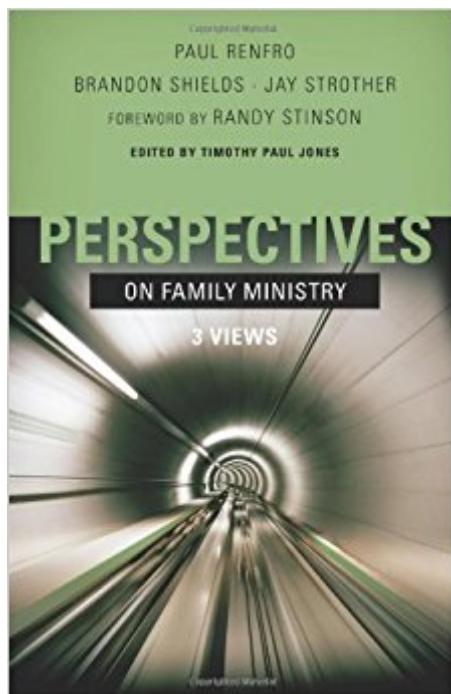


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# Perspectives On Family Ministry: Three Views



## Synopsis

In *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, Timothy Paul Jones makes the case that every church is called to some form of family ministry—but what he means by "family ministry" isn't simply one more program to add to an already-packed schedule! According to Jones, the most effective family ministries involve refocusing every church process to engage parents in the process of discipling their children and to draw family members together instead of pulling them apart. Jones sets the stage with introductory chapters on the historical contexts and foundations of family ministry. Then, three effective practitioners show clearly how your church can make the transition to family ministry. Paul Renfro (pastor of discipleship at Grace Family Baptist Church in Spring, Texas) writes in favor of Family-Integrated Ministry, where the emphasis is on intergenerational discipleship. Brandon Shields (minister to high school students at Highview Baptist Church, a multi-site megachurch in Kentucky and Indiana) supports Family-Based Ministry—ministry that organizes programs according to ages and interests but also develops intentional activities and training events to bring families together. Jay Strother (minister to emerging generations at Brentwood Baptist Church in Tennessee) prefers Family-Equipping Ministry, maintaining age-organized ministry while reorganizing the congregation to call parents to become active partners in the discipleship of their children.

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## Customer Reviews

Timothy Paul Jones is assistant professor of Leadership and Church Ministry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. His previous books include *Misquoting Truth* and *The Da Vinci Codebreaker*. His research has also earned the Baker Book House Award for theological studies.

B&H's Perspectives Series is a joy to read. Unlike other book series, their books don't limit the discussion to theological differences in Evangelical Christianity (and there are many), but also extend the discussion to include various differences in ministry philosophy. One of their most recent books is a discussion about the ever-evolving landscape of youth ministry philosophy. Each view comes from a Baptist perspective, and each perspective has its foundation in a variety of "Youth Ministry pioneers" from previous decades. Each author builds upon this foundation. Before my brief comment on this book, I'd like to note that there has been a renaissance in the (Southern) Baptist Church as regards to Christian education the past 20-30 years. Many SBC seminaries have created a variety of doctorate degrees in Christian education, and the level of educator coming out of these schools is changing the field of Christian education, with youth ministry as a direct beneficiary. Many of these educators are choosing (called) to work as pastors in churches, focusing on youth and families, an incredible blessing. This book is yet another product of this healthy development, pushing youth ministry into a place of greater education and professional preparation. The days of hiring a student two years removed from high school are (hopefully) over. Now to the book. Timothy Paul Jones gives a great setup to the topic in the first half of the book, then the three contributors follow in part two with very lucid and encouraging essays about how youth ministry philosophy must evolve from (only) age-segregated programmatic ministry, into a much healthier, family-focused model. Some would even argue that youth ministry be absorbed into an all-encompassing, family-structured church ministry. The "Family-Integrated Model" (Renfro) finds its ministry rhythm in simplicity and family "building blocks" as the formation of the local church. It sees itself giving greater adherence to the ancient church practice of family worship and discipleship. The "Family-Based Model" (Shields) sees the current age-segregated structuring as more-or-less appropriate, but restructures it to include an intergenerational approach to ministry. I also adhere to this model myself, though before I ever read this essay(!). This model seemed most flexible and balanced (as Shields puts it) in my opinion, along with healthy engagement in culture and evangelism. This model possesses a "missional posture" as Shields

puts it. The “Family-Equipping Model” (Strother) loves the Family-Based model, but feels it doesn’t go far enough, calling it a “shotgun approach” to family ministry. They keep age-segregated ministry, but restructure the entire church around the question, “How Do We Best Minister to Families?” The FI Model would work in some select environments, such as smaller rural communities and churches with an older history of this style of discipleship. It would crush a typical church to try to switch to this. The style of ministry also seems almost militant against other forms of youth ministry, almost feeling like this is their Gospel, because it makes them so distinct. The FB Model faces the problem of over-programming (I should know, I run a ministry like this!), as it aims to integrate the home-church in intergenerational environments. This is a weakness in family ministry because it does take students away from the family more than you might want. The FE Model does have a very admirable goal of making it all about the family structure and ministering to parents to effectively disciple their students. Admittedly, the plan would take years to implement as it is a restructuring of the entire church to fit this model of ministry. Each model has strengths and weaknesses, but, as it pertains to the greatest weakness, Brandon Shields highlights how the other models fail to possess a more flexible and balanced “missional posture.” I would agree on this. The other models feel too insular, with both FI & FE focusing on the family unit as the building blocks of the local church. Practically speaking, it also seems that the other models prioritize discipleship over evangelism, with evangelism as a byproduct of discipleship. I believe it is the other way around. Their ecclesiology also feels too neat, the church’s biological makeup is just a whole lot messier than this. Each article is excellent and worth the read. Each model engages with scripture well enough that one can see each paradigm is more based on ministry strategy than theology, as all pull from the same passages. While each contributor sees this working out in the local church quite differently, they all agree on the critical importance of creating and executing a family-focused ministry, a ministry that is not focused exclusively on youth, but includes youth. Youth ministry is a challenging field which requires not only a solid working knowledge of Christian doctrine, but an ability to build a workable ministry philosophy and execute it, engage/train students and families, mobilize volunteers and parents, carry out a large assortment of administrative tasks, all the while making ministry sustainable. This book is one of those very helpful tools in sustaining a life-long ministry for God’s Kingdom.

Perspectives on Family Ministry is a great introductory book to read on family ministry. In part one

there is a clear introduction, historical context, and foundations for family ministry. In part two the three contributors lay out their arguments, critique and respond to the other views. In the beginning Timothy Paul Jones suggests that, “The ministry models that many ministers have studied in seminaries and inherited in local churches are fundamentally flawed. As a result, well-intended ministers have attempted to pursue task in the sole context of the church that God designed to occur first and foremost in another context. That other context is the family.” This ministry model that he speaks of is one in which parents are not seen as the primary disciple maker of their children, but rather a professionally trained minister is seen as the one who is responsible for making disciples of all the children/youth. In chapter 2 we see from Scripture that the home is to be the primary context for discipleship and the parents are expected to serve as the primary disciple-makers. In chapter 3, a clear historical context for family ministry is given in which we learn about the recent invention of the teenager and how high school and age segregation are both a recent phenomenon in America as of the 40s and 50s. In chapter 4 foundations are laid for family ministry in which all the contributors agree on. The definition that is given for family ministry is, “the process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregations proclamation and practice so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as the persons primary responsible for the discipleship of their children.” There are many other foundations for family ministry on which all three perspectives given in this book agree on. In part 2, the three perspectives, Family-Integrated Ministry, Family-Based Ministry, and Family-Equipping Ministry are represented, critiqued, and responded to. This book was very useful when I was serving at a church working with middle school students. After reading the book I decided to recommend it to a couple of the pastors that I worked with. One of the pastors, after reading it, recommended the entire pastoral team read the book and said that the first part of the book alone is worth the price. I agree with my pastor and want to say at the outset that the fact that people are discussing how to do family ministry is a very good thing. I believe that all three perspectives represented in this book are good and helpful. Each perspective does have strengths and weaknesses, and none of the three perspectives alone will make disciples of your children. As a young parent I remember reading these words and being freshly convicted and feeling the weight of my role as a parent like never before:

“such a vast and serious undertaking as a child”  
discipleship is too significant to be relinquished completely to professionals. God has selected specific, ordinary people for this assignment, and these people are known as  
“Dad” and “Mom.” The primary

formation of a child. The reality of this sunk in, and I was and continue to be eager and grateful to be able to take on this weighty and noble task. I was convinced not just from reading this book but also from Scripture that this is indeed true. It is amazing how culture and tradition (or neo-tradition) affect how we have thought about the discipleship of our children. Being raised in a church where a clear pragmatic model for ministry was practiced, I really had no category for family ministry. I believe all of the models that are given in this book are a great alternative to the neo-traditional model of pragmatic/age segregated family ministry that we have seen practiced in many modern day churches. One critique that I have of the definition given for family ministry on page 40 in the book is the potential for a neglect of reaching and discipling the unconventional family in our church. For instance what do you do with the widow, single mom, or the spiritual orphan who comes to or visits your church? If everything in the congregation's proclamation and practice is focused on parents being acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as the persons primary responsible for the discipleship of their children, will these people in this category not feel awkward at best? While this definition is helpful and biblical, I believe that in the messiness of real life ministry we must strive to reach those that have been and are affected by sin and the fallenness of the world we live in. My fear is that in response to the pragmatic model some would respond by placing an over emphasis on family ministry and neglect to include those that may not have a conventional family. This critique would play into my critique for the Family-Integrated model. I know this model does not seek to neglect the unconventional family (Single-Parents, etc.) The reality is that of all the models, this one is the most extreme eliminating any age segregation. In having family ministry integrated into everything couldn't this be an unnecessary stumbling block or turn off to the single mom that visits your church? For instance if you are clearly calling fathers to disciple their kids every week wouldn't a single mom unnecessarily be made uncomfortable and or reminded of the fact that she is a single mom every week? I am not saying that churches should neglect to teach clear biblical teaching (Fathers are to lead their families and disciple their kids) but I don't see it as necessary to make that a main point in every aspect of the church's life.

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