and format are inconsistent	Person and format are not appropriate	Person and format are totally inappropriate
Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriately used, cited, and clearly supports main argument	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriate but need more depth and use of critical thinking	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are inadequate for main argument and do not reflect understanding	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are improperly used, over used, under used, or cited in error
Paper completely conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper generally conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper somewhat conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper does not conform to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>

BTS Outcomes Evaluation

Outcome	Rank	Rational (one sentence)
Scripture	5	Students will engage with scripture and understand a biblical approach to ministry to families and next generations.
Reformed Theology	3	Students will understand a reformed approach to family ministry.
Local Church	5	Students will gain a greater understanding local church ministry and different approaches to age group ministry.
Wisdom	5	Students will grow in their personal wisdom and character development as they wrestle with their own philosophy of ministry.
Discipleship	5	Students will grow in their own discipleship methods as the class explores a biblical view of discipleship.
Communication	5	Students will grow in their communication skills as they write research and response papers and complete oral reports with the professor.
Worldview	5	Students will grow in their understanding of a biblical worldview as they learn how cultural challenges effect ministry to the next generation.
Leadership	5	Students will grow as church leaders by gaining a greater understanding of how to minister to families and the next generation.