Dedication

This book is dedicated to all of the men and women who work day in and day out with youth. It is in honor of those who do so much that is never noticed but makes such a difference for students.

If you have further questions, contact us at YOUTHMINISTRYUNLEASHED.COM. You can reach us by email or on our facebook site.

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Foreword

Youth ministry is exciting, heartbreaking, exhilarating, tedious, enjoyable and dreadful all at the same time. We get it. We have lived through and have the scars and pics to prove it. That’s why we wrote this book. We’re sharing stuff that we wish people had told us when we were had a group of our own.

Our hope is that in this book we can come alongside you, give you some tips while helping you to be more effective in what you do.

We aren’t offering any magic bullets or easy answers here but we do hope that we can get you thinking in a good direction. Hopefully we will confirm what you were already thinking and it will feel like we are saying, “You’re on the right track!”

Other times you may disagree. That’s fine too. We have tried to take into account many different situations but it could be that not every article is going to speak to your reality. We get that. In fact, if you have any questions or comments on any of the ideas here, we’d love to hear from you (maybe you’ll make it into our next book!) We know that we don’t have the market on every great idea in student ministry so we’d love to get a conversation going here. Don’t worry about offending us... we’ve worked with youth for years –nothing phases us!

We hope that you get a lot out of this book!
Preface

WE DON'T EXPECT YOU TO READ every word of this in one sitting. We hope that you will turn to the short articles that catch your eye or meet a need in the moment for you.

Flip through the pages on your e-reader and see if a title interests you. If it does, scan the subtitles, and if you’re really motivated read a few short paragraphs.

It may seem like there is no real progression from one idea to the next and that there is something random about the presentation. All we can say is that “It made sense to us at the time!”

Part of our thinking is that we wanted material that dealt with priorities and how-to’s without getting so much into youth culture or youth issues. (If you are desperate for information on these things though, we have some good content on them in our blogs.)

Another thing that we had in mind was that it was unlikely that veteran student ministry directors were going to downloading this book in droves. So, we purposely chose to write about topics that would be useful to volunteers, recent grads, and people in the first five years of youth ministry. If you’re in none of these categories thank for reading!
What Have I Got Myself Into

That was what I said my first day on the job. They gave me a cupboard under a staircase in a 200 year old church. There were rusty cans from a food drive everyone had forgotten from 10 years ago.

I dragged a chair and a Sunday School table into the dingy place and sat down. “I don’t know anything about youth ministry,” I admitted to myself and God as I sat there. “I need to read up on this!” The panic was taking hold.

I went to the Bible College across the city and checked out seven outdated books on youth work. It wasn’t great but it was a start.

Looking back I wish I had a resource like this one. Some place that I could easily access quick useful articles that focused on the questions I was trying to solve, like “why am I doing this? How do I do it right? Where should I be investing my time? How can I get help? How do I know if I’m doing a good job? Or How do I get parents on board with what I am doing!

This isn’t a how to do youth ministry in 3 easy step. We’re just providing the sign posts not the whole map. We hope that they will help point you in the right direction as you’re headed down some roads we’ve been down before…
Chapter One: Starters

Every year I am getting older (I know, what a brilliant line). But as I get older I am finding that my fitness is declining rapidly. To combat this a couple of years ago I started running. I agree with you, I was not a fan of running, but I am a fan of training for a race. My wife and I finished our first half marathon this past summer within our goal time. Now I am starting to train for a full marathon.

As anyone who knows me would say, I am not an elite athlete. In fact I don’t even consider myself an average athlete anymore. However, running has taught me some key lessons that I think can help anyone that works in youth ministry.

Lesson #1 – Goals are key
I would rather get a root canal than to run three times a week just to stay in shape. However, if I sign up to run a half marathon and have the goal to do it in under 2 hours I am out there running. Goals are powerful motivators, but we do not set enough of them in our youth ministries. What are your goals this coming year?

- how many baptisms do you want to see?
- what students do you want to connect with one to one?
- what key biblical principles do you want your students to internalize?
- how many parents do you want to do coffee with?

**Lesson #2 – A plan is necessary**

It is one thing wanting to run a half marathon when you can barely make it around the block and another to make that goal a reality. I had a four month plan that had specific runs and distances each week. What is your plan to accomplish your goal? I often hear youth workers say they want to reach unbelieving students with the gospel. This is a great goal, but when I ask them what their plan is, I get blank stares and you can hear crickets in the background. What is your 3, 6, and 12 month plan to accomplish your goals. Too many youth workers have wonderful God sized goals but no plan to see them accomplished.

**Lesson #3 – Perseverance is needed**

It is winter right now and I am supposed to go for a run. I don’t want to because it is cold outside and I would rather be warm, sit on my coach and watch football. Sticking to the plan in order to accomplish a goal takes perseverance. There are days when you
want to take it easy but you must persevere. I set running goals with my wife so we can push each other. Who is a ministry partner (spouse, senior pastor, youth leadership team) that can help you persevere when you feel like going easy on your goals?

I am convinced that even the most out of shape person can run long distances when they set the goal, make a plan and persevere. Imagine if these same principles were applied to your youth ministry. I truly believe that you would be blown away with the results! What is a goal you have for your ministry this year?

One of the best ways to grow your group is to stop losing kids. And since every student is precious to God we really don’t want to lose a single one. Here are 3 simple practical ways to make sure that kids keep coming back to youth.

**Make immediate Connections**
Leith Anderson in his book “A church for the 21st Century” teaches that people are like lego pieces with about 8 possible connections. If a student does not make a positive connection to another youth, a group of youth or to a leader in the first few weeks they will not be coming back. Many groups use a registration system to track new comers but a phone call from the youth pastor that week or the next probably won’t be enough to get them connected.

Each new student must become the responsibility of one leader in your group. That leader needs to connect students to other new students (students who have been at your group since they were 11 are unlikely to adopt this new person). Leaders need to be lego builders who are helping to connect students to other students. If this does not happen a leader will need to take that student under their wing for a weeks until eventually they make a friend.

**Follow Up Absentees Right Away**
During hockey, or volleyball season, summer holidays, or exams, students can miss a lot of youth meetings. Does anyone miss them? Groups that have students assigned to a leader who calls students every week can keep the connection to the group alive. When a family gets out of the habit of dropping off kids at youth it is going to take some work to get them back in the habit again. Weekly calls from a leader make a difference. Recently a church in Edmonton put all of the adult leaders on the church phones from 4-6 pm on a Friday. The results were remarkable! Besides all of the prayer, counseling, and encouragement that took place on the phones the youth room started filling up early before start time and kids who had been away for weeks showed up.

**Make Invitations**

Do you expect kids to just come back week after week? Why? Because they are supposed to? In a perfect world that would be the case but most of us in ministry recognize that our world is anything but perfect. That is why we need to keep calling kids back by promoting activities, events but more importantly inviting kids back to youth. Recently I reread the story of the Good Shepherd going over fields and hills to find a lost sheep. (Luke 15:1-5) The Shepherd could have said “We are right here whenever you want to come back –and remember it is you
who left – we didn’t make you leave!” Many groups have lists of inactive kids who used to come to the youth group. Going the extra mile to invite them back to a Christmas Banquet, a retreat, a mall hunt, car smash, or games night tells a youth that they are still considered members of the youth group no matter what they are up to.

If kids knew that they were truly welcomed, accepted, and missed when they are not there, it is likely they will be there more often and get a lot more out of your group.

A Youth Ministry Rant about Lack of Depth

We have a problem in our youth ministries. Actually it is a problem with us youth workers. The problem is that we like results. Now results in and of themselves are not bad. The problem is that we are drawn to these results like a fish to that worm on the hook. We want it so bad and it is not until it is too late that we realize that we should have been chasing something else.
My problem is that we will do anything for those results, within reason, and the odd time outside of reason. We will bribe, guilt and manipulate students to come to youth. But if we don’t go that far then we will worry more about what the students want that will make them like us or our ministry. Or probably the most subtle but dangerous problem is that we become more concerned with how things look, style, than really anything else.

What we need are youth workers that are more committed to depth in their lives and their ministries.

Here is something we all need to continually develop in order to dig into the depth required for ministering to students.
**Prayer.**

I will be totally honest, I do not understand all of the mystery that I think surrounds prayer.

- Why do we have to pray for things when God knows everything?
- Why does God answer certain prayers and not others?
- How big of an impact do my prayers really have?

However there are two things that I do know. The Bible says that we should pray and when I do pray I seem to dig a little deeper into the depths of what God wants for me and my ministry.

Here is another little secret about me, I find praying to be difficult. It is not my natural instinct. And when I do decide to do it I find it is like going for a long run, difficult. Here is one idea that a friend told me he did. Each day write the name of one of your students on a sticky note. Now take that sticky note and put it on your office phone or on your computer screen. Every time you see it say a prayer for that student. Think if you did this every work day. On average you are looking at 220-240 days. Think of how many students you could pray for. What kind of depth would occur in your life and your student’s life if this occurred?

Here is another suggestion. Every single time you get together with your leaders pray. Please do not mistake this as a token little prayer to open up a meeting. What I am saying is take 10-15 minutes and ask all the leaders to share what they see and hear is going on among the students. After hearing the good, the bad and the ugly about the students begin to thank God for the good
and intercede for the bad and ugly. Foster an attitude with your leaders that there is lots of good things we can do but nothing with bring more depth then praying for the ministry and the students.

I crave for the day when we are surrounded by youth ministries and youth workers that are known for their depth.

What are some ways that you strive for depth?

**GETTING STARTED**

**He sat at his clean desk on his first day at the church.** A white sheet stared up at him from the desk, like the eye of a Cyclops. “Now what am I supposed to do?” he thought in a George-Costanza-ish moment. “I have all this training, done hundreds of hours of volunteer work. But now I am overwhelmed with the enormity of the task.” Mental paralysis sets in. **Where do I start?**
There are so many variables. So much to consider when giving direction to a youth ministry but something needs to be done. It is one thing to have a general philosophy of youth ministry and quite another to implement it. Having a clear vision makes all the difference. Here are some steps for developing and inspiring vision.

**God has a will for your Group**

God has a will for your group. Yes there is a general will, that it be a loving, encouraging group that is passionate about Jesus but there is a specific will for your group. In the book of Revelation Jesus evaluates 7 churches (Rev 1-3). For each Jesus points out their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and potential problems. Business ventures take a similar look at new proposals. Part of the vision process involves evaluation.

**Evaluate the Situation**

Each group should be evaluated. What are the strengths? What are the weakness? What resources of time, money and volunteers are available? Part of the whole evaluation process also involves determining the levels of commitment of your students. If there are no core or committed students you should probably be focusing on evangelism at the outset.
Get input from others

An example of vision statement would include the conditions that you would want to change at a church. When I arrived at a church where I was to take on the responsibilities of the youth pastor, I began to evaluate even before I set foot in the office. I had long conversations with the outgoing youth pastor and sent email to the church. I did a demographic study of the city and talked to other youth pastors in the area.

Involve those who will be affected by the Vision

When I arrived at the church I began talking to the leaders, the parents and the teens. There were many questions about what kind of program that I was going to run. Since most people hate change I decided to keep running the same kinds of programs until I was further along in my evaluation.
Next I began to involve others in the evaluation/vision process. Helping others to see the needs and the opportunities began to stir up a desire to see God do new things in the group. A sense of excitement was beginning to build. Together we began to dream about what the youth ministry could be. But I knew better than to confuse vision with dreams.

**Craft a Compelling Vision Statement**

A vision is not a dream however. It is a description of the conditions that God would like to develop in the ministry. (Consider Moses motivating picture: A Land flowing with Milk and Honey) It is not a wish list or wishful thinking. It is seeing the ministry through God’s eyes for what it can be and do.

An example of a vision statement would be: To see a ministry that reaches each student at the level of their spiritual commitment. Or...To develop a ministry that targets the particular needs of early and late adolescents through developing separate Junior and Senior High Programs.

**Do you have a vision statement for your ministry?**
The Six Key Conditions for Health and Growth

Okay, now might not be the best growing season where you live but I know that with the correct conditions any youth group can begin to experience better health and growth even now. Just the same way that living things need warmth, water, sunlight, and nutrients youth groups require some essential elements to thrive. Without these elements or if your group is deficient in one of these areas, your students are not going to grow as they should. So what are these six key conditions?

1. Get Love flowing in the group.

Jesus said that the world would know that we are his disciples because of our love. Getting love flowing in very “cool” youth culture is not always easy. Students need to drop their pride and be willing to accept love as much as they are willing to express it to others. This will have to be modelled by the leaders. The more openly and effectively you are able to communicate love as a leadership team the more that students will pick up on it and adjust to the “new normal.”

2. Model a right Relationship with Jesus

A group can be fun loving but not very Christian. As one student commented after spending a year in a new youth ministry, “We
had a lot of fun but none of us got saved!” Groups can be warm and loving but if Christ is not present, the key member is missing. Unless Christ is being modeled to the students the ministry really falls short of its potential.

3. Coordinate Weekly Contact with every Kid

In adult ministry it is called “visitation.” It means being there. Students do feel important if they always have to visit the youth worker at the church and the youth worker never visits them in their home, school, or at a sports event. A part time youth pastor using time effectively can call each student in a group of thirty members once a month. Coke dates with two or three student after school work well. Lunches with students at the high school campus also work to connect with students who attend the group, frequently, seldom or never. A system of contacting every student makes a huge difference!

4. Develop a Positive Group Image

It is essential that a group has a good reputation among youth. The best way to know that youth love their group is that they want to invite their friends. Students will not want to invite friends to a group that is either boring or weird. One youth ministry veteran explains that he measures the three f’s. He wants to make sure that the there is food, fun, and friendship. At the same time, some students are coming to the group to learn. They like the feeling that they now know something knew. Others are looking for an encounter with God. Worship has become a huge part of some youth ministries with over an hour given to singing and jumping.
5. Get as many People Praying as Possible

It is not enough that the youth leader prays daily and aggressively for the needs of the youth ministry. Unless prayer begins to become a very big part of the ministry the depth of transformation in the lives of the students will be stunted. One vision statement crafted by SonLife concerning prayer is: “to enlist concerned students and adults to regularly and specifically pray for the total needs of the youth ministry resulting in a spiritual impact.’

6. Communicate the Word Creatively

Creative communication of the word involves beginning where youth are at in terms of their thoughts and interests and taking them from there to the word of God as the indispensable guide for belief and behaviour. Howard Hendricks has taught that “making the bible boring is a sin.” Communicating to youth does not mean lengthy sermons and pulpit pounding. Speaking to youth works best when it is visual, interactive, and personal. I suggest reading Speaking to Teens by Doug Fields and Duffy Robbins.
The Challenge...

These six key characteristics of healthy youth ministries are not comprehensive but they are essential. Youth groups or campus clubs that leave any of these areas unattended will find that there is something lacking in the group. Wise leaders will examine these vital signs first to see how well the ministry is doing and then move in quickly to restore the area that is lacking.
2 Vital Questions to Measure Your Success

I think a lot about success. I want to succeed in ministry. That might sound arrogant but I don’t think it is. Isn’t it a good thing to want to do the best possible job with what God has given us?

My guess is when we talk success you are thinking about one question.

“How big is your ministry?”

...or it might be a variation of that question.

“Is your ministry growing?”

I want to be clear and honest. These questions suck! They force us to do ministry based on getting students into the building. It might happen subtly, but if your question is based on numbers then numbers is what you will go after.
I think there are two better questions that we have to ask.

1. The Growth Question

A bad assumption is that if students show up to your ministry they are growing in their spiritual walk. That if they show up that they will look more like Jesus. This is a lazy way to do Youth Ministry.

Showing up is not enough. The question you need to ask is, “Are your students’ lives looking more like Jesus?”

Do they...

- read their Bibles regularly
- think less of themselves and more of others
- give of their resources
- talk about Jesus as if he is active in their lives
- pray often

The question of spiritual growth will shape how you do things and interact with your students. It will be a question that you can gage if you are succeeding or not.

2. The Outward Question

I love baptisms. One of my favourite things to do as a pastor or as someone in the congregation is be in a baptism service. It is a reminder that Jesus transforms lives. It is also a reminder that people are coming into a relationship with Jesus.

The other question you need to ask is, “Are students discovering and surrendering their lives to Jesus?”
When is the last time a student came up to you and said, “I didn’t know Jesus, but now I do.” It makes me very sad that when I am with Youth Pastors I do not hear very many stories of salvation.

**A Driving Force**

This needs to drive us. When I read the New Testament it seems that this is what drove those leaders of the church.

What must drive our ministries are the maturing of believers and the salvation of non-believers. This is the measuring stick of a successful youth ministry.
These 5 Steps Will Stop New Students from Falling Through the Cracks

What parent would ever allow their child to stay home from Jr High or Middle School because they were nervous of the big kids, didn't like change, or just wanted to stay home? Outrageous! Yet some families feel joining youth group or going to the junior high ministry is optional.

There are reasons for this but we know that for one third of early adolescents, if they do not make this connection with the youth ministry, they will never get connected. Hemorrhaging Faith study discovered that we lose 1/3 of our students at this exact spot. That is why every possible effort needs to be made by the church, the parents, and the youth ministry to ensure that no student slips through this crack.
I don’t know any group that has a 100% success rate but here are the 5 steps that effective groups make to have the highest retention rate possible:

1. **Determine who is coming up to your area of ministry**

If you run a middle school ministry then you should already have developed with some kind of relationship with students in grade five. If you group begins in grade 7 they you should make yourself familiar with all of the grade six students. You need to get an accurate list of all of the students who will be leaving the other ministry area and coming into your ministry area.

2. **A face to face meeting with students and parents**
It is wrong to assume that if you have been volunteering or employed by the church that the Sunday school parents already know you. You need to arrange a meeting with them likely on a Sunday just after church or during the Sunday school time even if this is during the church service.

All parents with a student leaving the Sunday school should be invited to the meeting where you get to know the families and explain the next step in their child’s church life. Here is a place to describe the ministry and address any fears they may have. Be sure to leave time for their questions.

3. A fun activity bonding kids with each other, older students, and leaders

Some groups hold an event at the end of the school year for students coming up to the next area of ministry. Some do bowling, other go on an outing to an amusement park, water slides or a
similar event that will run long enough to get to know the students.

This may see extravagant but my wife and I visited each of the students in their home to give them a flyer personally and to attend an afternoon on a BBQ on a house boat with a hot tub for an afternoon.

4. Invitations to all summer activities and designated leaders to take them under their wing

If you still run your group during the summer this is the time to really work at relational ministry toward all of your students. Increase the attention that you give to new students as it takes a long time for them to feel comfortable with the group. Leaders should make a personal invitation to these students for each meeting or activity during the summer. Remember, this is not their youth group until they attend for a year!

5. Hold a kickoff activity with students and parents communicating the expectation that students will attend every week and join a small group.

This might be expecting a lot but it takes a lot to connect a student with a youth ministry even if they have friends who attend the group. Responsible parents should be made aware that the student ministry at the church is a vital aspect of their commitment to Christ.

Do As Much as You Can
We are often passionate about reaching the lost. Holding on to kids who went to Sunday School before they are lost is one of the most effective ways to do this. Please don’t miss the opportunity to welcome new students and get them connected with the leaders and other students.

2 Ways to Be Open Without Being Creepy

We have all been there. You are drinking a coke with a student and there is that teachable moment. If you could just share a
struggle that you have been going through you think it could make a big difference.

Or you are sharing a talk with a group of students and you have the perfect illustration. It is something that you have gone through in your life. However, in the middle of your talk you are second guessing yourself. –Should you share this much detail about yourself?

How open should you be with students about your life and struggles? Do you share your deepest, darkest secrets? Maybe you should just not let them in and share nothing about yourself.

Here are 2 ways to be open, but not too open and one important reminder for all of us that work with students.
Be Transparent But Not Crystal Clear

The first church I was a youth pastor at the young adult pastor taught me this lesson. My natural response is to share a lot about my life. Probably too much at times. This is when my friend sat me down and told me to be transparent but not crystal clear.

What does that even mean?

Well, we are human. As a human you will make mistakes. In fact it is important that your students know that you are a human that makes mistakes. This allows them to have grace with themselves. It also makes you more relatable. BUT, they do not need to know all of the gory details.

If you struggle with self image, you can let students know that you have had this struggle. Crossing the line into crystal clear would giving all the details of what about your image you don’t like. Or if lust is a problem, describing in detail what you lust after would be too much.
Consider: **Do You Want This Repeated?**

Another great way to help in not being too open is to ask yourself, “do I want this repeated?” Here is something that you have to realize, it will be repeated! Even if a student says they won’t tell anyone, IT WILL BE REPEATED!

I hope I have made it clear, students don’t keep secrets, especially when it is about you.

So, what would you like your spouse to hear? How about your senior pastor? This thought can be a great filter right before you open your mouth.
One Important Reminder:

When we talk about being open with students, the danger is that we retreat. We decide it is too uncomfortable or there are too many potential problems that we share nothing.

I believe that sharing nothing about our lives is FAR WORSE than sharing too much.

Some of the best ministry moments that I have had with students is when I look them in the eyes and get transparent. Walls fall down and the student is transparent in return. It often becomes one of those moments when you can feel God working.

So with all of this caution I don’t want you to close up and share nothing from your life.
3 Questions We Must Ask!!!

Most of the time we complicate things...

-We over-think them.

In hockey they call this, squeezing the stick too hard. You want to get a goal so bad that you over think it. You try too hard. As a result you don’t score the goal. Here’s what I think...

I think the same thing happens in youth ministry. We can get too professional. We become too much of an expert. The result is we forget why we started doing youth ministry in the first place.

We forget the big picture.

The big picture is what guides us in the decisions that we have to make every week in youth ministry.

Let me show you. What would you do in the following situations?

**What To Do?**

A student tells you his friend got his girlfriend pregnant and they have an abortion planned, what do you do? Rumor has it that a student on your worship team is being very promiscuous with other students, what do you do?

You have a student of Muslim background that has been coming to youth; he mentions that his parents are very concerned, what
There is a student in your group that is a social outcast and does not seem to connect with anyone else, what do you do?

You have had a very big influx of non-Christians in your group and many parents and students are concerned and some mad about the potential problems/influence this could and is having on the existing group, what do you do?

**Try This!**

This is what you do in each and every situation. This is the big picture that is so easily lost. You love God, love students (Matt. 22:34-40) and make disciples (Matt. 28:16-20).
No matter the situation you ask yourself these 3 big picture questions;

- How can I love God in this situation?
- How can I love the student in this situation?
- How can I make disciple in this situation?

This is the big picture. These are the three questions that we can never forget. If we do we will lose our way and our students are too precious for us to lose our way.

The 2 Things Students are Desperate to Get from You

I have struggled with my ego for years.
It was much worse when I first started off in Youth Ministry. I wanted to be the Youth Pastor that everyone talked about. I wanted the largest ministry with the slickest services.

I have now come to the place where I am convinced that students could care less how big the Youth Ministry is. They can care less about how “cool” it is either.

Don’t get me wrong, students care, just not about those things. Yet this is what I spent SO much time on in the early years.

When I look at it now, students care deeply about these two things:

**Do You Care For Me?**
I met one of my old youth that I haven’t seen in years the other day. She called my name, came over and gave me a big hug. She then brought me up to speed with her life.

She didn’t do this because I was an amazing preacher or the coolest, hippest youth pastor. No, this moment happened because there were years of care happening when she was a high school student.

Do you:

– pray for you students by name
– call them or write them a letter to encourage them
– go to their school events
– visit them in the hospital
– stop and truly listen to what they have to say

It is these little things done over and over that communicate to students that you truly care.

**Will You Challenge Me?**

You are involved in Youth Ministry. The key word is “ministry”. Students want to be challenged in their relationship with Jesus. This is why they come.

So do you challenge them or do you try to not lose them?

Often we are motivated to attract students and then not lose them. WHAT A WASTE OF TIME! Your job is to introduce them to Jesus and then help them to be more and more like Jesus.
This requires you challenging your students, because they want it from you.

When is the last time you:

- had a baptism
- invited students to surrender their lives to Jesus
- called a student out for their sin
- memorized Scripture with students
- worked through a book or curriculum with students that wanted to go deeper

Ten years from now when you meet one of your students, they won’t care how awesome your sermons were or how cool the youth ministry was. What they will remember is if you cared for them and challenged them.

What are some ways that you care for and challenge students?
I am a volunteer. I am no longer the Youth Pastor or the main contact person for a ministry in our church. I volunteer. This past year I co-led a grade 8 guys small group with one of my former youth. It was a very rewarding experience. I also led a young families small group in our church.

I love volunteering but I have learned a lot about what ticks off volunteers. In the past I functioned as and thought as a youth pastor. Now I am very aware of what youth pastors do that ticks off us volunteers.

Here are two of them:

1. Do Not Communicate EVERYTHING

When you are leading a youth ministry you live it. It is what you think about and plan all day long. You wonder what changes can take place to push the ministry to the next level.

This is great but it also causes a huge problem.

You have already thought about and communicated all
of your ideas to a few key people so you get tired or lazy. What happens is your volunteers get a very quick and unclear communication from you.

This is frustrating when you expect us to read your minds. It is frustrating when you expect us to know all that you have been thinking and planning.

You must communicate to us often and thoroughly. Weekly emails, monthly meetings and annual retreats are a must if you want to get the most out of us volunteers.

So when you have communicated enough, my guess is you need to communicate even more.

2. Treat Us As Slaves NOT Teammates

I will admit, slaves might be too strong of a word. However, I would not be surprised if you see volunteers as a tool to accomplish your mission. If this is even slightly true you are missing something truly great.

You have the potential to unleash a great team. A team that will have great positive effect on the students you minister to.

The key is seeing all of you as part of a team. Like any team everyone has their role and part to play, but everyone is needed. If you work as a team here are some of the benefits;
Collective Wisdom: As a team you are much smarter in your planning. Use this! Brainstorm together, plan together, dream together.

Diversity of Gifts: I am sure you are a great youth pastor, but I hate to break it to you, you cannot effectively do it all. You just do not have all those gifts. However, your team does have all of the gifts needed to accomplish the vision God has given you.

Diversity of Personalities: With all of these different leaders with all of their different personalities it allows you to connect with all the different types of students you have.

To be effective with your volunteers you must be thinking team!
One of the big buzz words among church people these days is coaching. By “coaching” what is meant, is that you find a caring person who will challenge you to grow in areas of your life.

There is an element of coaching involved as that person helps you to set goals then keeps you accountable to reaching those goals. At the Youth Ministry Institute, we take this so seriously that every student does One-on-Ones with a prof.
Why One-on-One Discipleship?

It may not seem time efficient or the best allocation of your human resources but there are a number of individuals who would greatly benefit by providing opportunities for one-on-one discipleship...Here are some students in your group who could really benefit from One-to-One time with you or one of your leaders:

**Teens Out of Step with the Group**

Zack (not his real name) ran away from his Christian home and lived on the streets for a year. When he returned to God, our youth group and his parents, he had experienced a slice of life that was so totally foreign to the other kids in our group that his questions in Bible study made heads spin a full 360 degrees. We
began to meet each week and debrief his year on the road in the light of the gospel. In me he found acceptance and understanding that he would not have found in our group setting.

**Teens who are Hungry for More**

“Ron can you teach me to Pray” Tommy asked me after one of our Sunday School classes. When I came to, Tommy went on to tell me that he wanted to get results when he prayed instead of just praying because he was supposed to. The focus of our discipleship was very specific. He read a book called “Too Busy Not to Pray” by Bill Hybels and we discussed a chapter a week. Tommy also began to list his prayer requests and report to me which were answered. Lastly we spent a portion of each or times together praying. We both grew in the area of prayer.
Teens with Social Challenges

Socio-path, freak, psycho, loser, spazz – those are just a few of the names Troy was used to when he came to our group. Sadly, I had no time for him. He was disruptive in every group setting. He was suspended twice from our Junior High program. All of our leaders’ patience was worn thin. But like an answer to prayer John got a burden for this young guy. In a one on one setting his attention deficit disorder was less of a problem than in the group. He was getting the attention he was seeking and did not have to seek it on Wednesday night. What a breakthrough!

New Believers

I don’t know many small youth groups that run a new believers cell group. What would happen if someone were to actually come to Christ at one of the meetings? If we believe that one-size-fits-all we risk damaging the spiritual development of a new believer. We are also responsible to follow-up kids who make commitments at camps or retreats, rededicating themselves to live the Christian life.

Teens Overcoming Addictions

There is certainly a big difference between a twelve step program and a discipling relationship, but there are also some similarities. Both involve learning, accountability, setting goals and trust in a higher power. When one of my student leaders confessed to me that he could not sleep at night without a drink, I chose to be his accountability partner. We studied the roots of addiction and focused on goals together. We memorized scripture together and
prayed together. For a time he called me every night at his bed time. This was scaled back to once a week, then once a month. Discipleship programs have helped other teens who have struggled with pornography, sexual immorality, shop lifting, and addiction to gambling. The goal of the growth is to replace immediate gratification that comes with these things with a healthy desire for God, fellowship, and His Word. Rather than focus on the addiction the focus is on Christ.

**Grads in the Fast Track**

Grade 12 attendance sometimes drops off because the group is something from their past and at this point they are future oriented. They are also busy. Either they are up to their eyebrows in work, or they are chasing after scholarships, university applications, or just emotionally disconnected from youth ministry. If there is a genuine desire for God and the excuses for not being at the group are real, either a small group for grads, or a tailored one–on-one discipleship situation may be the answer.

So basically every youth could benefit in some way from a discipling relationship. In the same way that athletes and movie stars have personal trainers, any student can benefit from a mentor who will keep them accountable and challenge them upward toward a higher level of commitment and health.
Getting Started in One-to-One Discipleship

So you are sold on the idea of getting your leaders to meet with students one to one but like a lot of things in youth work getting started is the hardest part. Where do you begin? Some teens, in one of the groups mentioned in a previous blog, may come to you to ask for extra help. Other times parents may ask for extra help with their teen. What has worked for me was to announce the program of one to one meetings and I have had kids approach me afterward explaining that they would like extra help in their spiritual development. You could also encourage your small group leaders or adult leaders to take a student under their wing for a season... The relationship is established... but what happens after that?
Build Trust

After getting permission from parents, building the discipling relationship is the first order of business. If you do not trust each other, you are off to bad start. At the Youth Ministry Institute, most of the time I am working with a student and that means that it is not really a two way street. We may discuss the same materials that we are working through but it is clear that I am there to help them grow and not so much the other way.

The First Meeting

Even before the first meeting it is most important to develop trust. The student needs to be completely comfortable with you if he or she is to begin to open up. This can be established by having more of an informal time together at first. Going for a coke or a coffee and getting to know each other better would be a good start. This meeting could be more of a fact finding mission to understand the
student developing some goals and objectives for your time together. Although some young people will benefit from just an informal time together to hang out, discipleship is more than this. I have found that little progress is made without goal setting and accountability. AT the end to of the first few meetings it is good to have established a regular time and place that you will meet as well as your expectations of the discipling relationship.

**Week to Week**

From week to week there should be greater trust and progress toward some measurable goals. Sometimes if the one on ones are not meaningful or profitable to the young person, you will find that attendance drops off. Young people are not always good at informing you that they will be late, will not show up or afterward, that they forgot about the meeting entirely. Having the parents involved in the process can help out. There are times when a meeting to re-evaluate the progress may be necessary. This may follow a week where the student has been absent or around the midpoint, if you are not convinced that real progress is taking place. It is essential to be consistent in prayer for your discipleship partner.

**Moving On**

Discipleship programs, group or individual should never be open ended. You may decide to renew the one to one meetings for another 13 weeks but more likely it is best to take a break afterward. Part of the danger is that an unhealthy relationship of dependency can be developed and rather than helping the young person stand on their own two feet, you have crippled their
spiritual development. The better that you have made the conditions of the program clear from the start the easier it will be to stop meeting together at the end of the allotted time.
Chapter Two: Media

4 Key Findings on Students’ Social Media Use…#3 will surprise you

There was a study done in 2012 by Common Sense Media looking at the digital lives of students.

Let’s be honest, you’re thinking what’s the point of doing all of this research when we already know the results. Students are addicted to social media, they are on it all of the time. In fact this is the most digital generation ever.

Well, according to the research that’s only partially true. What this research shows is crucial for your ministry.

Here are 4 key findings that they discovered.

**Key Finding #1: They Are Avid, Zealous Users**
Well, no kidding!!! You already knew this if you spend 30 minutes with students. They are always on their phones checking out social media.

In fact this study discovered that 90% have used social media and that the vast majority of students use some sort of digital communication daily.

Like I said, you already know this, it is the other findings that surprised me.

Key Finding #2: Is It A Positive Or A Negative?

I have always liked the saying that perception is reality. So whether you agree with these next findings or not is irrelevant. This is how students see technology and in particular social media in their lives.

It is a positive.

Students feel that it makes them feel less shy, more confident and helps with relationships with friends. Not only that but 37% of students say that it has helped them with their relationship with family compared to 2% that say it has hurt that relationship.

Key Finding #3: How Do They Want To Talk?

This by far was the most surprising finding for me. Even though students are avid social media users they still prefer to talk to you face to face.
This what Common Sense Media discovered; “About half (49%) of all teens say their favorite way to communicate with their friends is in person. Texting is the next favorite (33%), with social networking (7%), talking on the phone (4%), and Twitter (1%) far behind.”

The ironic discovery was that even though students prefer face to face communication they admit that social media detracts from it.
Key Finding #4: What They Wish For

This study showed that students wish they could disconnect more often. But it is not just them, they wish others around them would also disconnect more often.

28% of students who parents have a mobile device say their parents are addicted. Nearly half (45%) of teens say they sometimes get frustrated with their friends for texting, surfing the Internet, or checking their social networking sites while they’re hanging out together.

So information like this is very interesting but if we don’t do something with it then it is useless. So how do you think this information should shape our ministries? My next blog will look at that.
3 Ways to Win the Social Media War

They’re everywhere.

In fact you are probably using one to read this blog. Smartphones. They’re the gateway to social media that make it available 24/7. In fact you might have found your way to this blog through one of our social media avenues of Twitter or Facebook.
Last week I wrote about a study on teenagers use of social media and shared 4 key findings. This is blog is about the “SO WHAT” question. Now that we know this data, what do we do?

Here are three ways you can win the social media war.

1. Some Battles Aren’t Worth Fighting, Is This One?

This might sound contradictory but bare with me. I remember about 8 years ago talking to a youth pastor about Facebook. He thought it was some great evil because one student said something negative to another student on it. This youth pastor refused to be a part of Facebook and was encouraging his students to get off of it.
At the time I just shook my head in disbelief at him. This might be revolutionary but, Facebook is not going away anytime soon. This youth pastors issue with his students wasn’t Facebook but deeper issues like slander and gossip.

This is my advice, social media is not going away so don’t fight it.

2. Too Much Of A Good Thing?

I laugh to myself sometimes these days. It seems that one of the gauges of how cool or effective or hip or relevant of a youth worker you are is by how much you use social media.

I just made the case to not fight social media but please don’t think I am encouraging you to swing the pendulum completely the other way. If you completely absorb yourself in social media I think you will miss what students really want.

In fact we have to see social media as a tool to get us to the most important thing.

3. Face To Face

All throughout scripture there is this theme of “face to face”. It communicates intimacy. We crave intimacy with God and with each other. It is the way God has made us.
Your students want to be face to face with you. They want you to be able to look them in their eyes and mentor them, push them to deeper things, tell them that you care, challenge them out of their apathy or sin. These things are powerful face to face! When done over social media it feels plastic.

The study that I talked about in the last blog made this point, students prefer face to face communication.

So this is my challenge to you, use social media as a tool to move you to face to face conversations with students.

3 Sexting Dangers You Need to Discuss with Your Students

We were on a Youth Ministry Institute retreat. A female college student came to me in tears. One of her small group students had
been caught by her mom taking a video of herself in the shower. Everyone was shocked. No one saw that one coming. The video was sent. There was no way to get it back before it went through the high school.

That was a few years back. It was the same time that the Pew institute released these stats.

39% of teenagers say they have sexted

51% female teens admit they feel pressure to sext photos of themselves

4% of teens who own smart phones ages 12 to 17 say they sexted a sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude image or video of themselves to someone via text message

15% of teens say they have been sent sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images or videos of someone they know in a text
messaging on their phone

Some parents, youth pastors and para church workers were under the mistaken impression that this had gone away. They thought it wasn’t a problem for their kids. They were wrong.

Recent statistics prove otherwise. see http://ehs.siue.edu/her/_common/documents/prospectus/prospectus_1/hudson-prospectus.pdf It shows that:

24% of American high-school age teens (ages 14 to 17) and 33% of college-age students (ages 18 to 24) have been involved in a form of nude sexting.

Sending semi-nude or nude photos is more common among teens girls. 22% of teen girls report sending images of this nature, while only 18% of same-age boys have.
15% of teens who have sent or posted nude/semi-nude images of themselves send these messages to people they have never met, but know from the Internet.

A study published in 2012 in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine found that more than half of 14- to 19-year-olds have been asked to send a nude photo of themselves to someone, while 31 percent had done the asking, and 28 percent had followed through—higher numbers than those found in earlier studies.

So it is more common that we thought. Where are the big dangers?

STOP

Here are 3:

**Danger #1 Revenge Pornography**

Students need to consider “Who will see your sext?”
17% of sexters share the messages they receive with others, and 55% of those share them with more than one person.

In an article called the Naked Truth http://www.wfmynews2.com/news/article/269479/57/Sexting-The-Naked-Truth Triad, NC– Recently, University of Texas researchers surveyed 1,000 high school students, and 30 percent of them admitted to texting nude photos of themselves.

And if there is any question concerning the damage to the soul, hear this girl’s story from the news article “It was full body and I wish to this day I hadn’t sent it because it changes everything.”

It was to a bitter ex-boyfriend. He shared her sexted photo with other students after a breakup. The shame and embarrassment led to a severe depression.

“I’ve tried cutting myself several times. I tried choking myself to make myself pass out and keep it there and just die,” explained the girl, who wants to remain unnamed.

The article continues to say that “On the streets, teens say sexting is a bigger problem than parents know.” They ask for face shot, and the next question would be can I have a full body shot,” explained another teenager.
After a break up, one in ten males will post an explicit image of their ex to the internet. The damage to the student can be irreparable as girls who get a copy of the picture or video often engage in shaming girls in this compromising situation.

**Danger #2. Sextploitation**

In an Article in Teen Vogue Sarah Giacobbe warns, “Here’s what’s unsettling: As sexting has risen in popularity, the consequences have grown far more serious. According to estimates, hundreds of websites now specialize in the anonymous—and unauthorized—posting of girls’ explicit photos, often accompanied by details about where they live or go to school, along with links to their social media accounts.”

Hopefully teens have not forgotten the story of Amanda Todd the BC teen who committed suicide because she was being blackmailed by an online stalker. Sexting, snapchat and now the new app slingshot which shares videos that are supposed to disappear only add to the problem. SUP is another app that claims you can remote control your friends. It can have bad consequences.
Most students feel confident that they would never fall prey to a cyber-stalker. It is this false sense of security that makes them so vulnerable to sexting a boyfriend or girlfriend and having no control over where that image or video has gone.

**Danger #3 Legal Action**

Stephen Balkam of the Huffington Post explains:

“Let’s be clear. Sexting is a risky behavior with potential harms — both emotional and reputational for those involved. While some dismiss it as a modern form of flirting, sexting can have real world implications that can last a lifetime, particularly for teens.” He continues to say that teens sexting teens is not a crime. Not every state or high school sees it that way.

Sending or receiving a sexually suggestive text or image under the age of 18 is considered child pornography and can result in criminal charges in some states. Many states have passed
legislation making sexting of a minor illegal. These laws are now being tested in the courts. Canada is in the process of passing some of the toughest legislation in the world in bill C-13.

Sexting is not harmless flirting. It can have serious legal consequences that students never consider.

**Please Say Something**

There was an ancient heresy spread in the church called Gnosticism. One branch of it believed that what you do with your body has nothing to do with the soul. Teens need to understand that what they do with their body can damage their soul. It is a clear form of sexual immorality causing guilt and shame.

Sending, receiving and redistributing sexts damage a teens reputation, and their soul. It is not a harmless form of flirting. It is not a joke. In many places it is illegal.

If you work with students on campus, or in a church, it is so important to get this message across. Let’s pray that they take it to heart. I doubt we will turn this trend around but I pray we can protect the teens that we work with.
How to Consume Media the Right Way According to Walt Mueller

Your students cannot avoid it. Everywhere they go there is going to be music, movies, and tv shows. So what do you teach them about media?

The bible says to avoid and hide from everything unless it is from a Christian label, right?

Actually it doesn’t. What the bible does do is talk a lot about discernment. It teaches that we are to discern what we are supposed to consume and what we are not supposed to consume.

We tend to not teach about discernment because it is difficult. – Difficult to teach and difficult to do. And we avoid things that are difficult.
No one I know of does a better job of helping us teach students about discernment better than Walt Mueller. His website, www.cpyu.org is an amazing resource.

Walt starts off by asking a great question, do you mindlessly consume or do you mindfully critique? Do your students just turn off their brains and consume. Most do and this is dangerous.

The key we need to teach our students is to mindfully critique. This is the process that Walt suggests. He calls it the 3d’s.

1. **DISCOVER what is being said**
Can we teach our students to ask lots of good questions about media before they consume it. Questions like;

What is the main lesson?
What worldview is being promoted?
Would you consider what you just saw as “good” or “bad”?
It is by asking good questions that students start to understand what that particular piece of media is teaching.

2. **DISCERN through the filter of Scripture**
After the discover process there is now a lot of information. That is good but you have to do something with it. Our students need to take all of this information and push it through the filter of scripture.
The lesson being taught or the worldview being promoted, what does scripture say about them?

Is the song talking about a man’s love for his wife? I think scripture would approve of this. Is the song objectifying woman and about the singer having sex with as many woman as possible? I think scripture would disapprove.

The key is that scripture is our measuring stick for what is good and bad.

3.DECIDE what to do

Now the key is to have students decide if they should or should not consume the media. Do they want to consume something that is bad. This process helps them to see if something is good or bad and decide accordingly.

Teaching our students to discern is a life long skill that they must have. Telling them to just avoid media is unrealistic and unhelpful.

If you want to see this process put into action here is Walt Mueller using the process on the Beyonce video “Pretty Hurts”.
I encourage you to look at what Walt has to say and comment below on if you think this is a realistic approach to teach our students.
Chapter Three: Sexuality

If you work with students the topic of sex is bound to come up.

Doug Fields has a joke where he says students want to know about sex and end times and if you can have sex during the end times.

The question I often get is, “What’s the big deal about sex?” Do we make too big of a deal about it or do we not make enough of a deal about sex?

Unfortunately, I think society and even the church only talk about and address the surface of this issue. Paul however digs deep into the results that sex actually have in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.
I think when we address sex, as Paul did, we will be making the proper deal of a subject that is sensitive but extremely important. Let’s look at what Paul said.

God the Father – 1 Corinthians 6:13-14

God the Father will raise our bodies at his second coming. Because of this, the body is important and should be treated with as much care as the soul. Specifically, Paul says sex outside of marriage does damage.

God the Son – 1 Corinthians 6:15-17

We often forget but when you are a believer you are a member of Christ and one with him. As a result, when you have sex with someone who is not your spouse it is not just about you and that other person. It violates your relationship with Christ by joining Him to the person you have sex with.

God the Spirit – 1 Corinthians 6:19

A believer’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. He lives inside of the believer, makes his home there. As a result, our body does
not just belong to us, but it also belongs to God. So Paul is saying one of the main ways we can honour God with our bodies is to avoid sexual immorality.

**So What?**

So why does Paul tell the church of Corinth that any kind of sexual activity that it is not with your spouse is a bad idea? –Because it violates a believer’s relationship with every person of the trinity. That, in my books, is a big deal for anyone who says they want to follow Jesus and honour God with their lives.

So what do we tell our students about sex? I think our great mistake is that we skate on the surface and just tell them to wait until they are married. We say that they need to use perseverance and prayer so they won’t fool around with their girlfriend or boyfriend. Then they watch a movie or music video and they are told it is one of the most pleasurable experiences of their life.

What would it look like if we got to the heart of the matter? What would happen if we went deeper and taught the beauty of God’s plan for sex? What would happen if we taught the spiritual ramifications of sex? What would happen, if without advertising it to our students, we began to help them develop a theology of sex?

Call me crazy but if we dug down deep like this, I think we would see much more students understanding and following God’s plan for sex.
How to Talk to Your Teenagers about Sex

So your students are surrounded by sex all the time. It is hard to watch a movie, surf the internet, or pick up a novel without some message about sex being shared. Some of these messages are healthy, but let’s be honest many are not. Unfortunately the church has been very poor at being a strong voice in teaching our students about sex.

So the simple question is what are you doing to help your students have a biblical view of their sexuality.

1. Be Approachable

When the word sex comes up do students see your red face of embarrassment or do you clinch your teeth to the point of
grinding them to powder. If so, no student will talk to you. The key is to be approachable. In other words can the topic of sex be treated in the same way that you would talk about any other topic. Don’t blow it out of proportion and make sex some colossal topic that sirens fall from the ceiling when someone says the word. On the other end of the spectrum though, don’t ever not talk about it. In other words, talking about sex should be treated the same as talking about parents, movies, dating or friends.

2. More to Waiting than Getting Pregnant

When we do talk about sex we often tell students they need to wait because they will get a girl pregnant or they might get an STD. Now these are true possibilities but I think they are poor deterrents. Why don’t we paint a picture of all the positives of two virgins getting married. Instead of selling all the bad that could go wrong why not sell all of the positives of waiting. I often say to females wouldn’t it be nice in your marriage knowing that the only person your husband has been with is you. There is no need for you to worry about him comparing you to someone else. Not once has someone told me they think that is a bad idea.
3. Boundaries

When you talk to teenagers about sex eventually the question will come up, so what can we do then. In other words, how far can we go. It would be so much more simple if God created a sexuality switch in all of us that didn’t get turned on till you said your wedding vows. But we all know that students are interested in exploring their sexuality far before their wedding vows. I believe in simple and clear boundaries, so here it is. If a bathing suit covers it your hands don’t go there. And it is not one of those tiny
bathing suits either. If students follow that it is hard for things to get out of control.

4. Ask Questions

One last thing, when the topic of sex comes up, don’t do all of the talking. Ask questions and listen to what your students have to say. What struggles do they have, what pressures are they facing.

The topic of sex is everywhere for us and our students and we must find effective ways to talk with them about it.

What do you find are the best ways to talk about sex with your students?
Gay Okay? 3 Helpful Responses When a Student Says they’re Gay

If you have a trusting relationship with your students, eventually one of them will confess to you, “I’m gay.” How you respond in that moment is going to determine what future role you are going to play in their life. Here are a few helpful ways to respond.

1. Listen compassionately, seeking to understand without panic or judgement

The main skill required to help teens is active, non-critical, empathetic listening. A student who has grown up in the church may be gauging your reaction to their “coming out.” If you are calm and help them to share why they think that they may be gay
without judgement the more they may be willing to open up to you about their thought process.

As I shared in a previous post, What to say to a student about same sex attraction, sexual identity takes time to grow. Telling a student that they are not gay, or reacting against what they have shared with you is not helpful in the long term.

2. Demonstrate Patience and Willingness to Journey with the Student

What the student is really asking you is, “will you still love me if I am gay?” Your non-critical acceptance will determine whether or not you will be able to walk with them down this road of sexual identity development or someone from the LGBT community will help them out.
As the Washington Post reports, the CDC found, less than 2 in 100 adults will self-identify as gay later in life. So this may be a phase in their development that most will grow out of. Some may struggle with bi-sexuality during this time as their sexual identity forms. Your patience and willingness to continue the discussion will have an impact on how open they will be to the bible, the Christian community, and to God.

3. Guarantee Confidentiality and Unconditional Love while Holding your Stance

A big concern for a student is that you are going to go straight to their parents with this big news. Unless the student is sexually active, same sex attraction may not be something you want to go to their parents with immediately.

Eventually a student should share with their parents that they are same sex attracted but it would be best to evaluate the student’s certainty of their orientation and the parents’ ability to help in the situation rather than drive their child away.

Along the journey with this student always express unconditional love. Always take their concerns seriously. Never make fun. Always be sensitive to their gender issues and questions about sexuality.

At the same time you can continue to take a strong stand that God wants to protect us from all sexual activity before marriage. Gay or straight, students need to also shun images or videos of sexuality.
If they have been around you at all, the student already knows your stance of homosexual relationships. They may want to change that but changing that is not going to help them. Dishonesty about what you believe is not going to help the student or the other students that you work with.

**There’s so Much More to Know**

Clearly, this is just the quickest introduction to this topic. There is so much more we all need to know to work with a student is same sex attracted, or has gender confusion. Things like: when to have the student talk with parents? When should we refer a student to a counselor? When is this causing a student emotional health issues like depression or suicidal thoughts?

It is worth learning more about all of these things.

More than anything else it is essential the student is assured of your unconditional love regardless of their thoughts, or actions.
3 Tips for Helping Students Deal With Porn

If you spend more than five minutes working with students you are going to have a guy or yes even a girl come to you after a service, during a trip to McDonald’s or in the middle of your small group and say that they struggle with looking at porn. Unfortunately, this is such a pervasive and prevalent issue in our society that you must have a response ready in that moment.
Here are three tips when talking to the student that I have found helpful.

1. **Temptation is not a sin**

I have found that when a student confesses their problem with pornography, many times the student is beating themselves up. I agree that this is a very serious issue that can have huge consequences if it is not taken care of quickly and early. However, there is a big difference with being tempted to look at porn and actually looking at porn. So I always start off by reminding the student that even Jesus faced temptation. Unfortunately wherever they go there will always be the temptation of porn and the access to look at it readily available. Therefore this temptation is a normal part of life, it is what they do with this temptation that is the key.

2. **This is a Spiritual Attack**

In all of the articles I have read on dealing with porn and all of the conversations I have had with fellow youth workers I have found little said on the spiritual nature of porn. I think if there is one
area that the enemy is trying to destroy students then porn is that area. So if it is a spiritual attack by the enemy then it needs to be responded to in a spiritual way. We need to challenge our students to pray and fast over this issue. But what I find most helpful is reminding them that in those moments of temptation to realize that this is the enemy attacking you and he wants to destroy you so you must fight back.

3. Accountability is a Must

Yes porn is a spiritual attack but there are also practical steps that we need to encourage our students to take such as putting accountability software (xxxchurch.com, covenanteyes.com) on every device they have that can get them on the internet. The two things that I remind them with accountability software is first that if they want to get around it I am sure they can. So there must be that desire and fight to defeat porn in their life. Secondly there has to be a little fear of their accountability partner. I had a student accountable to me once and he kept looking at porn and each time we would have the same conversation on how he didn’t want to look at it but did anyways even though he know I would find out. Finally I told him if he looks at it again I was going to make his mom one of his accountability partners! He stopped looking at porn.

Good luck as you help students battle with porn in their lives.
Talking to Teens about Their Secret Habit

In all of the discussion around internet pornography there is very little said about masturbation.

I can understand why. It is something that none of us are comfortable talking about. Just writing the word makes me uncomfortable but I feel I need to break the silence for the sake of suffering Christian students.

Pleasure and the Power of Pornography

Part of the power of pornography is that it is a prelude to masturbation. It is this bond that makes it so addictive and so
secretive. It is addictive because of the huge surge of brain chemicals associated with ejaculation or orgasm. It is so secretive because it is personal, private, and a taboo subject in families. It can be used as an escape, a way to deal with boredom, loneliness or anxiety, or sometimes a way to alleviate emotional pain.

**How Common is This?**

For teens, the lure of pornography and masturbation is even more treacherous because they are discovering their bodies and their emerging sexuality. A 2012 study of 14-17 year olds, by Robbins and others, found that “74% of the males and 48% of the females reported that they had masturbated at some point.”

**What they teach in Some Health Classes**

Health classes will tell teens that this is a normal part of development. In class it is recommended as a safe form of sexual release. The addictive nature of the habit when coupled with online images and videos is rarely discussed.

**Christian Teens Experience Shame and Despair**

Many teens do not see any shame in it but many Christian students feel shame and guilt about self-stimulation. They have heard about the warnings about lust. They have heard also that Jesus said that to look lustfully at a woman is equal to having sex with her.

In my ministry, I have spent 100’s of hours listening to young men tortured by guilt and shame over their inability to gain any control over this habit. Even with counselling their addiction only
intensified. Like struggling in quicksand the harder they fought it the deeper they sank.

**Suffering in Secrecy and Silence**

Curiosity may get the better of Christian teens who look for answers and images online but experience guilt and isolation. They are unable to share the new thoughts and feelings they are experiencing with their parents, teachers or pastors for fear of condemnation of punishment. Many Christian teens will suffer in secrecy and silence.

Considering the changes taking place in students’ bodies and the powerful influence of society then, parents, youth workers and youth ministries must be committed to helping students develop a healthy, godly sexuality. This involves breaking the awkward silence that surrounds masturbation.

Oddly, the Bible seems silent about it as well...

**The Bible is Silent about Masturbation but Talks about Lust**

Strangely, although the Bible discusses every form of sexuality, this subject is not mentioned. This is odd considering that almost all males will have masturbated at least once during their
adolescence and many will masturbate regularly into their adult life.

Some well-meaning Christian authors or youth speakers will try to connect masturbation with the sin of Onan described in Genesis 38:9 which says,

But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his (dead) brother’s wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother.

Clearly this is not a biblical injunction against masturbation. The sin of Onan was not fulfilling his duties as a kinsman redeemer for his deceased brother.

But while Jesus didn’t mention masturbation he did forbid lusting after anyone who is not your spouse. The moral difficulty with masturbation is that it is always accompanied by fantasy. God is concerned with wrong desires which go contrary to his pattern for intimacy in marriage. He cares about the focus of our desire.

**What Christian Counselors Teach**

Christian authors and counsellors, James Dobson, Les Parrot III, and Keith Olson, all indicate that this has been a common counseling issue helping many young men and some women who suffer greatly because of their struggle to gain control over this habit.

Dr. James Dobson addresses masturbation in his book Bringing Up Boys (focus on the family 2005) He explains:
As for the emotional consequences of masturbation, only four circumstances should give us cause for concern. The first is when it is associated with oppressive guilt from which the individual can’t escape. That guilt has the potential to do considerable psychological and spiritual damage. Boys and girls who labor under divine condemnation can gradually become convinced that even God couldn’t love them.

They promise a thousand times with great sincerity never again to commit this despicable act. Then a week or two passes, or perhaps several months. Eventually, the hormonal pressure accumulates until nearly every waking moment reverberates with sexual desire.

Finally, in a moment (and I do mean a moment) of weakness, it happens again. What then, dear friend? Tell me what a young person says to God after he or she has just broken the one thousand first solemn promise to Him?
I am convinced that some teenagers have thrown over their faith because of their inability to please God at this point of masturbation.

In Helping the Struggling Adolescent, Les Parott III writes,

In a life stage that is typically fraught with insecurity, anxiety, and turmoil, the search for the pleasures of masturbation may become compulsive. When this occurs, compulsiveness, not masturbation is the problem that needs to be addressed. Teens need not be obsessed with or mastered by masturbation.(p. 247)

A posture of grace, love and affirming patient acceptance of young people who feel like failures in this area of their life is absolutely essential.

**Break the Silence with Acceptance and Grace**

There are negative responses to masturbation. After speaking at a conference workshop one mother waited to speak with me. She
said it was such a problem for her son that she had her husband take the boys bedroom door to the basement. This to me didn’t seem helpful or effective.

Dad’s should talk openly with their sons in early adolescence letting them know that this may happen and if it does they can talk to them about it. Mom’s should also talk to their girls at an age when they feel it is appropriate. Judy Blume broached this subject in one of her books, Deenie, read mostly by 10 year old girls. This may be a little too early for some girls who have never considered masturbation.

As I have worked with counselling college students it was the ones that made this habit a matter of their salvation and thought about fighting it all of the time that were most controlled by it.

**What Works and What Doesn’t**

Students who invested their energy in sports, social action, healthy friendships, and church life gained greater and greater control. They also lived with a deep acceptance of God’s grace. They reminded themselves that they were saved by grace and not by their victory over their habit of masturbation.
Those who were unable or unwilling to make a complete break with pornography were worst off. They lived in a downward spiral of abstinence for short periods followed by binges of pornography and giving in to masturbation. This was followed by self-loathing, intense guilt, and shortly after, another pornography binge.

If you have to...

One parent who was too embarrassed to discuss sexuality with his son placed a copy of James Dobson’s “Preparing for Adolescence” in his room. His son told me that when he discovered the book he immediately went to the sex chapter and read about masturbation. It set his mind at ease knowing that he would not go insane, blind or be condemned to an eternity in hell if he gave in to his urges.

**A Final Word**

If I was actually paid at counsellor’s rates for helping high school and college students with their anguish over masturbation, I would be a wealthy man. Few young people have anyone who they would trust with this secret.

I would hope that parents and youth workers would break the silence by developing relationships where teens are confident to reveal their secrets. Sharing with a trusted parent, counselor, or youth leader will give them hope when they feel hopelessly controlled by this habit.
Chapter Four: Teaching

Andy Stanley’s 7 Topics to Teach Students

A little while ago Andy Stanley and Stuart Hall wrote a book called “The Seven Checkpoints”. They were arguing that there are seven topics or themes that need to be constantly communicated throughout a student’s time in your ministry.

Here is what they came up with...

1. Authentic Faith
When you say God, what do your students think? This is an important question. The idea behind this topic is that God can be trusted. He will do as He promised to do.

So the question that you have to ask is are your students trusting God with the critical areas of their lives?

2. Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines lead to intimacy. When we are intimate with God we see the world as He sees it. When we see the world as God sees it we are much more likely to do what God says.

Are your students developing and growing in the rich array of spiritual disciplines?

3. Moral Boundaries

Almost every chance that we have we need to be teaching students about moral boundaries. We need to teach that God created sex to be great. However, outside of His boundaries it can be destructive.

Are your students establishing and maintaining Godly moral boundaries?

4. Healthy Friendships

Friends have a HUGE influence on the life of a student. In fact one’s friendships have a huge influence on determining the health and direction of their life.
Are your students establishing healthy friendships and avoiding unhealthy ones?

5. Wise Choices

We are in the habit of asking students, is this right or wrong. A far better question to ask would be, what is the wise thing to do. Huge chunks of scripture are considered wisdom literature. We need to teach from here and other areas to help our students make wise choices.

Are your students making wise choices in every area of their lives?

6. Ultimate Authority

We are often told by society that freedom is answering to no one but yourself. This actually does not lead to peace and freedom. Maximum freedom is found under God’s authority.

Are your students submitting to the authorities God has placed over them?

7. Others First

In our society we are told to be a somebody. To make yourself great. However scripture says something very different. It says that when you make other first that is when you really become something. This is what Philippians 2 says about Jesus. He made himself nothing.

Are your students putting the needs of others ahead of their own?
What the authors of the book were saying was that this is not a program. It is themes that need to be communicated regularly to students. The idea is that when they graduate these 7 topics are burned into their hearts and minds.

So, another youth night is coming up and you are wondering what you should talk about. You could just open up your Bible, put your finger down and preach on that passage. You could speak on what interests you. You could even speak on something you are going through right now.

All of these methods can get you through one or two sermons, but a whole year???
If you figure you have a student in your ministry for 3 years (I know it might be shorter or longer, but work with me) what would be the list of things that they would HAVE to be taught? The idea is that when it is time to work on your lesson you go to the list and pick the topic.

Here are 3 of those things that I think must be on that list.

In a word it is, Jesus. I know, that is the Sunday School answer. However, think about this, in this day and age, do our students have a Biblical and rock solid view of Jesus? I think the answer would surprise you if you did a survey of your students.

So here are the three things I think our students must be taught about Jesus.

1. **He is the Only Way**

In our culture today we are inundated with the message of pluralism. Simply put, all religions lead to God, they are just different ways at looking at God. You have heard the analogy of 3
blind men touching an elephant or different paths leading up to the mountain top to illustrate this point.

The problem is, Jesus was pretty clear it is not true. He claimed that he was the only way to God. The other problem is Jesus being the only way is a very unpopular message today.

Are we doing our students a disservice by not teaching them about Jesus’ exclusiveness? Also are we doing them a disservice by not teaching them on how to talk about this exclusiveness in our culture?

2. He Is Unique

Pretty much every major religion talks about Jesus. As you would suspect, they all say different things about Jesus.

So what makes Jesus such a big deal to us? Him being fully God and fully man I would say is pretty important. What does this mean to us and how we live out our faith.
3. He is Risen

Until I started looking into the resurrection for a class I teach I never realized how crucial it is to the Christian faith. I know, right now you are thinking how could this be a huge revelation to me. But think about it, if Jesus never rose from the dead then everything about the Christian faith crumbles apart.

Do we teach our students the theological significance of the resurrection? Do we teach our students that this is not a fable and we can show that the resurrection is true?

I know Jesus can feel a bit like a cliché when we talk about what students need to learn. However, these are three things that every student must be taught, think about and own in their faith.

What are some things you think should be on the list that students need to be taught?

Most of us use a hit or miss approach to teaching in our student ministries. We latch on to the best new video series out there and look for the next before this one runs out. What is the
result, after three years of our patchwork teaching? What have our high school students got as a foundation for life, when we are done with them? Is there a better approach? I think there is!

The Challenge

I was challenged by my prof, Dr. John Wilkinson, to do better than that. He asked us to compile a list of 100 Characteristics Every Fully Discipled Teen should develop in 3 years under our teaching. I was skeptical that it could be done! Like there are 100 attitudes, behaviors, and truths that every student should have when they left my ministry?! Really?!

Well, I took the challenge. Do you have any idea what I came up with? I am dying to share it with you!

The Process

First, I attacked the Bible in a two week marathon, and wrote down every quality that God wants to see in every believer. I had lists from many of the Old Testament books and multiple lists for each book of the New Testament. Next, I went through the lists and crossed out all of the duplicate items. Finally, I crammed the lists into six categories with many items under each. These became my 3 year teaching plan!

The Structure

I found the best structure to come from Acts 2:42-47. The characteristics of the first believers should also be evident in the lives of maturing discipled students, experiencing that full life Christ offers in Himself. As I searched the scriptures, I saw this
validated again and again. I became passionate that discipled members of our group would emerge from the training with the following characteristics evidenced in their lives. Each area has a number of items that a student should know, what they should be able to do, as well as attitudes they will have.

**The Product**

Here is a quick outline of the categories but the Give Away is more detailed. Each of the items can be developed into a full talk with one clear objective.

1. Devoted to the Apostles teaching... Essential truths

   All the bible doctrines teens need to know and live out.

2. Fellowship –Centered in Christ

   Relating to others in the home, school, and church.

3. Worship and Praise

   A lifestyle of love and gratitude expressed to God in Church and all places

4. Prayer

   Every aspect of prayer for the growing Christian

5. Sharing/Serving

   Not just sharing faith but our very lives with others “Enjoying favour with all men”
6. Attractive Holiness

How to be a Christian without being a Jerk! Righteous living in a Post Christian World.

My Challenge to You

A systematic approach to teaching won’t guarantee that teens that you teach will serve God for the rest of their lives, and it doesn’t mean that you will never use a captivating video series again. But hopefully this will help you to take seriously the content of the Scripture and present it in a systematic approach. You will help form a more sure foundation for the teens God has called you to serve. Maybe my ideas sheet will help you to have a more consistent approach.

Please take a look at the E-Sheet Go to the appendix to see all of the items in the Description of a Discipled Student
2 More Truths We Need to Teach Our Students

Last night I was with my grade 8 guys’ small group and I was reminded about something. We are not the only ones that are teaching these students about faith and spirituality. During our small groups I heard everything from some New Age thinking right down to heresy.

As I was leading the discussion and trying to find out where these views came from, I couldn’t help thinking, “What are we doing to give clear biblical teaching?”

So as you are getting ready to prepare your next message, I beg you not to wing it. Don’t just pick something that interests you to speak on. Why not be really radical and have a plan; a set of topics and issues that you want your students to know and learn.

Here are two topics that I think you should add to your list.
Redemption

Chances are, if I explain the gospel message to you or to your students, you are going to tune it out. You have heard it thousands of times and you know it. But just so we are all on the same page here it is;

Jesus died and rose again so that sinners could have their sins forgiven and be reconciled to God (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Did you read that last sentence or did you just glaze over it? I think the problem is many of our students could articulate that sentence but they don’t truly believe and understand it.

Have you spent time to teach on the power of salvation? Have you taught on the power of God to accomplish salvation? And
here is the kicker, when we experience this power we are redeemed by God.

When we all, (not just students) understand the power of redemption in the salvation experience, that is when we do life differently. Otherwise it is just a sentence we know and we try to be good Christians.

Sanctification

I hear it all of the time from students, “I'm not perfect” or “I messed up”. After working with students for 5 minutes you will hear a statement like this.
So what do you teach your students? Do you tell them to pray more? –Not a bad thing to do but is that helpful? Do you tell them to just try harder to not sin?

I think we MUST teach the theological concept of sanctification in a way that students understand. Salvation and justification result in being freed from the ultimate consequence of sin, but the influence of sin is still very alive and active. Scripture refers to the sin nature as “the flesh.”

If the flesh is fed (this is done by living in a selfish sinful way) it will grow and get stronger. This makes it harder to live in a way that pleases God. However, if the flesh is starved it shrinks and gets weaker. This results in temptation being easier to resist.

I feel that this is a key lesson for students to know and live out, if they are going to have a faith that lasts.
It drove me crazy that students didn’t know how to open up or listen to each other.

I looked around all over the place for some kind of cards, game, or activity that would achieve this. Eventually, I decided I’d have to develop it myself. Here’s what I came up with and a free copy for you to download, copy, cut and use.

INTERACTION CARDS are in the appendix at the end of the book

**Beginner**

I always thought it was nuts that we were pressuring students to share their faith when they could hardly open up about themselves in any conversation. So that is why I developed these interaction cards that you can copy and cut up to use with your group.

The lowest level of communication is what I call beginner. It begins with a few hints for meeting new people and sharing answers to non-threatening questions. On the same side of the card are quick hints to being a good listener.
If your group hasn’t done this kind of thing before, this would be a good level to start at. Get them in pairs some creative way (I sometimes use a deck of cards) and give one card to each pair. The instructions are on the cards, but you can let them know that one should be the listener and one should be the sharer and at a certain point you will get them to switch.

**Intermediate**

If your students are fairly familiar with each other and are comfortable to talk about some non-threatening subject, they may be ready for the intermediate level cards. These cards begin to get past the surface and begin to explore thoughts, memories and feelings.

You could allow more time for these questions and pair students with friends who they trust to talk about such things.
Advanced

Now we are getting closer to the heart and this is a little more risky area. Students should have worked up through the other levels first before getting to these types of questions. The questions are more personal and may require a level of trust and confidentiality.

Students should be advised before beginning that confidentiality is expected. I prefer that this level of openness should be guys with guys and girls with girls.

You may choose to set this activity up with some instructions and a little more contemplative atmosphere.

Spiritual Fellowship

This may sound like a strange distinction. But the conversation at this level really does involve the student’s faith, doubt, devotion and relationship to God. I created these questions based on conversations that I have had with students. By this point there was a sense of trust and fellowship based on our love for God.

Once again, the atmosphere should be right for this level of conversation. You may choose to begin the sharing with prayer, have some music playing, and encourage students to find a spot in the room where they will not be easily overheard. I normally encourage students to pray with each other when they have completed their time of fellowship.
Using the Cards

It is very important to me that students build bridges with each other outside of their usual groups of friends. Using the cards can help students to open to newcomers and old friends. Changing up the partners and working up the levels can create variety and help your students to become more inclusive.

It is exciting when you begin to see students interacting with others without the cards.

Over time they learn that there are different levels of interaction. Students learn that there are other subjects to talk about beside the latest YouTube video or new tech devise on the market. They learn to move from shallow small talk to meaningful heartfelt conversations.
I believe that allowing students to share their fears, hopes, faith, and doubt with each other they will become much closer as a group and healthier adult believers.
Chapter Five: Leadership

7 Ways to Find Volunteers

I can remember times when I was burning out, doing everything myself, with no idea how to find people to help me reach and disciple teens. Thankfully, I learned some effective ways to find and recruit volunteers that I would love to share with you!

1. **Always be promoting and recruiting:**

There can be a high turnover of volunteers in your ministry. Not only this, but if the ministry grows as it should, new leaders will need to be added.

2. Run leadership training seminars:
One way to meet keen individuals in your community or church is to be involved in leadership training. Many churches use programs like Leadership 301 to train volunteers. In this process you can spot who might work well in your area of ministry or you may be able to redirect them to another department of the church.

3. **Find out who church people would want as leaders:**

When participants in a ministry choose a volunteer, you have overcome the biggest obstacle in recruiting. Most people think that other church people would not want them around or see them as a leader. If you can go to them and tell them that other church people chose them they are almost signed on!

4. **Create multiple levels of commitment:**

Since some people cannot be there all the time, if you create various levels of involvement, your leaders who are good at certain
areas of ministry can be freed up to work on that area specifically. Here are three levels that have worked for me:

a. **Some time**: These people can drive for events, bring in a snack once a month or help out when you do outreaches for just one special day. This volunteer can be called upon just a few times a year for specific events.

b. **Part time**: These people may be able to come twice a month on a regular basis but not every week. They can be on a rotation to set up chairs, do decorations, or other responsibilities depending on their gift set. Many children’s programs use the rotation schedule so that church people miss the church service only once a month.

c. **All the time**: These are your core ministry team people who are at every meeting, retreat, and event. They need to become trained in their area of ministry. These could be musicians who help with the music each week, children’s leaders, the leadership team for your youth ministry, committees that function in the church or deacons who are in charge of specific areas of ministry.

5. **Survey the congregation for potential workers**:

As a pastor on staff at the church, each year I sent out a volunteer survey to determine who may have skills that could benefit the youth ministry. It is remarkable to see the gifts available in one congregation that would bless so many different areas of ministry.

6. **Ask directly**:
After such a survey it is very important to follow up by asking people directly and immediately. It is almost insulting to volunteer your time and skills and then feel rejected when no one asks you to contribute to the church.

7. *Invite potential workers to successful events:* 

Let potential leaders get their feet wet rather than immersing them in something they cannot get out of. Letting them see the ministry when it is running well might draw them to be part of what you are doing.
Don’t get discouraged...You Can Have More Volunteers

Even if you try three of these ideas you will find someone who can give time to teens. Along with these keep praying for workers as Jesus told us to... you know it is a prayer he really wants to answer!

5 Things Your Volunteers Need From You

What do you want from me?!?

Lina yelled at me. She had every right. I wanted her to organize all of the youth resources but I gave her no training or instructions. No wonder she was fed up. Getting yelled at by someone who had been so eager to help, made me learn that I needed to change. Here’s a list of 5 things I learned that my leaders need from me.
Training

It’s not fair to ask volunteers to do something that they haven’t been trained for. If you want them to contact a group of 5 students every week, do a role-play, or leaders’ session teaching on exactly what that looks like. If you want leaders to pray with students, walk them through a process of listening to needs and praying with the student. Even if it’s just taking attendance, managing student behavior, or leading a small group, it’s unfair to put a volunteer in this situation without:

- teaching them,
- letting them observe it,
- letting them assist you or another leader,
- then you watching them do it.
- Clear Expectations Repeated Regularly.

I had a lead pastor who would tell me “check up on the kids, Check up! Check up!” Granted, English was not his first language but I couldn’t get him to specify what “check up” looked like. (Frankly I’m still not sure!) I never knew if I was living up to his
expectations. If you are expecting leaders to “hang out with kids” be specific about what that looks like.

It could be,

- stay with your students from start to finish of the youth program.
- Have a conversation with each student each week.
- Arrange to meet each of your students face to face outside of youth once a month.
- Arrange one group activity for your students each term.

These standards need to be repeated regularly. You can share the standard in a leaders meeting, have leaders share what is going on with their students in a leaders meeting, or call each of your leaders each week to get praise and prayer reports with what is going on with them.

**Consistent Communication and Feedback**

I have mentioned this in another blog. Volunteers often feel that they are not performing very well. They feel that they could be doing more. Sometimes they wonder if the work they do is appreciated. Some youth ministries have a debriefing meeting after the students have gone home. Some have a meeting
an hour before the students arrive. Whenever you meet (and I think it should be each week) it is important to provide group feedback. Here is a chance to talk about how well the leaders are relating to students at the program.

Mention specifics that you want to be repeated like “I saw many of you go out of your way to include fringe kids and newcomers! Way to go!”

Meeting each week and encouraging your leaders is crucial. At the same time don’t neglect speaking to your leaders individually about the work that they are doing. Point out what you have observed and affirm every effort that they make. Never underestimate just how insecure they are!

Most of all, please communicate with them about what is going on and what is expected at your meeting. It’s terrible when the volunteers know less than the students. They will be very angry if they don’t get advance notice. This is going to require good planning and communicating information in written and verbal form. As Tyson Howells has shared you can never communicate enough.

**Opportunity to Be Heard**
I love Steven Covey’s Principle – Seek first to Understand then to be Understood. It applies to youth ministry. Have you ever felt that your leaders “don’t get you?” It could be that you need to get them first. Asking your volunteers or sponsors for input even an evaluation of how the ministry is going, will provide you with necessary insights. Often they will see things that you miss. Value their input and wherever possible, act upon it.

In the same way that the volunteers serve the youth, I always felt it was my role to serve the leaders. This meant following up with them to find out how things are going; not just in their ministry to the students but other areas of their lives. I found that they would do the same thing for the students as I did for them.

**Shared Vision**
I find that volunteers are inspired when they can see the big picture. Every volunteer should feel like an important part of the overall direction of the ministry. Too often the vision is fuzzy. Adult and student leaders aren’t able to see the connection between programs, activities and the overall goal of the ministry.

I heard a local youth pastor communicate his vision this way before their prayer time.

“I know that this may seem like just another youth night but I want you to know that there will be new community kids here who are going to hear the gospel. They will be assigned to one of you leaders. You will have the chance to build a relationship with them and help them to be part of a small group. Eventually this student, like many of you, will grow in the faith and be part of this team. You may not realize it when that new student steps on to the property but we are changing this community, one student at a time!”
Staying On Top of All This

It’s hard to stay on top of these five essential leadership functions. I don’t think that I ever did, at least not all five at the same time. I do know however that when I made conscious effort to recommit my time to making these a priority ever area of the youth ministry went better. The volunteers were happier and more effective in their ministry. Students were growing and each week we knew that our vision was becoming a reality.
20 Quick Tips for Small Group Leaders

Last week, I led a small group leaders training session at an amazing youth ministry, with over 40 adult leaders and coaches.

We shared back and forth and came up with some great tips. Try sharing these with your leaders. I really like 9 and 18.

1. If you will listen to them during the week they will listen to you at the group.
2. It’s not enough to teach them trivia. You are aiming for life change in every lesson.
3. Connecting with you is great. Connecting them with each other is even greater.
4. Break the prayer barrier in your group. Faith is activated as students pray out loud.
5. Involve students in as many ways possible. Maximum involvement results in maximum life change.
6. Pray daily for each student like you are in a fight for their soul. You are!

7. Never ask your students to do something that you are not doing yourself.
8. Don’t pretend to be more spiritual than you are or try to come off looking more righteous than you are.
9. Don’t be afraid of silence. Wait long before you bail them out.
10. Imagine that you are responsible for the purity, health, and growth of their soul. Pray lots.
11. Wear your love for Jesus on your sleeve.
12. Share your faith not your doubts. Work through your doubts then share your story.
13. Break the sound barrier early in your group. Get’m clucking like chickens if you have to.
14. If you miss their birthday you must do the polar bear plunge or spend a 1000 years in purgatory. <smile>
15. Respond to their texts in full sentences as soon as possible after you get them.
16. Do an activity outside of the church once a semester.
17. Get to know their parents. Get a home visit in if you can each year!
18. Show as much interest as possible in what they love. Read their poems. See their drawings. Listen to their songs.
19. Love their friends as much as you love them. When you reject their friends you reject them.
20. Hold off on giving advice. Let them generate possible solutions for their problems.

**Getting Parents on Board**

I recently bought a new vehicle. I hated the process. I am so paranoid of getting a bad deal that the entire experience frustrates me.

The funny thing is I love buying houses. A much larger investment but for some reason I like doing that instead. Probably one of the reasons is that it is simple advice on a good real estate purchase.

You ask any real estate agent and they will tell the three most important things are, location, location, location.
What does this have to do with youth workers and parents? Actually a lot.

If you want to have parents partnering with you to make the ministry even better then there are three things you have to do.

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE
I am going to get very honest with you. Many of you are horrible at communicating with parents and as a result you tick them off.

So here are three ways you should communicate with parents.

Initiate Casual Conversation

What do you do when students are being picked up? Are you in your office? Are you hanging out with students or leaders?

I think these are all the wrong things to be doing at this time. You have a very small window when some parents might walk into the building to get their student. Walk up to the parents and engage in conversation. Talk about what happened that night. Brag about how awesome their student is (parents love it when they hear positive gossip about their student).
Same thing goes for Sunday morning in the foyer. You will have plenty of time to hang out with students but there are precious few moments to connect with parents. Go up and talk to them.

Have Regular Formal Communication

When was the last time you had a formal parent meeting? If the answer is not within the past 4 months then you are failing with your communication with parents.

I know too harsh. You will tell me parents don’t show up. Thats your fault, make the meetings more interesting or at a more convenient time.

How can you share vision, direction and understand what parents are going through if you don’t gather them 2 or 3 times a year and communicate.

The meetings don’t have to be long but they must be purposeful and meaningful. Also food never hurts.

This is your chance to hand out schedules, retreat forms, and prayer lists. This is your chance to get all of the parents on board.

Communicate over a Cup of Coffee

How many times a week do you take a student out for lunch or a coke. I hope your answer is 2-5 times a week. I think you should add 1 parent a week to this schedule.
For me there were few things more powerful in getting parents on board with the youth ministry then asking 2 or 3 moms to meet me for coffee. I got to share my heart and hear theirs.

Every single time we walked away excited about the youth ministry and were it was going.

Are you scared of parents or do you find it is like swimming up stream when you deal with them?

My advice, Communicate, Communicate, Communicate, Communicate
Chapter Six: Just for You

4 Strategies for Managing Expectations—

“What do these people want from me!?”

I complained to God.

Parents wanted me to fix their kids. The students wanted the “funnest youth ministry in the city.” My pastor wanted me at the church from early morning prayer at 6 Am to 4 pm in the afternoon (7 am on Saturdays) I had assignments to complete for the seminary, and I was losing touch with my family. I found myself saying too frequently, “I hate my life.”
I looked at a bunch of books on burnout and life management. Finally, I discovered this remarkable strategy for dealing with expectations. I hope that you, or someone you know, will find it helpful too!

Make a list of all of the expectations, duties, and responsibilities that you have in your life. Make sure that you don’t leave anything out. Then employ the 4 strategies on your list.

1. **Delete the ones that are unrealistic and impossible.**

   You can’t fix anyone’s kid. You can’t save a soul. Only Jesus can. You can’t change family dynamics in a day. You can’t be two places at once and you can’t work 18 hours a day. The Lord can do these things but you can’t. So, while people may have unrealistic expectations of you and your abilities you should not have them of yourself. In fact, the sooner your church or agency realigns their expectations, the better the outcome will be.

2. **Delegate the ones that others could or should be doing.**

   You probably already know that you can’t do it alone but you may be trying to anyway. You may receive compensation for youth
ministry and because you are paid, you assume that you are being paid to do the work. What if you saw your role differently? What if you realized that your role is to train believers to do the work of the ministry? If it isn’t already in your job description, put it there now.

We neglect delegation sometimes because we are too unorganized and don’t want to ask for help at the last minute. Take a look down the road. Youth ministry can be pretty routine. What roles need to be filled? Who can do them? Look at your list again. What can you assign to volunteers so that they will be able to make a meaningful contribution to the ministry?

Volunteers feel valued when they do meaningful work that gets recognized. By doing these tasks instead of allowing others to do the you may be robbing them of joy. As a rule of thumb, try to do
only those things that only you can do. As much as possible let others do the rest.

If you don’t have a lot of adult volunteers allow students to do what they can do. Another rule of thumb: as much as possible don’t do for students what they can do for themselves. Meaningful responsibilities for youth give them feelings of identity and ownership of the group. Don’t rob them of this benefit.

3. Do the ones that are doable.

As each item is cleared away you will feel refreshed. The burden of them on your mind will lift and a sense of victory will return. Now you will be left with meaningful projects that you can tackle. These are ones that were reasonable and could not be delegated to students or adult leaders.

Some items will be quick and simple like booking a bus, or buying an item that you need for your group. Tackle a few of these first that give some quick results even if they aren’t your top priority. This will give you a better sense that you are digging your way out of this pile of responsibilities that you are buried under.

Next you need to get to those high priority tasks that are important and urgent. It could be visiting a student that has stopped attending your group. Maybe it is setting up a training session with your leaders or setting up a system of one to one discipleship. Here’s a useful graphic for determining with projects are important and urgent:

urgent
4. Depend on God.

When you are doing the work that He has called you to do there is a sense of peace, order and purpose. Everything is more difficult if you are overwhelmed by fear. When you know that you are doing the tasks that only you can do and that these are the ones the Lord wants you working on, you can just do the work and stay focused on it.

Of course things can go wrong and they will from time to time. The leader who was supposed to pick up snacks calls in sick. The teens on the worship team who were dating break up and neither shows up for practice. These are unavoidable but as we continue to give our ministry over to God there is a sense of blessing despite the challenges.

Faith in God manages anxiety. He knows we are but dust. Jesus says, “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Whose burden have you been carrying?

Not Fool Proof But Better Than What I was Doing
Finding this strategy helped me to stop running from one crisis to another. My usual approach that involved procrastination, taking on too much, letting people down, and making excuses wasn’t sustainable. These strategies helped me to begin to evaluate each request that came my way.

I still had a problem saying no when someone had a project they wanted me to do. What helped was seeing a list and a schedule for completing tasks. My schedule was able to answer for me. I was working on tasks that were important but not urgent. The work I was doing was manageable and meaningful. It was nice to move from living in constant crisis to productive activity.
DEFEATING DISCOURAGEMENT

Rick Warren admits he struggles with discouragement.

He says, “Do you know how often I have wanted to quit being pastor of Saddleback Church? Every Monday morning!”

I know what he’s talking about. I have been there too; even recently. It’s easy to get discouraged when things are not working out as you hoped or planned. So I thought I would share with you some things I am learning about battling discouragement.

**Identify the Signs and Causes of Discouragement.**

The signs of discouragement are sometimes subtle. It’s not like you have completely given up; it’s more like you have lost hope. Are you experiencing any of these symptoms?
Apathy – your passion for your work is gone. You are working but your heart is not in it.

Hopelessness – you have stopped believing that things are going to get better or that you will ever achieve your goal.

Distraction – you have lost focus on your goal because it seems you will never get there. You may be busy but your tasks are make-work projects that have little to do with your long term goals.

I certainly don’t blame you for feeling this way. I often battle these same issues when I don’t get results quick enough. Rick Warren
shares some of the causes of discouragement. Are you facing any of them these days?

- #1 Cause – FATIGUE
- #2 Cause – FRUSTRATION
- #3 Cause – FAILURE
- #4 Cause – FEAR

Defeat the Causes of Discouragement

I know, easier said than done. If you can identify the source of your discouragement though, you are half way to overcoming it. I love the Psalm that asks: “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” Ps. 42:5 –Once you know the answer to this question then you can respond effectively. In fact, Warren suggests that each of the causes of discouragement has a correct response. He suggests:

- REST YOUR BODY
- REORGANIZE YOUR LIFE
- REMEMBER GOD WILL HELP YOU-Just ask Him. He can give you new energy. There’s incredible motivating power in faith.
- RESIST THE DISCOURAGEMENT

Pastor Rick says “Fight back! Discouragement is a choice. If you feel discouraged, it’s because you’ve chosen to feel that way. No one is forcing you to feel bad. Hang on! Do what’s right in spite of your feelings. No feeling lasts forever.”
The 4 Truths Everyone Needs to Know about Youth Pastors

Youth ministry has sometimes been criticized as ‘baby sitting kids” but it is more like shepherding sheep.

That’s not very exciting, is it? “Come shepherd sheep!” You probably won’t find it on a Bible College recruiting poster anywhere in North America, but it is the call of the Master. “Feed my Lambs..” isn’t much better, but it is the job description of any of us who dare to bear the title “PASTOR.”

Jesus’ disciples noticed this one day. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few...

Considering the importance of the work. Here are 4 truths you need to know about youth pastors!

Before we get into it, let’s understand that by pastor I mean shepherd.

Shepherding sheep is not as glamorous as saying that you were a special speaker in another country, or that you organized city wide rallies, or led life changing mission trips. The week-in-week-out
discipling teens through the roller coaster years of adolescence doesn’t look very spectacular on a resume but it is the great need of our day.

Sadly, in some circles, faithfulness in this ministry is no longer good enough. Many leaders and books challenge youth pastors to dream “bigger dreams!” Although the intentions are good, they devalue the important task of caring for youth.

1. Shepherding is demeaning work.

We would rather be soldiers, engage in spiritual warfare, take down strongholds, ‘take our cities for God!’ Those are the analogies that work best with this generation. There is honor in that. You can live and die for that. Feeding the same fifteen bleating sheep every week doesn’t give us much to talk about among our peers—but it should. Faithfulness, not attendance, is what God will reward on judgment day.
Youth pastors are often undervalued and underpaid even though it is a commonly accepted fact that the vast majority of Christians alive today made that commitment before their eighteenth birthday. The work the youth pastor does in the high school, or the youth room is cutting edge; it is heroic!

We come face to face with Satan as we rush in where angels fear to tread. The wounds we bear upon our soul as we have sobbed for teens, few will ever see. But the One who bled and died for these same sheep has never overlooked even a cup of cold water given in His Name. There is no higher calling, no greater honor than to be his hands and loving arms to wash the feet of his disciples.

2. **Shepherding is demanding work.**

“**I want to be a history maker in this land**” as the Delirious tune challenged me. Instead I find myself in the hills going after the one sheep that strayed away. Sometimes I bring them back screaming
and kickin’ all the way. Not much glory in that. (but boy do you feel it in your lower back!) I wanna be a “Jesus Freak!” as the DC Talk book of martyrs suggested. Throw me to the lions, or the communist torture camps, but please don’t let me face an angry mob of parents!

Hey, I’d even be a “God Chaser” if I didn’t have to be back for feeding time. The average youth pastor in so many communities spends less than three years at the same church and is done with youth ministry completely in under five years. The late nights, high intensity, and constant pressures take a toll on the body soul and mind. The demands are huge but the souls of young people are worth the effort.
3. Shepherding is Demoralizing work.

I was interviewed on TV once. (Okay everyone gets their fifteen seconds of glory and I’m milking mine for all they are worth!)

I was asked what is the best part of being a youth pastor. “Seeing kids commit their lives to Christ” I said without hesitation. “And what is the worst part of youth ministry... “Watching those same kids walk away from Christ.” We love to see transformed lives, but it is a journey. Thank God that the story is not over by the time that they leave the youth group! If you are genuine in ministry your heart will be broken again and again.

Youth ministry is also demoralizing at times because it is messy work. This doesn’t make the headlines, but those who truly care about kids will be involved when they mess up. We love to report how many were filled with the Holy Spirit, how many made first time commitments, or how many were transformed on mission trips, but we don’t brag about how many got pregnant, how many have been charged by the police, how many still struggle with anger, hatred, doubt, depression, and harmful addictions.

Those don’t make great stories. But if we are going to be honest, even when we are experiencing revival we are mopping up some of the messiest stuff of life.
4. Shepherding is a High Calling

So youth ministry, that glorious slavery to the master, may be demeaning, demanding even demoralizing but it is the high call to PASTORING. Some youth groups may do great exploits for God or they may preserve and protect a handful of teens through the ravages of adolescence. This is not a popular perspective but a very real one.

There are great things that must be done but they should never over-shadow the loving care of youth into a discipling relationship with Jesus. The temptation to be noticed, to do something big, something really successful can be a dangerous distraction. So
when you feel some larger than life dream coming on, just meditate upon these words:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

The sheep are helpless and harassed.

Will you be a good shepherd, a good servant?

It is the highest, most heroic call a human can answer...
Conclusion

You’ve probably heard someone joke, “You don’t have to be crazy to be in youth ministry but it helps!”

Some people may think that you are nuts for what you do. We don’t! What an incredible way to invest your life. Sure, the results can seem poor some weeks and the recognition isn’t equal to the work but you are playing an important role in God’s work on earth.

The lives that you impact may be changed for a time but hopefully they will be impacted for eternity.
DESCRIPTION OF A DISCIPLED STUDENT (DDS)

This description of a discipled student was compiled after a detailed study of the New Testament, extracting qualities and characteristics of mature believers. The commands of the Lord and the instructions of the Apostles have been taken into consideration. A list of one hundred items was reduced to produce a composite picture of what a teen should know, feel, and be able to do, by the time they graduate from a youth ministry. The passage below from the book of Acts provided a natural outline for these hundred items.

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The characteristics of the first believers should also be evident in the lives of maturing discipled students, experiencing that full life Christ offers in Himself. As we search the scriptures, we see this validated again and again. It is our intention that discipled members of our group would emerge from the training with the following characteristics evidenced in their lives:
1. "Devoted to the Apostles teaching... Essential truths

The discipled student will have:

**an understanding of:**

- the salvation process (faith/repentance/regeneration)
- the meaning of Christ's Lordship who God is and basic doctrines like the Trinity, sanctification, justification, resurrection, and atonement
- the importance and reliability of God's word

**the ability to:**

- use two Bible study methods
- explain the salvation process
- memorize some key scriptures
- maintain a regular quiet time

**the desire to:**

- continually surrender to Christ's Lordship of their life
- know Christ intimately, and hunger for even more of Him
- know and apply the word to their life on a daily basis
- gain greater knowledge of Christian life through, books, media, etc.
2. **Fellowship – Centered in Christ**

The discipled student will have:

**an understanding of:**
- the body of Christ and their function within it
- the importance of true Christian fellowship
- how to express love to every kind of person in the group
- how to encourage and edify believers

**the ability to:**
- help new members fit into the group
- work cooperatively in a team
- do contacting
- create their own fellowship activities outside scheduled meetings
- pray for others privately and corporately

**an attitude:**
- generating warmth, gentleness, kindness, peace, and joy.
- of genuine appreciation of other members of the body
- that desires to make Christ central to all interaction
- that is sensitive to needs in the body
3. **Worship and Praise**

The discipled student will have:

**an understanding of:**

the purpose and power of praise.

the One we are worshiping

the purpose and place of baptism and the Lord's supper in worship

the importance of the Church as the body of Christ

**the ability to:**

meditate upon God (be still and know who He is)

worship freely both privately and publicly

"brag about how great God is!" to Christians and non-Christians

Participate fully in the life of the church

**the attitude of:**

thankfulness to God in most or all situations

rejoicing in who God is and what he has done for them and others awe and reverence for God continual intimate communion with their Father

making every life action or conversation an act of worship
4. **Prayer**

The discipled student will have:

**an understanding of**

- the importance and efficacy of prayer
- the role of persistence and faith in prayer
- what are legitimate prayer requests
- the relationship between prayer and God's guidance
- how to pray in groups or alone

**the ability to:**

- maintain a regular prayer life
- pray out loud publicly
- develop a prayer list for needs of others
- wage spiritual warfare in prayer
- intercede for others, the lost, and the world

**an attitude of:**

- excitement over the power of prayer
- faith, expecting answers to prayer
openness to pray for the burdens on God's own heart

expectancy, to "hear" from God

5. Sharing/Serving

The discipled student will have:

an understanding of:

the concept of stewardship (God owns all!)

the needs of the lost, the lonely, and the poor

surrender and self-denial (selflessness)

what it means to be a "world Christian"

how to lead someone to Christ and do follow-up

how to discover, use, and develop their spiritual gifts

the ability to:

to wisely invest their resources for the kingdom

lead someone to Christ and do follow-up

be led by the Spirit to minister to needs as they arise

exercise spiritual gifts by faith for edification of the body

develop friendships for the purpose of ministering, or sharing Christ
incorporate the servant lifestyle at home (cheerfully!)

**an attitude of:**
tremendous concern over lost and hurting humanity
detachment from worldly ambitions, possessions, etc.
humble selflessness - considering others needs first (die to self)
a servant mindset - seek nothing in return, done for love alone,
radical commitment to the great commission

6. "Enjoying favour with all men" Attractive Holiness

The discipled student will have:

**an understanding of:**
the necessity of integrity for credibility
legalism, license, grace, and freedom in Christ
conformity, peer pressure, and transformation
Christ's Lordship of relationships, family, friends, dates.
self-discipline, control, and handling emotions

**the ability to:**
demonstrate a more and more balanced, consistent walk with God
gain increasing control over desires, emotions, and speech
think critically about issues to develop a Christian response
discern God’s will and restructure priorities to align with His will
demonstrate genuine love to family, friends, and teachers
follow through with commitments, dependable, reliable
dependency on the Holy Spirit for control, power, and to produce fruit
reject any type of addiction through desire to be free in Christ

an attitude of:
humility, honest, and Christ-righteousness (not self-righteousness)
separation from the world, to God, and back to save the world
dependency on the Holy Spirit for control, and to produce fruit
sincere love as the basis and motivation for all relationships
joy and fulfillment in living to serve
BEGINNER

For The Listener
Read the question to your friend.
Be warm. Make eye contact.
Let them speak. Encourage them to add more.
Ask questions that look for more details.
Thank your friend for being open with you.

For the Speaker
Be as open as possible. Imagine you have known this person for years. Speak in full sentences and give as much detail as possible. Take your time and enjoy the interest they are showing in you.

The Questions
1. Give your life story in about one minute. What were the high and low points?
2. Describe your favorite movie. Why did you like it so much?
3. Describe your family members. What do you like and dislike about each?
4. Describe your bedroom in detail. What do you think it says about your personality?

INTERMEDIATE

For The Listener
Read the question to your friend.
Be warm. Make eye contact.
Let them speak. Encourage them to add more.
Ask questions that look for more details.
Thank your friend for being open with you.

For the Speaker
Be as open as possible. Imagine you have known this person for years. Speak in full sentences and give as much detail as possible. Take your time and enjoy the interest they are showing in you.

The Questions
Describe the best day of your life in detail. Try to describe your feelings too.
Describe your most embarrassing moment. How did you get over it?
If you could be any place in the world where would you be? What would you do there?
Describe the 5 best things in your life and the five worst things in your life.
ADVANCED

For The Listener
Read the question to your friend.
Be warm. Make eye contact.
Let them speak. Encourage them to add more
Ask questions that look for more details
Thank your friend for being open with you.

For the Speaker
Be as open as possible. Imagine you have known this person for years. Speak in full sentences and give as much detail as possible. Take your time and enjoy the interest they are showing in you.

The Questions
When was the last time you cried? Describe the circumstances in detail
What are the biggest regrets in your life? If you could change things what would you do?
Describe three things that scare you? How do you deal with your fears?
As honestly as possible describe your strengths and weaknesses?
When you are alone how do you feel? What do you think about? What do you do?

SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

For The Listener
Read the question to your friend.
Be warm. Make eye contact.
Let them speak. Encourage them to add more
Ask questions that look for more details
Thank your friend for being open with you.

For the Speaker
Be as open as possible. Imagine you have known this person for years. Speak in full sentences and give as much detail as possible. Take your time and enjoy the interest they are showing in you.

The Questions
Describe a time you gave in to temptation. Explain why you struggle in this area.
Describe the story of your faith. What has happened in your relationship to Jesus?
Describe a time in your life when you doubted. What do you struggle with now?
Talk about you and prayer. When do you pray? What do you pray about?
Describe the last time you lost your temper? What makes you angry? Why?
About the Authors

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