

# **Leading a Disciple Making Youth Ministry**

A Self Study as part of the Youth Ministry Lay Institute

**By Ron Powell**



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# Discipling Youth

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## Welcome

Welcome to the important study of discipleship and youth ministry. I hope that this will both challenge and inspire you! Wide margins have been set aside so that you can make your own notes, comments, or questions. I hope that you will find studying through this material very helpful as you work with youth. If at any point you wish to contact me, I can be reached at [ron.powell@vanguardcollege.com](mailto:ron.powell@vanguardcollege.com)

Ron Powell

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## Introduction

It is one thing to get youth to mumble some kind of a sinner's prayer or coerce teens to make a decision to go the front of a large meeting place, and another thing to disciple them into mature followers of Jesus.

This book attempts to prepare the reader to nurture faith development in young people. Beginning from a biblical perspective on discipleship in general, the focus will move to the call and character of the youth worker. From here we will examine the challenge of ministering in a post modern pop dominated culture. From here we will examine discipleship as it relates to the church and the outworking of a philosophy of discipling youth ministry.

A few points of clarification at the outset may be useful. This book has been prepared with the part-time and full time youth worker in mind. By youth worker I do not mean the "youth worker" as designated by some government agencies, to refer to *social workers* who have a specialty because of a program of studies geared to working with adolescents. What is meant by *youth worker* in this context is the person, either volunteer or paid, who devotes time to discipling teens in a church or para-church context. While the term youth pastor may be used interchangeably what is meant is a person with a definite call to work full or part-time to reach and disciple young people.

As you probably already know, this is a daunting task but very much in keeping with our Master's clear directions... to go and make disciples.

## Getting the most out of this book

By the time you have worked your way through this book you should be able to

- Describe and defend the biblical basis for disciple-making youth ministries
- Evaluate your personal readiness for youth ministry leadership and develop goals for further preparation
- Identify the challenges and opportunities associated with adolescent development and the process of faith shaping
- Recognize the effects of cultural forces on contemporary youth ministry and respond with effective relational strategies to reach and disciple teens
- Evaluate the effectiveness of a youth ministry in a church or para-church setting and be able to devise a plan for improving the discipling process.

## Recommended Reading

If you like this self study book you will really love, *This Way to Youth Ministry* by *Duffy Robbins*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004. If you read the two together it will be that much more helpful!

# Part 1

# Foundations of Discipleship

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## Chapter 1 Discipling Youth: The need and the potential

### Introduction

--from a youth workers heart...

*"It seems endless. Everywhere I turn I am bombarded on all sides by reports and statistics of youth- - violent, troubled, unambitious, disrespectful. The headlines, studies and news reports flash in my mind and ring in my ears... My heart is heavy I feel like shouting STOP!!! Stop causing fear! Stop stereotyping. Stop showing only one side. Stop exaggerating. Stop writing things in REALLY BIG LETTERS to sensationalize.*

*What about the sense of humour young people have? The potential? The almost unshakeable trust they put in things or people until they are let down? What about kids who strive for excellence? Did any of you watch the commonwealth games? How many medals won by Canadians were won by teenagers!?.*

*Certain kids make bad choices. Certain things cause them to. What about what God thinks of them? What about how he reacts to the things they do and say!? They are created in his image. Do they know that? Please pray that I will be used of God to teach kids this truth. Then we can see what can be."*

Excerpt from a newsletter written by Tina Heald, Youth for Christ worker in Toronto's Jane/Finch area

In this chapter we are going to examine the situation of youth and youth ministry today -not just the problems but the potential as well. It is my hope that this study will create a sense of urgency in all of us to always have a deep concern and respect for youth whether we work with them directly, indirectly or not at all.

### The Need for Disciple-Making Youth Ministries

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 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. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:35-38 (NIV)*

When Jesus observed the masses, he compared them to sheep and to wheat. As sheep, he noted that they were "helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd." --Definitely a challenge. He must also see the gaping needs of youth, helpless and harassed, exploited by the music and fashion industries ready to follow someone who is willing to take the time to understand them. As wheat youth are seen as ripe for the picking. Sadly, Jesus observes that with this vast harvest the youth workers are far too few. He challenges you and me to pray that others would get involved in the harvest.

In this chapter we will observe the need for youth workers by observing both the challenges and the opportunities set before us.

## **The Great Need**

Youth ministry is essential because youth are influenced by or could fall prey to the follow forces or dangers:

### **Media Saturation**

**Media overload:** Everywhere teens go in society they are bombarded by a barrage of advertising messages. Some of these messages are more covert hiding behind their favorite idol who happens to wear a certain brand of jeans. Other messages are less intentional but that makes them all the more insidious. Teens realize that people can go to bed with each other on the first date, that people rarely pray to solve their problems and that parents, especially dad's are basic idiots. The image portrayed by many of the rock stars is that you do not need an education as long as you have talent and the law is not your friend. The media takes no responsibility for the messages being shared unless it hurts profits. Media is not making teens happier, healthier or better prepared for life. When the church tries to share its wholesome messages it is drowned out by the hours of media and internet exposure teens are constantly getting.

**Reflecting society or warping it** Media giants and executives from the television networks claim that they are just providing teens with the cutting edge programming that they clamor for. They insist that there is no agenda except to entertain. Good entertainment keeps the kids viewing and the advertisers buying costly advertising space. Researchers are not convinced. Researchers have been able to show a correlation between media choices and increased violence. They have also been able to document the relationship between hours of media viewing and poorer health among youth. And while the advertisers only want to create voracious consumers at ever earlier ages, the artists and screen writers do have their own personal agendas, whether it is greater tolerance for same sex relationships or showing distrust for government, law enforcement, or religious leaders. As teens become more and more jaded and desensitized to violent and sexual themes pushing the envelope and exploring the most shocking in society distorts reality and teens begin to believe that the exception is the norm. Who will take responsibility for this brave new world? Certainly not the media. They will just keep playing it back to the kids louder and wilder every year.

**Market driven** – What is most infuriating about this assault on all of us by pop culture is that it is completely market driven. The teen market is huge industry. As MTV executives once boasted, Teens are like an empire and the subcultures are like

countries. To gain a new segment of the market is like conquering a new country for your empire.” At the heart of this onslaught is the exploitation of the 150 billion dollar market in North America alone. Money is the bottom line and making new inroads into untapped markets, like the Christian teen market is just one more way to siphon off more revenue. Teens become pawns in a brutal war between the Multinational corporations. Money is what matters and there is not concern for the teenage soul.

**Christian Values challenged.** There are times where the culture is openly antagonistic toward Christ, but as most teens will tell you there is more of a suffocating affect. Media is everywhere. For parents who tell their pre-teen child to shun secular music they would be better off to stuff cotton batten in their ear and have the kids listen to recordings of jets taking off than expect their kids will not be constantly exposed to this music at the mall, at school, even at soccer practice in some communities! One of the ways that kids become convinced that Christianity is not the norm but an insignificant aspect of the dominant culture is just observing how the characters on their favorite tv programs deal with life issues. They do not go speak with their pastors, pray in their bedroom or do a detailed study of scripture unless it just happens to be concerning death or a religious issue. In general people do not turn to death unless it involves a major crisis and even in those instances the problems are solved by their own wits, strength and increasingly ...by *magic*.

### ***Increased Violence***

As a youth pastor I have been able to observe first hand the increase in violence since I began youth ministry in 1984. While the Canadian government has indicated that the overall rate of violent crime may have diminished here are some observations that show that youth violence has increased.

**-More weapons** – In 1984 it was common to hear about students who carried a knife, a chain, or nunchukas (Chinese beating sticks). Increasingly youth pastors are having to deal with problem in our cities of students coming to the youth group with a gun. When speaking to teens I have asked “How many of you know someone who carries a gun and you have seen it” Without fail eighty percent of teens will raise hands. High schools are still really from shootings in Columbine and Taber Alberta. Guns are the new weapon of choice.

**-More Jr. Highs** –Violence is being downloaded to younger and younger youths with first offences happening at much earlier ages. These are not just petty bullying incidence but serious acts of personal injury.

**-More Grrls** –This may appear to be a typographical error but “gurls” or “grlls” expresses a different meaning and identity for girls in our society today. The tough girl image is being propagated in society and girls are acting out in new and violent ways. It is over five years ago now, but an horrific act of violence of junior high girls in Burnaby BC shocked the public as a group of girls beat and strangled another girl and dumped the body in the river. When girls at the junior high school were interviewed the response was not shock. Students have expected girls to behave that way.

**-More senseless-** The rationale behind the violence is evaporating. There does not need to be a cause. Like a recent subway swarming in New York where a girl was cut ninety times on the face hands and arms with a razor blade. The reason “I didn’t like the way she looked at me!” Incidence of severe violence without provocation is on the rise. Some of it is race related.

## ***Disintegration of the Family***

When society is so destructive and dangerous it is a wonderful thing for a youth to come home to a warm loving stable environment. If only this were possible. Just when teens need the nurture and sanctuary of a home as never before the family unit is not living up to the challenge.

**Single parent families** Normally a household run by a single mother, the single parent home faces challenges that other homes may not. Most industrialized nations have homes that require two incomes. Even with a high paying job the single mother is challenged economically unless they are receiving large alimony payments. Also the single mother faces exhaustion issues trying to do what other families do in tandem.

**Recombined families** –One of emerging realities resulting from the high divorce rate in some countries is the existence of the recombined family where sibling who did not grow up together are now learning to coexist with brothers or sisters who came with a step parent. Discipline issues are complicated. Sibling rivalry takes on new dimensions and issues of fairness and equality are much more convoluted. A peaceful harmonious recombined family is a challenging proposition.

**Same sex parenting** –As a result of changing laws concerning same sex marriage and cohabitation small minority of children are being brought up by same sex parents. Fears that all of these children will adopt homosexual or alternative sexual lifestyles have become a reality, but these young people face challenges socially trying to justify their family unit. Likely this will become more common than it now is in the next decade.

**Physical and sexual abuse** The worst betrayal that can happen to a child is the breach of trust that happens between them and a mother or father. Physical and sexual abuse affects all social classes and races. Often this cycle of abuse continues unreported for years. The trauma resulting for girls or boys raised in this environment is substantial. Where this involves a father there are often issues toward trusting God. One of the questions young people deal with as they begin to reason through the causes of their victimization was “Where was God and why did he not do something?”

**Permissive parenting style** Maybe an over reaction to the rights of the child is the diminishing authority of the parent. Fighting with kids over every issue wears parents down to the point that they are willing to go along with just about anything as long as it is relatively risk free. Parents want their youth to be well adjusted and to be happy so they too give in to the peer pressure rather than make their child stick out and be different. The parent becomes the chauffeur and guide in the teenage years for fear of being too restrictive .

**Parents in Crisis** –Teens are not the only people influenced by society. Parents in Japan, Korean, United, States, and Britain are finding it increasingly difficult to cope. The demands of work, parenting and caring for elderly parents, has given rise to what is being called the sandwich generation. They are pressured on all sides and in some cases they are not bearing up well. In Canada the second leading cause of death among middle aged men is suicide. Use of anti-depressants among middle aged women is also escalating. Parents are having a hard enough time facing their own lives to have adequate resources to help their own children.

**Domestic Violence** –Closely related to physical violence is the subject of domestic violence between husband and wife or common law parents. In many urban centers in North America the number one source of calls for police is domestic violence. Many of these calls are made by teens hoping to protect their Mom’s from their Dad’s. Having had to counsel youth who have made such calls they seems to be torn between guilt for calling the police and guilt for not having called sooner.

**Run Aways** – A few years back I was involved in ministry in the city of Toronto. One night I was surrounded by a gang of older youth who seemed to be interested in stealing my sound equipment. In conversation with them I discovered what was beginning to become a trend. They indicated that they were hanging out because they lived down town and had no intention of going home. They said “its safer on the street.” One girl said, “At least when I have sex here I get paid.” She went on to explain that her step Dad never paid for the sex and was the most violent partner she had ever been with.

### ***Too Many Choices***

As I mentioned above, teens are inundated with overwhelming messages, but they are also faced with more choices than any generation before when it comes to worldviews, lifestyles, products, services, educational options, and future prospects. Making wise decisions is more complicated than most adults would ever imagine.

**Slogans** –Advertisers use tag lines like *Obey your thirst? Just say no? Just Do it –No fear?* These tag lines keep the products in the minds of young people. When youth begin to take these tag lines as common sense advice for everyday situation t the results can be tragic. Look at the tag lines again and think of a student about to take a dare from a friend, or a girl in her boyfriends house after school be pressured to have sex. The line Just do it, or obey your thirst begin to take on a new dimension. Lately McDonalds switched to “I’m lovin’ it.” Siding with youth culture it plays back to them what they want to hear. Some use out right rebellious tag lines like “Play it Loud,” to side with youth against the parents who are more likely to use the tag line “turn it down!”

**Information overload** – There has been an overly optimistic view to the internet assuming that evangelism will rule cyber space. Unfortunately pornography is the bigger stake holder on the internet. It is much more likely that a student will stumble upon the erotic images that a youth group web site. In the back log of millions of websites also, students have become very narrow in their choice of interests. Ignoring most of the noise out there students log on to their favorite sites or shut it all out as they chat with friends. Students could spend years just visiting the Harry Potter sites alone with no time left to pursue their interest in the latest and hottest pop star. When it comes to television choices most students are restricted to the music channels and one or two top shows that they like to watch.

**Alternative lifestyles** – It is easy to assume that the gay lifestyle will be addressed here, but that is only one of the choices available to youth in terms of a distinct orientation to life. There are also Goths who focus on a dark lifestyle outside of even normal sleeping patterns. Students can often be classified by the music that they consume. It determines whether or not they will develop a “gansta” persona or wear angry black shirts and hair that covers the eyes. Whereas in generations past youth bore some resemblance to their parents appearance and lifestyle, this relationship cannot be assumed at the present.

**Cultural pluralism** –My daughter’s favorite food is Sushi. I had never even seen Sushi until I was an adult. The world is becoming more cosmopolitan and more fragmented. Even when it comes to religious choices, Reginald Bibby in his book *Fragmented Gods* points out, that there is religious smorgasbord available and people select their favorite ideologies from the buffet table. Choices become more complex staring at the cornucopia of various faiths available to people in every country of the world that allows a measure of religious freedom.

**Moral Relativism** – Truth is stranger than it used to be. Post modern thinkers hope to free us from narrow minded absolute truths and would rather have us come to

some kind of consensus on what is right or wrong. The community sets the standard because there is not reliable authoritative repository of truth. While truths may be reliable today and in this situation the same need not apply later on. Science has shown us that what may have been an accepted truth or reliable information last year is already obsolete. When it comes to morality we are on our own.

### ***Substance Abuse***

**Alcohol the drug of choice** –Despite the efforts of international organizations like mothers against drunk driving (MADD) teens continue to consume alcohol and then drive. The results are disastrous. Most teens have been to at least one funeral of a student in their school who is now dead because of alcohol abuse. The danger of this drug is in the social acceptance where drinking alcohol and partying are synonymous. Since alcohol impairs judgment it is directly correlated to first experience of sexual intercourse and poor choices concerning other more potent drugs. In terms of usage in Canada and the United States, alcohol is used my widely, and frequently than any other substance.

**Steroids-** Whereas girls feel an overwhelming need to be thin males have the pressure to build muscle mass. Those involved in sports have seen that the baseball player that they idolize have used drugs to gain a competitive edge. Given all of the dangerous permanent side affects on developing bodies the risks far outweigh the advantages. Estimates concerning steroid use in Canada place the use of these drugs at about 40,000 teens.

**Designer and sex related drugs.** The use of meth-amphetamines or crystal meth, ecstasy, rohypnol, ghb, in clubs has been a cause for alarm. In rave clubs “candy raver” are seen to have pacifier in their mouth to decrease the amount of salivation associated with the use of ecstasy. While these club drugs are used regularly by a minority of students their affects are powerful: Temporary amnesia, loss of inhibitions, and susceptibility for rape are cause for serious concern.

### ***Loss of Literacy***

**Educational system failing** –Many schools have moved to a process by which students are moved on from one grade to the next without being held back. Often this process results in students moving through the school system with very few of the basics. Parents are sometimes unaware that their child’s skills are so weak.

**Functionally illiterate grads** –the result is a graduate population with some students who would be classified as functionally illiterate. They can read basic signs and simple texts but are limited in their ability to read.

**Post literate society-** Parents are appalled that although their child spends hours on the computer each day typing away madly, they are incapable of reading or writing at a university level after graduation. Being more familiar with visual media students are less likely to pick up the book. The producers of the movie the Lord of the Rings were very much aware that majority of the audiences had not read the books and never will. The importance of this issue should not be lost on the church. At church we place an emphasis on reading the bible. Recently a youth pastor had a youth one his student leadership team confessed in tears that she was not doing her devotions. It turned out that she was not able to read the bible even though it was a modern version and she had tried repeatedly. This student was in grade ten at high school and was functionally illiterate.

### ***Emphasis on the Body***

**Younger is better** –The ideal for beauty has changed over time. At this time in history youth is worshipped as the ideal. Supermodels begin their careers at earlier

ages than ever before. Girls as young as twelve years old are considered ideal. Women beyond this age try to fight the affects of puberty especially fighting the characteristic distribution of fat associated with development. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has examined the fact that marketing companies have recognized this trend and have been aggressively marketing “sexy clothing” to girls 8 to 12 years old. Sadly parents are giving in to the pressure to purchase this sexually seductive clothing. (for a detailed discussion of this go to <http://www.cbc.ca/consumers/market/files/money/sexy/>)

**Body worship** –The book of Romans describes the degeneration of mankind from worshipping the creator to worship of the creation. Such is our present situation. The human form, the outward appearance in particular, has become an object of adoration for men and women. This is idolatry. The outcome of an obsession with the physical becomes a curse upon youth who become objectified.

**Unrealistic expectations** –Another aspect of this obsession with physical appearance is the unreasonable standards placed on young people to have very little body fat and well sculptured muscle. Very few teens are able to fit this ideal or even the clothes that are designed to accentuate these features. These standards are set by the very beautiful people, who through personal trainers, cosmetic surgery, and other procedures gain have an unnatural beauty unattainable to the majority of young people.

**Bulimia and anorexia** –Due, in part to the pressure to be thin many young women will binge and purge the food that they have eaten. This is almost epidemic on university campuses where students are fighting the effects of college dorm life and dormitory food. While this book cannot begin to deal with these issues it is important to be aware that youth are susceptible to either of these disorders.

**Piercing tattooing scarring** –Body art and body modification are different expressions of a preoccupation with the physical. In a sense the body becomes a canvas and the various markings are intended as an outward manifestation of an inward reality. When interviewing teens who had multiple piercings, the reason given was that the pain of the piercing was the only thing that could match the intensity of the inner feelings. Youth and young adults explained that they would get a new piercing or a new tattoo to mark a significant event in their life. It is unclear if this is an attempt to glorify or deface the human body. Some have interpreted this trend to be an expression of inward pain felt by students in society.

### ***Sex in an Age of Aids***

**Risk taking behaviors** –There is a branch of the study of adolescence devoted exclusively to risk taking behaviours among teens. David Elkind has suggested that these death defying risks are an expression of the personal fable that is embedded in the minds of teens. These teens feel that while others may be injured, “it will never happen to them” The result is that teens continue to experiment with sex despite a global HIV epidemic.

**Earlier first experience** One reason for concern among parents teachers and youth workers is the early experimentation with sexual intercourse among teens and preteens. The result of sexual activity before age 16 is often promiscuity in the teen years and conflict with parents. The clearest indicator of when a youth will experiment with sex is the level of sexual activity of their friends.

**Sexually sophisticated teens** –With a plethora of information available on the internet and cable television sex shows, teens have become sex savvy at an early age looking for variations for greater pleasure.

**Unprotected sex** –despite the ads and the sexual education provided by schools a large number of students are having unprotected sex. This may be even more

prevalent with Christian youth as they feel that carrying contraceptives means they are planning to have sex. In their minds it is less sinful if it happens spontaneously.

**Bi is in** –There is a changing orientation toward sexuality among young people who describe themselves as bi-curious, or bi sexual. Interviewing high school youth in the city of Toronto I found that students considered by sexuality cool. One girl interviewed explained, “I love boys, I love girls...I just love sex!” The focus in these relationships seems to be pleasure rather than romance.

**Technical virgins** –There is a growing number of youth who claim to be virgins. In further discussion researches have found that they have engaged in oral or anal sex, but in their minds they have not “gone all the way.” In an article at youth specialties Dr. Campolo discusses the convoluted ethics that students have developed concerning their sexuality. Basically they live by one rule and that is you cannot engage in intercourse. ([www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/sexuality/ethics.php](http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/sexuality/ethics.php)) In some ways this is encouraged by health programs that instruct teens to engage in “outer course instead of inter course.

**Internet sex** –After speaking at a conference in the city of Edmonton called Breakforth I was approached by a desperate parent who said she could not leave her 15 year son home alone as she knew that he would be immediately viewing hardcore pornographic material. Other students have engaged in cyber chat where they describe in intimate detail what sexual acts they would perform with a person in the chat room. Others have met people on the internet and pursued a sexual relation when meeting on a date.

**Sexual Abuse** –Bibby and Posterski reported that 4 out of ten girls and one out of ten boys will be molested by the time that they are 18. Molestation often occurs from a trusted individual or a dating partner. The trauma experience by the abuse victim can be permanent and requires professional counseling.

**Incest** –Is the greatest violation of trust. When sexual abuse is inflicted by a family member the victim is scarred for life. Incest affects all social classes, and all cultures. The incidence of incest may seem to be on the rise because children and youth are actually reporting it or because it is happening more frequently. When asking a Bible College class if they knew anyone as a teen who had been a victim of incest, out of 60 students everyone knew someone had been a victim.

**Date rape** –Partially promoted by some of the dangerous lyrics of some to the rock, hip hop, or alternative bands there is a misconception that when a girls says “no” they actually mean yes. Date rape is often unreported because females take responsibility for their partners actions. The incidence of college and high school students involved in date rape incidence is a strong indicator that teens are in trouble/

**Prostitution** –In Japan the teenage girls call it “compensated dating” but even high school girls will supplement their income by dating middle age business men. In other industrialized nations there are those who are forced into prostitution, those who do it to support and expensive drug habit but there are also those who live at home and prefer to make money on the side.

## ***Despair***

**Inheriting a broken world** –High school students of different decades have been classified in different ways. Teens today are known as fixers instead of whiners. The situation for socially conscious youth can seem overwhelming. While these students may have seen positive steps forward in the past decade they have also seen and live with the aftermath of the attack upon the world trade center in New York. Teens today are aware of the delicate balance of political and environmental factors.

**Environmental crisis** –Students world wide are introduced to environmental concerns ranging from global warming, to ozone depletion. They live with the knowledge that the world they have been handed from their parents is in need of repair.

**Economic uncertainty** –Teens are less convinced today of economic stability. They are aware that a civil war in one part of the world has implications for their country. They may be less convinced that with all the violence world wide that things will keep getting better and better.

**Uncertain future:** In there grandfathers era teens hear that a person could work for the same company for forty years and receive a pension. Their parents face the prospect of change careers twice in the next forty years. Despite the optimism of youth they fear that they may experience a “series of unfortunate events.”

**Suicide solution** –Depression among youth in industrialized nations is a serious concern. Where suicide is the second leading cause of death in teens after accidental death (which may or may not be suicide related) there is cause for alarm over the deteriorating sense of self worth and growing despair among teens. When they are being told to have the time of their lives many see life as a bad joke and wish they were never born.

### ***Which God –Buffet Spirituality***

**New answers to old questions-** There is no lack of belief in this generation of young people. They have some pretty way out beliefs concerning creation, the universe, God and the after life. Recently the DaVinci code has played up to this market with millions of copies of the book being sold. Basically it described Christianity as a conspiracy. People are willing to believe that. At the same time beliefs from other countries and the zeal of the cults have introduced teens to many other possibilities to justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

**The new spirituality** –the vast majority of young people consider themselves “spiritual” where spiritual can embrace a wide spectrum of exotic beliefs. There is less apologetics needed to convince young people of the existence of a God. Who is this God is the question we must be able to answer. Paul attempted to do this in Athens as he described to them the unknown god that they worship. Elijah put this challenge out to the worshippers of Baal. The challenge was that the real God will answer by fire. Convincing people who already have some home made belief system that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God and the only way to salvation is going to take some doing. In the minds of post modern people “all faith systems are created equal.” For one faith system to claim exclusive rights to salvation seems highly arrogant and bigoted. Whereas in the days of Elijah fire was what was required today love, faithfulness, and service will be more convincing than signs and wonders.

**The truth is out there** –Today there is a proliferation of spiritual themes on TV and in movies. From Star Wars, to the Lord of the Rings, to Harry Potter to the Passion of the Christ, spirituality and mysticism have captured the attention of audiences world wide. This global interest may be a sign of hope that the post modern era has created a planet of “seekers.” On the other hand, with all the competing and confusing messages clamoring for attention in the religious market place people may be more mystified than ever. The truth may be out there but how can anyone know when they have found it.

### **The Great Potential**

Looking at the challenges above it is possible you feel like one pastor, who after a seminar on these and other issues said, “I feel like taking off all of my clothes

crawling under a thick comforter, assuming the fetal position, and waiting for Jesus to return.” Hopefully you will not be so overwhelmed that you will pack up your books and become a professional wrestler. Where sin abounds grace abounds even more greatly. Such an assault on humanity may be due in part to the inherent worth in young people. The attack is meant to keep youth from realizing their potential in Christ. This potential is outlined below.

## ***Ready***

**Teens are open to salvation.** It is the nature of adolescence to want to explore and to experiment. While this innate tendency can draw teens deeply into the darkness this same interest can create an openness to the gospel that is not found in older adults unless they are facing a crisis. Teens will visit youth services and camps with a simple invitation. Junior highs will get on busses in droves to attend youth rallies and sports nights sponsored by the church. While the initial draw may be the crowd of youth assembled or the prospect of meeting someone of the opposite sex they are less likely to have set up a huge defense system against the gospel. Some countries, recognizing this openness have tried to restrict conversion in young people by passing laws against “proselytizing.”

**68% choose Christ before 18 yrs old.** –There is a Christian mythology that over 80 percent of all conversions happen before the age of 18. These numbers seem inflated. The Barna group sets this number closer to 68%. What this means however is that the ones who are ready to receive Christ are the younger ones. This may have something to do with the hardening of the heart that happens as people grow older. Pride plays a significant role as well where adults find it harder to humble themselves as “a little child” in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. We should also note that the Holy Spirit is the key player in salvation and it may also be God’s will that individuals come to him younger rather than older. This being the case it seems that significant financial and human resources must be dedicated to the evangelization and discipleship of those under 18.

## ***Reaching Out***

**Teens are best at reaching teens** –The marketing companies have recognized that youth have the money to buy their products and the time to use them. They have also recognized that avante garde youth are their greatest allies in selling their products. Once the cool kids have bought into a trend the whole region of teens are quick to follow. When teens get excited about something they sell it to their friends. When it comes to the gospel teens are best at reaching their friends. In fact, when it comes to reaching teens the average youth has an advantage over Billy Graham. Although they do not have the speaking ability they are very influential and persuasive when trying to reach out to peers. Studies by various researchers, Bibby, Posterski, and Barna validate what most adults know intuitively and that is that teens are most influenced by their friends. They trust their friends more than they trust even the most respected Televangelist. Friends have that rapport and credibility when they share what is most important to their friends. While mass crusades yield large number of converts, teens who invite a friend to a local youth group will see greater long term results. A personal invitation from a friend is so much more effective than an invitation on the tv or radio. Also, ten percent of the work in discipling someone is having them yield themselves to Christ repent and receive salvation, the other 90 percent of the work is the discipleship process. So while a hundred will go forward at a mass evangelism crusade only one percent can be found worshipping in a church 5 years after the crusade. On the other hand 85 percent of youth who give their heart to the Lord in junior high will continue to attend church five years later. A teen who shares the gospel with a friend, invites them to a youth event, sees them accept Christ, and

continues to bring them out to church has been as effective as Billy Graham in their community!

**Jr Highs are ready to receive** –In north America the younger teens seem to be the most effective at this process. Given the opportunity to bring friends out jr high students seem to be able to bring them in droves. Jr high students have more disposable time than senior high students since they are less likely to be working at a part time job and are less likely to be involved with party scene. Looking for parent approved activities the youth ministry provides a wholesome alternative to hanging out at the corner store or the mall. Parents are willing to let their thirteen year olds attend church events and likely praying that something good will happen to them their (even if they are not believers themselves!) Junior high groups that run a program which includes fun, food, friends, media and music will likely draw a crowd. Older jaded busy teens are not so easy to draw to a church sponsored event. The open door of evangelism seems to be a timed event with greater openness attend and hear the gospel at a younger age.

## ***Revolutionary***

**Youth are the Greatest Revolutionary Force** –History shows that it is the youth and young adults who take up a cause and are willing to sacrifice their lives for that cause.

**-Red guard or youth League:** Chairman Mao who radically transformed China recognize the Key role that youth would play in that Movement, he wrote: *The young people are the most active and vital force in society. They are the most eager to learn and the least conservative in their thinking. This is especially so in the era of socialism. We hope that the local Party organizations in various places will help and work with the Youth League organizations and go into the question of bringing into full play the energy of our youth in particular. The Party organizations should not treat them in the same way as everybody else and ignore their special characteristics* From: Introductory note to "A Youth Shock Brigade of the No. 9 Agricultural Producers' Co-operative in Hsinping Township, Chungshan County" (1955), The Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside, Chinese ed., Vol. III.

**Hitler's Army** –A recent movie called "Strictly Ballroom" has popularized the existence of the Navi Youth movement that influenced youth so strongly that they would report subversive activities of even their school mates and parents. Caught up in the euphoria of the third Reich these cadets grew into an army that was almost unstoppable.

**Castro's Isle of Youth** –Dann Spader, founder of Son Life youth ministry describes the secret to Castro's control of Cuba as his indoctrination of the youth in huge youth camps . For many years Castro made indoctrination in communism a rite of passage for youth. While other stronghold of communism have collapsed Cuba continues to stand as one of the strongest out posts.

**Mormon Missionaries** –Meet Elder Smith and Elder Paulson. They are Mormon Missionaries to Romania from Idaho. They wear white shirts and black ties. Although they are wearing a name tag saying "elder" they are recent high school grads off on a two year missionary commitment before they go to university. They are two of hundreds of thousands of Mormon Missionaries world wide. They are the back bone of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints evangelistic army.

## ***Revivalists***

**Majority of Revivals Spearheaded by Youth** –James Orr preacher and historian has shown that six of the nine great modern revivals have been spearheaded by youth

and young Adults. After conversion these young believers were willing to go where others would not go with a zeal others could not muster

**Oxford Awakening** –When D.L. Moody launched his crusades at Oxford he probably had no clue that inspire the famous Oxford Seven who would head out to China. He could not have known that he would see the conversion and calling England’s most famous Cricket player C.T. Studd and that in the next 75 years of his life would do ministry on three continents.

**Welsh Revival** –it is said that the Welsh revival sparked in 1907 was so powerful that you could not buy a drop of liquor in Wales. The pubs were used for evangelistic meetings and people were not interested in buying alcohol. The leaders of the revival were young men who devoted themselves to prayer. The leaders of the movement were also young men.

**Youth Churches worldwide** – One of the newer phenomena influencing the world Christian movement is the development of youth churches where oldest people in the church are only thirty years old. Australia has seen the rise of many of these. Unhindered by tradition or reputation these churches use innovative worship and community based outreach to connect with younger generations. Similar churches are popping up in Canada and the United States.

**Student Led Cell Ministries:** As we will see later in this book student led cell group ministries have been making a huge impact in Bogotá, Columbia and other places. Ted M. Stump, leader of “*high impact ministries*” insists that the secret to youth ministry today is student led small group ministries Trained, committed student leaders do the leading, follow up, and nurture—just like the adults in the cell-church model. Stump admits that the results have been nothing less than revolutionary. He describes the growth saying:

*... in the last five years, student-led, cell group-oriented youth ministries have been increasing in number. My organization is working with 1,000 to 2,000 youth ministries that are either completely cell-group oriented or are transitioning to that model..*

## **Resourceful**

**Teens have Billions at their Disposal** -One of the reasons that youth are so exploited by the media is that this demographic pumped over 150 billion dollars into the North American economy last year and has been growing in its spending power for years. Globally considering countries like Japan and some of the countries in the European Economic Union this demographic is an empire that the multinational corporations want to take over. While marketing companies appeal to the more basic instincts of youth and hope to transform them into voracious consumers at earlier and earlier ages the kingdom of God on earth could benefit greatly from youth world wide willing to invest their almost limitless resources toward ministry of the Gospel.

**Never have more disposable cash** –While some teens will be saving a portion of their MacDonal’d’s money for college the majority will be making purchases on technology (Ipods, Laptops, gaming systems) clothing, or entertainment. While young adults will have greater income than their younger siblings, they also have greater expenses. Youth have the least financial commitments and the greatest discretionary cash flow. Heaped upon the high priced toys that teens desire these resources help fuel the economy. However, if teens were to yield their resources to the Master and his Kingdom the potential for world transformation is staggering.

**Teens will give to a cause they believe in** –Critics argue that teens are too self absorbed to make a difference with their resources. They are able to show with empirical data that youth are bent on satisfying their own narcissistic and sometimes hedonistic preferences. Despite current economic trends there have been rays of hope

showing that teens are willing to spend money on good causes if they are convinced that their money will go to a project that they support. Recent Tsunami relief efforts have shown that teens can be motivated to not only give but to organize fund raisers to care for others. At a recent gathering of youth in the city of Edmonton, Alberta 16,000 youth met for a weekend of Christian concerts and motivational preaching. At one of the services an offering was raised for outreach in Ukraine. Students at that service donated 84,000 dollars for evangelism. While students will continue to spend much more than that on Christian music cd's and other entertainment items, the financial power of young people can be a resource for world missions

## ***Recognized***

While adults may be influenced by the sensational stories of violent youth that make the news headlines scripture indicates that the God has high expectations for youth. Samuel, and David were called to ministry and service when they were only boys. Josiah, one of Judah's most godly kings reformed the country while he was quite young. God recognizes the potential in youth where others are more apt to see only the problems associated with the time of life.

**Mary teenage Mom?** –Most Bible commentators assume that Mary was not much more than a teenager when she gave birth to Jesus. Recognizing the normal child bearing age in Israel and typical marriage practices this is a very likely theory. Scripture indicates that Mary was most highly honored among women. This is definitely true. When God chose to send his son into the world to bring about salvation for all who would believe and received him as Lord, he chose a very young woman. This woman may have been a teenager.

**Age of the disciples** - It is likely that Mary was less than twenty when she gave birth to Jesus. In all likelihood also, some of Jesus disciples were also teenagers. There is indication that Peter was married, but there is no such information provided for any of the other disciples. James and John were working with their father. Their mother seems to be involved in their lives still considering their future position in the kingdom that Jesus was going to establish. John exhibits behavior like leaning on Jesus at supper time that is more typical of younger teens. Given the date of John's later writings he would have been a very young man when he traveled with Jesus. The evidence points to a very young age for John as a disciple of Christ. Could it be that when Jesus called the original twelve that some of them were only teenagers?

**Jesus called and calls teens.** History chronicles heroic acts performed for God and country by the young. Joan of Arc was convinced that it was God calling her on a crusade for her country. The Salvation Army influenced the British Empire through its young cadets. Many missionaries serving today describe their initial call to ministry coming to them when they were a child or a teenager. The Lord seems to have a different opinion about the young than the view held by the media.

## **Conclusion**

At the start of this Chapter youth were compared to sheep without shepherds. The great work of discipling youth is much like the care and guidance of sheep, i.e. bringing them to green pastures for grazing. Jesus also compares this task to farming.

Shepherding required consistency. It requires dedication to lead and protect the sheep. It can be lonely and demanding work with few rewards. From the Lord's perspective, the sheep are worth the effort. The Lord is very much aware of the great need and the great potential. Those who disciple youth need to be keenly aware of the challenge and the opportunities involved with this work. Teens need caring leaders who can see their value in spite of the negative influences affecting them.

Jesus has called us not only to shepherd sheep to but equip young people to do the work of the ministry. As history reveals youth have been used for good or evil purposes. If their time, their money, and their lives are invested in the kingdom the possibilities are limitless. The challenge of youth ministry is to rescue teens from the negative influences of this world and prepare them for works of service.

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## Chapter 2 Biblical Discipleship

### Introduction

On one of my retreats I challenged my students to create a *sky hook*. Students produced some outlandish, wonderful, creative inventions. Each group was convinced that their sky hook would do the job. Each felt that their product was superior to the product of the other groups. I was disappointed however because none of the products was able to do what I wanted them to do. I wanted them to be able to snag a cloud and bring it down to the earth. Or at least that what was I told them after they delivered their spiel about the many virtues of their creations.

This exercise probably sounds bizarre to you and you are probably thankful that you are not in any of my classes and can study safely at a distance. The point may not be obvious, so I will explain it to you. As I told my class afterward, we have been called to produce a product in the church. We do not use an assembly line (I hope!) but we are called by God to make disciples. There is a big problem with that. The problem is, like our concept of the sky hook, we have very different ideas about what a disciple looks like and what it is supposed to do when we are done making one.

In this Chapter we are going to look rather mechanically at the definition of a disciple. By doing so I hope to help you begin to develop a blue print in your mind of what a disciple might look like.

To use another analogy, in shop class, we were assigned the task of making book ends to sell at a school craft sale. As we began, each of us was given the same tools, identical pieces of wood, and especially a template to measure out our pieces. The shop teacher left nothing to chance because the sale of these products would be used to fund the wood work shop at our school.

As much as we might resent this *cookie cutter* approach to discipleship, there are some aspects of the process that cannot be avoided. Hopefully in this description of the discipleship process we will be able to agree on some of these basic elements.

### Discipleship Defined

disciple (Webster's Unabridged Dictionary)

[ME, fr. OE *discipul* & OF *deciple*, *desciple*, fr. LL *discipulus* personal follower of Jesus Christ in his lifetime (fr. L) & L *discipulus* pupil, perh. fr. (assumed) L *discipere* to grasp, comprehend, fr. L *dis-* *Idis-* + *-cipere* (fr. *capere* to seize)

*I* : one who receives instruction from another : one who accepts the doctrines of another and assists in spreading or implementing them : FOLLOWER :as

*a* : a professed follower of Christ in his life time esp : one of the twelve apostles

*b* : a convinced adherent of a school (as in philosophy, art, or politics)

The Term "Disciple" and the Concept of "Discipleship"

The Greek term (mathetes) refers generally to any "student," "pupil," "apprentice," or "adherent," as opposed to a "teacher." In the ancient world, however, it is most

often associated, with people who were devoted followers of a great religious leader or teacher of philosophy. In this Chapter we will examine the use of this term in as this illustrates its meaning

## Concept of Disciple in the Old Testament

**Follower.** Isaiah 8:16 and 50:4 uses the phrase “my followers” and this phrase is used in a similar fashion to the word disciple in the New Testament. The Hebrew term for *followers* means “learner” or one taking “instruction” In some cases this may refer to a formal school, as we see in the case of Elisha (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3-15; 4:1-38), or in what is called the school of the prophets (1 Samuel 19:20-24; 1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3-15; 4:1-38)

**Elijah and Elisha.** As the scriptures above point out there was more formal training of those who wanted to know the ways of God. Scripture also shows very good examples of mentoring relationships. Elijah lays his mantle on the young farmer who quickly abandons life of the farm and begins to travel with Elijah. Scripture does not provide us with didactic passages or discourses delivered by Elijah to Elisha. It would seem that by traveling with the prophet and attending to him Elisha learns many things. At the end of Elijah’s tenure he indicates to his apprentice that he will be leaving this world. At the end Elisha sticks even closer than usual so that he will be blessed when his master is taken from him.

**Mentoring relationship.** The above story indicates that discipleship in the Old Testament involved relationship. From start to finish the importance of the master and student being together is essential. Likely in the day to day operations of the prophet ministry Elisha picks up many unwritten secrets. He observes not only the teachings of the prophet but the lifestyle. Likely Elisha was given the opportunity to also observe Elijah’s relationship with God and his dealings with people.

**Attendant or Aide** –An interesting aspect of the Old Testament program of discipleship is that the mentoring relationship involves service; not in a master slave arrangement but more of a master apprentice relationship. It may be useful to think of this situation as an attendant or aide. Involved in this relationship is the intention that Elijah is training a replacement. Historically this would follow the example set by Moses and Joshua

**Joshua’s relationship to Moses** (Ex. 24:13, 33:11) When Moses sends spies into Canaan Joshua is included in the number. As the story of the wilderness wanderings unfold, Joshua begins to emerge as a commander of the army. He is given rare opportunities to see the inside world of Moses’ life including his conversations with God and trips to the Holy Mountain. At the outset of the book of Joshua, the Lord’s words likely the core of what Moses wanted his disciple Joshua to know. He says: *“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” Josh 1:6-9*

With the advent of written Scripture, discipleship takes on a new dimension. Central to the discipleship now is the focus on the written and recited word. Part of the call is to keep the word in his mouth and the other part is to meditate on it in his heart. The last dimension is the injunction toward obedience. Understanding, repeating and obeying the recorded word from this point on will become as essential as the relationship with a godly person.

## **Discipleship in the OT Home**

The injunction given to Joshua from the Lord is perfectly consistent with the Deuteronomy passage meant for all of Gods people. Look carefully at this passage and look at the implications for disciple making today.

*Deut. 6:6-9 -Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

## **Deuteronomy 6 Pattern**

For the next few moments study this passage and on a separate sheet, try to determine the answers to these questions:

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**Note:** this is also an interactive activity for this Chapter that can be submitted directly to the professor.

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1. When was instruction or discipling the child to take place?
2. Where was instruction or discipling the child to take place?
3. How was instruction or discipling the child to take place?
4. What was instruction or discipling was the child to receive?
5. What does this tell us about the role of family in discipling youth?
6. What principles from this passage could be applied to youth ministries today?

## **Summary of OT Meaning**

A quick summary of the major aspects of discipleship as recorded in the Old Testament should be sufficient at this point. Listed below are concepts that can easily be applied to ministry today.

**Emphasis on learning and instruction.** When individuals come to Christ they come for different reasons initially. Ultimately they choose to pledge their lives to his service. Fundamentally, unless they were raised in a Christian home and received sound teaching likely their will be a steep learning curve to live in the way that Christians do. Every thing learned in life previous to submission to Christ should be held suspect. Learning all there is to know and unlearning all that is harmful for the disciple is a major undertaking. It is disappointing that so many people are willing to accept new life in Christ and so few are motivated to continue to learn after they have been a follower for more than two years.

**Learning takes place in everyday situations in life.** Years ago there was a movie made called Karate Kid. The boy, Daniel san wished to learn Karate. The Karate master, Mr. Miyagi promised to teach Daniel san Karate on the condition that he would submit totally to his discipline. This training involved such mundane things as sanding a huge wooden deck, painting a very long fence, waxing vintage cars, and painting an entire house. After doing all of this manual seemingly pointless work Daniel san became frustrated felling like his master had not lived up to his part of the bargain to teach him karate. Daniel san receives an immediate revelation when Mr. Miyagi swing his fist at him and Daniel san is able to block it easily using the same

motion that he used to paint the fence. When Mr. Miyagi tried to kick him he was able to use the same “wax on, wax off” motion that Mr. Miyagi had given him to wax all of the cars.

The religion of the Hebrews did not compartmentalize the spiritual and the secular or church life and family life. Discipleship took place in the most common activities and was not compartmentalized to an hour on Sunday morning. The responsibility for spiritual nurture did not reside with the Levitical priests or paid clergy. Instead religious instruction began at the earliest age and became a part of daily routines.

Ministries that take discipleship seriously assist families to disciple their young and encourage them to integrate prayer, worship, bible instruction, and ministry through the home. Supplementing what is done in the home with valuable learning experiences youth ministries can help disciple teens through outreach, service, ministry to senior, fundraiser, extended times together and other gatherings.

**Learning involves service** –Joshua assisted Moses and Elisha assisted Elija. In the New Testament the disciples assisted Jesus in his ministry to the sick and the needy. In his final demonstration of discipleship Jesus serves his disciples by washing their feet. Youth ministries do well by allowing students to serve in whatever ways possible from stacking chairs to running a concession stand or a snack bar. In the mundane service Christ is present. Youth would do well to know that when they serve others they are serving him.

**Learning takes place in relationship with the teacher** –The Old Testament does not provide so much sentimental descriptions of the disciples’ relationship to his teacher. The loyalty shown is the big clue in the Old Testament. Joshua remains loyal until Moses’ death and Elisha will not be separated from Elijah until the very moment of his ascension in the fiery chariot. Much greater emotion is displayed in the New Testament where we see Paul weeping when he left a place. He expresses at different times how those he had taught were dear to him. Paul was not an unapproachable leader but a pastor who cared deeply for his sheep. Jesus’ disciples knew how much they were loved and it is quite clear that they loved him also.

## **Discipleship in the New Testament**

### ***Disciple in Greek Culture***

The Greeks used the term *mathetes* to refer to a “learner,” or on a more committed level, an “adherent.” The Sophists also used the term to refer to an “institutional pupil.” At the time of Jesus *mathetes* was used in Hellenism to refer simply to a “learner,” but apparently more often to an “adherent” of some wise teacher.

### ***Disciple in Jewish Culture***

Just as there were “disciples” in the Greco-Roman world of the first century, so there were people called disciples in Judaism as well. Such people were committed to a recognized leader or movement. This involved Jewish adherents to philosophical schools or to religious and political sects. The Pharisees also had their own disciples and they too claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28-29). John the Baptist also had disciples who lived with him and followed him, practiced his ascetic lifestyle, and shared his teachings (Mark 2:18; Luke 11:1; John 3:25; Acts 19:1-7).

In general, the education of boys in first century Judaism centered in the home around Torah learning. The Torah was taught primarily by the father. If he wanted further training in preparation for being a judge, teacher, scribe, or head of a synagogue, he might continue his study of the Torah in a small group or seek to study as a disciple under a certain scholar. The apostle Paul was an example of a

Jewish boy who had left home (i.e., Tarsus) to study the Law under Gamaliel, a famous Rabbi in Jerusalem (Acts 5:34; 22:3).

In summary, discipleship refers to people committed to following a great leader, emulating his life and passing on his teachings. In these cases, discipleship meant much more than just the transfer of information. Discipleship required imitating the teacher's life, adopting his values, and spreading his teachings. For the Jewish boy over thirteen this meant going to study with a recognized Torah scholar, imitating his life and faith, and concentrating on mastering the Mosaic Law as well as the traditional interpretations of it.

### ***Discipleship in the Gospels and Epistles***

The emphasis in the gospels and the epistles is quite plain. Disciples are called to be followers, learners, and disciple-makers. We see the follower in this verse, Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. (Mark 2:13-14)

David Watson in his book, *Discipleship* comments on the following aspect of discipleship and says,

*"a disciple is a follower of Jesus. He has committed himself to Christ, to walking Christ's way, to living Christ's life and to sharing Christ's love and truth with others. The verb to disciple describes the process of encouraging another person to be a follower of Jesus; it includes the methods used to help that person become mature in Christ and to be in a position where they can disciple someone else."*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, author of *The Cost of Discipleship* stresses that following Christ always requires a "definite step". He explained also that the key to discipleship was "single minded obedience." These words are a result of a detailed study of the Sermon on the Mount, but the concept permeates the Bible. The Apostle John defines discipleship in these words:

*We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:3-6*

**Learner** (Matthew 11:28-30) As a teacher the pastor has a serious task. Mark Tittley a youth pastor and professor points out that "*The primary task of the youth leader in discipling youth is to engage with youth so that youth learn from them. One of the most important characteristic in a disciple is a teachable spirit. People only learn to the extent that they are open to learn. A key task in youth ministry is to teach youth - to equip and educate them, not simply to entertain them. This involves a process of change - in terms of what youth know, feel and do. The task is not so much informational as transformational.*"

**Disciple-maker:** There is no way to avoid this obligation as we read the Bible. Discipleship is a call to "make disciples" Jesus original call to his first disciples included this challenge. In this very early encounter he calls to them and says:

"Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17) Disciple -makers (Luke 6:40) Jesus said that when a disciple is fully trained, he will be like his teacher. A disciple emulates the lifestyle of Jesus Christ and exhibits some essential characteristics: (1) Obedience (John 8:31,32) - as youth are disciple they should become more obedient, not just full of knowledge; (2) Love (John 13:31,32) - youth show they are disciples of Jesus, not by how much they know, but by how

much they love; and (3) Fruit (John 15:8,16) - youth also show that they are disciples by the fruit they produce.

In summary: A disciple is a learner who develops through a learning process; a follower who provides a significant model for people to follow; and a reproducer whose lifestyle is marked by obedience, love and fruitfulness.

### **Discipleship is Call to Personal Commitment to Jesus**

Mark 3:14 says that : He appointed twelve (whom he named apostles), so that they might be with him and that he could [then] send them to preach. Its a call to be with him and to know him (Mark 3:14) Philippians 3:10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, 3:11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. The goal is to enjoy him and become like him (Luke 6:40) through fellowship with the Master that we begin to look, feel, and act like the Master (cf. 2 Cor 3:18).

**Discipleship is a Call to Follow Jesus** Luke 9:23-24 emphasizes the need to follow. Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. 9:24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

**Requires Death-** this passage and many others place a radical demand upon discipleship. While other rabbinical teachers may call a student to years of devotion, Christ demands our life. In a world frightened by commitment this is unnerving call. Where we might be more apt to negotiate a deal that would require ten percent of our income and one hour of our time on Sunday morning Jesus has a completely different notion. For youth to face rejection by their peers by choosing to actively evangelize their high school they have chosen what youth pastors call “social suicide.” They have purposely cut off hopes being invited to drinking parties and other questionable events that they may have liked to participate in. Paul calls this a living sacrifice in Roman’s 12 but does not see it as something grandiose, just our reasonable duty and service. As Bonhoeffer is often quoted as saying, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

**Requires salvation** –Can you be a disciple without being saved? Some seminaries are debating this along with the question, “Can Jesus be your savior if he is not your Lord?” Gandhi considered himself a follower of Christ. He even referred to himself as a disciple, but Jesus made exclusive claims to his identity and deity. He demands that we believe upon him as the son of God. Gandhi could not technically be a follower of Christ because he was not born again.

**Requires commitment.** On many occasions Jesus seems to be discouraging people from following him. He urges them to count the cost or even places fantastic demands upon them like selling all their goods and giving the money to the poor. He is stressing the kind of commitment that it will take to be his follower. It is surprising that in some places discipleship is peddled like the only change required in our lives is a prayer before a meal or at bed time. The essence of the commitment is not so much to a teaching although that is essential, or to a lifestyle although that is required, it is a commitment to Him personally. Jesus can make the audacious claim upon a persons life, saying “Come follow me”

**Requires obedience:** John chapter 6 records a turning point in Jesus’ public ministry where a large number of disciples abandoned him. He had mentioned that they would have to drink his blood and eat his flesh, no doubt referring to the Lord ’s Supper and the new covenant. To them it must have seemed that Jesus was increasing his demands to unreasonable limits. They had done all he asked to that point but this was going too far. Like the rich young ruler they too probably went away sad or mumbling to themselves that the prophet had spent too much time in the wilderness. Nevertheless Jesus as the master is within rights to make demands on his

disciples and a disciples response is to be, “Yes Lord.” Obedience is the essence of discipleship.

For our purposes, then, a “disciple of Christ” is a person committed to loving and following Jesus. Learning from him and obeying his commands is a lifestyle. In our knowing Christ we are becoming like him—thinking, feeling, and living as he commands. We are to follow him, through thick and through thin, knowing that he is there and that he will reward us in his time; after all, he is the Master. we make it our goal to disciple others in every country

## **Conclusion**

While this biblical discussion is far from exhaustive it has highlighted a few essential elements that have been repeated again and again. From early times discipleship has involved learning. This learning was always in the context of a relationship either with the family or a recognized leader or teacher. Discipleship also involved service. Learning took place in the common experience of life and in ways that seem only remotely related to spiritual disciplines. Along with learning, relationship, and service, a fundamental aspect of the discipleship process was calling and commitment. Disciples were committing both to the teacher and to the teaching. Finally it was not enough for the disciple to attain new skills or further education, inherent in the process was the responsibility to reproduce the process by taking on the training of others.

# Part 2 The Disciple Making Youth Worker

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## Chapter 3: The Call

### Introduction

Students often wrestle with the meaning and the reality of the call of God upon their lives. This is understandable given the fact that as Christians we have yielded ourselves to the Lordship of Christ. As disciples we live yielded lives of obedience to God's will rather than pursuing selfish ambition. Likely if you are taking this book you too have thought long and hard about the call. In this Chapter we will begin by examining some perspectives on this question from the view point of other students. We will then go on to look at some of the popular misconceptions that seem to circulate in the church, and finally after all of the meandering we will explore a working description of the call to reaching and discipling youth.

### View Points on the Call

#### *The Question*

*Hey guys, I was reading the stuff on the call in our texts and I have a few questions and am curious on everyone's opinions. "The Call" is it only to pastors and leaders?? Are there other calls also? Are those things called a "call" as well? If people have been ministering for a while and God shifts where or how that person is going to minister now, does "the call" change or does the person become "uncalled?"*

*I know that I received a call to full time ministry many years ago when I was a fairly new Christian, but I didn't know what it was for, just that I would be in some sort of a full time ministry and i had a desire to go after the lost sheep because there was no one to go and when I felt God say "Who will go?" I said "send me" My call is starting to be shown now, gradually, like veils being slowly removed that leads into the holy of holies. Do you guys want to talk about your call??*

Blessings --Cheryl

### **First Response**

*First, in response to your question (good questions by the way), I don't believe that the Call is just for Pastors and leaders. I think God calls each person to minister (that's the call-to minister to people), whether it's preaching, teaching or greetings someone at the church door.*

*I think of the scripture that says God has given some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11) The thing that's important is finding out to which we are called and then do our best, with the Lord's help, to answer that call.*

*I know God's has called me to a full time ministry. I had my own dreams that didn't include ministry. But God began to speak to me five years and told me He had a better dream for me. It's amazing how when you allow Him, God makes His dreams your dreams. I wouldn't want it any other way now. It certainly hasn't been easy the last few years, I went through some very difficult times. But God has been so faithful, and He placed some terrific people in my life who have encouraged me and supported me. I don't know what He has in store for me, but as the song goes "I know who holds tomorrow". He has promised to be there for me, no matter what.*

*Well, it great fellowshipping with you. God blessings to you and your family.*

*LoVE AnD PRaYeRS, Diane*

### **Second Response**

Hey Cheryl:

*It's really funny that you asked to discuss this topic. While I have felt God's call on my life for full time ministry, I have also felt called to teach Sunday School, administer through serving on our church's board of deacons, lead the youth group for a time, usher, lead worship services, visit unsaved and sick people, help out with children's church and mid week ministries, in practically every aspect of ministry I feel that God requires my presence, my talents, the use of me to perform His Work. I realize that I cannot be all things to all people, but sometimes just being willing to step in and help out in some way, is response to a call.*

*As to being "not-called" I think that God uses us to do different things as He requires. We may not feel called to continue in a particular ministry, God might have used us for the time He had planned to do exactly that. I know that it is hard to stop doing something, especially something you enjoy, but maybe God is trying your willingness to obey, He might require your talents in another aspect of ministry for a time. God enables the called, He doesn't just call the enabled, we may not feel to continue in one ministry so as to become equipped for another.*

*An old hymn we sing at church is "Hold To God's Unchanging Hand". While He never changes, the paths He would lead us through vary from time-to-time. He wants us to lean entirely on His understanding, trust entirely to Him everything we are and have. Hold tight to His hand, trust and obey and your calling, whatever it might be will be made clear in His time, He'll also advise you of updates or changes as necessary.*

Barry

### **My Response**

Hi folks, this is an excellent discussion on *the call*. I think there is as much superstition surrounding this as there is truth out their in church land. I think it is

very confusing, and maybe more so for women since it is such a male dominated field. There are those who hold to a misinformed view that women cannot pastor or be a teacher, which makes it even more difficult for women to use their gifts. Then there is the whole organizational thing that confuses both men and women. It would seem that if you are *called to ministry* you go to full time bible college, graduate, get credentials from the district and get a position in a church.

It seems in the New Testament that people like Timothy were mentored but also recognized among the believers as a pastor. Likely he had to prove himself through using the gift of pastor-teacher in the church.

I think the call to pastor is different than the call to medicine, education, or research, but I think everyone should make sure that *whatever they are doing* is God's will for their life. Some people work to pay bills but see their *ministry* outside of the work place. Some pastors have been forced to work a secular job as they plant a church. Nothing is as important as walking so closely with God that you know his voice as he corrects and guides you. After that most things are simple (except finding a mate-- which is as complicated as the Cadbury secret!)

## The Call to Youth Ministry

Above you saw some view points on the call to ministry from level-headed people. Unfortunately there are some ideas floating around out there that are less balanced. Let's examine these momentarily. Try to determine if any of these ideas have ever influenced you at some point in your life.

## Misconceptions about the call

**Feel too young to work with adults.** Students sometimes feel that they are too young to work with adults in the church. What they forget is that an essential element in youth ministry is the work that is done with parents. The level of maturity required to work with youth is just as high as working with adults in the church. Immaturity

**Youth ministry is more fun.** To the outside observer, or to the student in the youth group, being a youth pastor can appear to be a great life full of fun and activity. As a student a youth retreat can be a life changing experience full of thrilling activities. The leader of such an event may have an entirely different experience staying up all night with a youth who is sick, or has decided not to return to her parents home after

**Want to avoid church politics.** Wherever you have people you have politics. Sometimes this is formal because there are organizational lines drawn and policies for keeping order. Sometimes this is informal just determining whose ideas are best to follow in a group and agreeing to do the same thing. In church life, both formal and informal systems influence how things are done. Students who think that avoiding board meetings or other church committees makes them invulnerable to church politics quickly realize that church committees make important decisions that ultimately affect the youth ministry. If the youth minister is not part of the decision making process some of the decisions can be unfavorable. Some youth workers then make it their goal to be part of the decision making bodies of a church.

**Can get better results with youth.** Some youth workers are achievement oriented and believe that by working with youth they will gain quicker, more substantial results working with younger people. With over two thirds of Christians making that decision before they turn 18, this highly understandable. The reality is however, in many youth ministries that while the youth groups are large it is hard to retain these youth into their college years. One Canadian denomination, known for thriving youth ministries published last year that only 15% of the youth from high school ministries

ever find their way into a young adult ministry. So while there can be some great gains there is also a huge falling away. Youth workers have to prepare for the heart break of mentoring a student only to see that same student walk away from the faith.

**It is a place to feel needed.** There are some people who should be turned away from ministry. These are people seeking to have some emotional need met by youth. Some people have a need to be needed. This could be an expression of the messiah complex or it could be the result of some psychological need but the result is young negative for the congregation. While the youth made need a youth leader their greater need is to become independent followers of Christ. Leaders who are looking for the popularity that they never had in high school or in college will do damage to youth groups. Leaders looking to feel constantly loved may misuse their role to direct students toward them instead of toward the cross. Leaders who seek to have their ego fed will find that they are doing more harm than good. Pastors and parachurch workers should go into ministry sharing the fulfillment that they already have in Christ not looking for results or even relationships with youth to make them feel fulfilled.

**There are more positions available.** Students may feel that God wants them in youth ministry because these “entry level positions” are more plentiful. In their minds, it is better to study youth ministry because that is more likely the place that they will start out. This too can be dangerous as a youth ministry is not a good place for a leader to discover that they have no interest in working with youth. In some denominations it is expected that a pastor will prove their ministry skills working with youth and then after ordination are given their own congregation. The danger with this approach is two-fold. First it treats youth like guinea pigs to be experimented upon by the novice pastor. Secondly it says that the same skill set necessary to work with youth will work with adults. This too is erroneous.

**People say I would be great with youth.** Many students enroll in the youth ministry program because a well meaning adult has taken them aside and told them that they would do well working with youth. This advice is only as credible as the one giving the advice. Does this person have a clear grasp of the demands of contemporary youth ministry or do they assume that you are gifted because you exhibit behaviours normally attributed to junior high students? Could it be that this is an insult not a compliment where your maturity is in question? The Bible says that there is wisdom in many counsellors but it is entirely possible that those pointing students toward youth ministry have no clue concerning the skill set required to do the job.

**No one was there for me when I was young.** While this is an admirable sentiment this is a strong enough reason in and of itself to choose vocational youth ministry as a life option. Obviously the need is great but no greater than the need to reach Buddhist children in China or refugee’s Rwanda. While the need is a great motivator there needs to be a “rightness of fit” for the youth worker and the ministry context.

**I have already been offered a position.** As a youth ministry professor, I have had the experience to meet with students entering the youth program. Sadly their reasons for entering were based more on employment than on ministry or calling. This has been compared to dangling a carrot in front of a donkey. In ten years of teaching I have never seen this arrangement result in the student taking the position.

**Someone told me that it was God’s will for me.** This is probably the worst abuse of advice. While there have been occasions in the Old Testament where the call for a Judge in Israel it is more likely that God will communicate with his children now through his Holy Spirit. While God’s call upon an individual’s life may be confirmed by wise, godly leaders in a church it is more likely that God will communicate this to that individually in a personal way first. The penalty for a false prophecy in the Old Testament was death by stoning. Those who take it upon themselves to speak to a young person about God’s call on their life need to exercise the utmost caution. For

those seeking God's direction for their lives, practicing discernment and discretion is essential.

## The Call: A Description

Any discussion of a specific call to youth ministry has to be partially speculative, but there are a few principles that can be applied to this process. Anyone sorting through issues relating to their personal call or those who may find themselves counseling youth would do well to carefully consider this discussion of the call.

**Not listed in the Bible as an office.** To begin, those who are looking for a call to youth ministry may be disappointed if they look for evidence of such a thing in the pages of scripture. While the bible lists offices such as pastor, teacher, or evangelist, the bible does not refer to age groups and their particular pastors. This is more an invention of the church in the last fifty years. While Jesus may have disciplined some sixteen or seventeen year olds among his disciples he did not operate under the coveted title of "Youth Pastor"

**Starts with gifts; e.g. Pastor, teacher, evangelist, etc.** Eph 4:11 describes some of the offices in the church. Some churches believe that some of these offices no longer exist in the church while others feel that a varying number of these positions still operate. One that most churches still feel comfortable with is the pastor (or pastor-teacher as some would prefer. This is likely that call that a student would receive. It should begin with the call to pastor or the call to be an evangelist first. The particular group to minister may fluctuate. The Apostle Paul had a definite call to the gentiles but this also led him into doing the work of an evangelist and teacher. It took him to all over the known world of his time.

## The Call to Youth Ministry Specifics:

The specifics of the call will vary greatly from person to person but the specifics below are elements that are normally present in the experience of the call as reported by youth pastors. ( for a more detailed discussion of this matter see also Youth Ministry that Transforms, by Merton Strommen.)

1. **It begins with the general call to serve.** Whereas there may be those called to vocational ministry, all of us are called to serve. No Christian can avoid the master's call to "go and made disciples of all nations." One of the key reformation principles was the priesthood of all believers. All of us are called but each has a different ministry. The question is what am I called to?

2. **There can be a specific call to a group.** In the New Testament church certain individuals were set apart for a particular task. Deacons were designated to oversee the benevolence of the church in Jerusalem. Different leaders were sent to various places to plant churches, support churches, and deliver important messages. In one particular instance we see that the Apostle Paul received a call in a dream to go to Macedonia to preach. Over the centuries other godly men and women have felt a call to minister to various people groups and to various age groups.

3. **There is a growing concern or burden.** Experience has shown that this call is sensed as a deep compassion for a certain group of people, a church, or a particular need in a community. Bill Bright felt a need for campus ministry and founded Campus Crusade for Christ. Some students have noted that every time they would go to pray that they would feel compelled to pray for youth.

4. **You could not feel fulfilled in any other ministry.** For those who feel called to the ministry in general, there is a sense that no other line of work would satisfy. Some youth pastors tried their hand at other vocations and found that they were

miserable until they pursued their call. In a similar way there have been those who felt an unmistakable call to work with youth but became involved in other ministries only to find that they would not be completely satisfied until they began to work with youth.

**5. There is a special love for youth.** The impetus for ministry is compassion. We see this clearly in Jesus ministry. It motivated him to do special miracles for people and directed all of his movements. One way that youth pastors have defined their call to youth ministry is by their love for youth. They explain that the love drew them. They sensed that it was the love of Christ in their hearts reaching out to young people. Although we are called to love all people loving youth seems natural and requires no effort.

**6. The ability to relate well to youth.** One of the indicators that this may be the direction for someone's life is the ability to relate well to youth. In most cases it is an unlikely fit that someone would be called to work with youth, detest their behavior and dislike being near them. At the same time it is more likely that a person with a natural capacity to understand, appreciate and relate to youth may be called to work with them. Many ministry skills can be learned and there are some exceptional cases where God has used people with almost know people skills but these are the exception not the rule.

**7. The call is confirmed in special ways by God.** Gideon tried to determine God's will by laying a fleece on the ground and asking God to either soak it or keep it dry so that he would be able to know for sure the will of God. This is not a New Testament pattern for discerning the will of God. More likely there is some fruit in ministry practiced with youth, or God through some means, creates circumstances that verify the call upon a persons life. This is sometimes recognition of a person's ministry by the elders of a church.

**8. Further confirmation is good fruit in ministry to youth.** Jesus said that by their fruits you will know them. This was in relation to the lifestyle of the Pharisees which resulted in legalistic religion and the distortion of truth to suit their needs. Conversely, those who are working in the power of God's spirit and are faithful to the scripture will produce good fruit. Those who are within the will of God will eventually produce good fruit from their ministry. Those who seem only to alienate youth, are in constant conflict with the parents, and are unable to organize effective youth meetings should seriously consider if this is the optimal place of ministry.

## Conclusion

Not everyone is called to youth ministry. There are some people who should never work with youth. It is demanding ministry not suited for most people. At the same time God continues to call men and women to youth ministry. In most circumstances they will be involved in the work of pastoring or the work of evangelism or teaching. Those who sense a deep and growing compassion for youth, posses some of the basic relational skills necessary and are willing to be trained may be called to work with youth. This call will be confirmed with an ability to relate to youth and develop a relationship of trust. Eventually workers who are called of God will see fruit that will last.

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## Chapter 4 The Character

### Introduction

People used to say, “You don’t have to be crazy to work with *but it sure helps!*” If they only knew how right they were. Consider the task for a moment. Willingly youth workers put themselves into unpredictable situations which involve herding young people on and off of buses or vans to get them from one place to another. Some brave souls will even load them up on planes and fly to other countries for extended periods of time. Others lock themselves in with 100 youth ages 13-19 for a whole night of deafening music, outrageous pranks, sleep deprivation, and high cholesterol snacks.

In what other profession are you required to be the student’s friend one moment and have to keep their attention and the attention of their 20 best friends the next moment? Or in what profession do you walk the tight rope between entertaining teens and challenging them to live a life of submission and self denial.

The task of relating to parents and teens at the same time is fraught with challenges. And people willingly choose this life?! Yes!

In this Chapter we will examine the various youth worker stereotypes that are widely held in the Christian community. Following this we will examine some of the characteristics and qualities required to go the distance in effective youth ministry. At the same time we will also examine the dark sided, the dangers of youth ministry from Robbins’ perspective.

### Youth Worker Stereotypes

One factor that limits a youth workers ability to enter a youth ministry position and to be effective there is the unrealistic stereotype often held by church boards, youth groups, and parents. Many good leaders have also given up on their hope of entering youth ministry because they too have had a misconception of what it takes to be a youth worker and build and effective discipling ministry. Below we will refute each of these debilitating stereotypes. f

**You do not have to be cool avant-garde or play a musical instrument.** The image of a guitar-playing running shoe-wearing young white male youth pastor is possibly the biggest deterrent to effective youth ministry. Thankfully after years of education and professional youth ministries this caricature is beginning to fade. Effective youth ministries are not built on these thin image driven approaches. Youth leaders who try to assume this kind of image are quickly spotted by youth as inauthentic. Churches who set out to find such an individual are often disappointed as well, determining within a year that by judging by such flimsy externals they have ignored more important and more relevant characteristics.

It should be noted that an understanding of music can be an asset and being “uncool” is not necessarily advantageous. Authenticity is really what matters here. The goal is not to be an over grown youth, but an authentic adult believer who is passionate about Christ and discipling teens.

**You do not have to like all the music that they like.** There have been older leaders who have shunned youth ministry because they could not stand the music. Others have lied and tried to pretend that they love every different style of music imaginable. Youth do not expect their leaders to like every kind of youth music. Youth choose one style of music that they like and normally take an antagonistic view of other styles. Teens are not expecting adult leaders to love their music but they will not tolerate a leader who constantly attacks their style of music without even listening to it.

**You do not have to dress exactly like them.** It is laughable to youth to see an adult try to dress like them. What they are laughing at is the shameful attempt to buy their way into youth culture by wearing clothes that most adults would not wear in any other circumstance. More important is that a leader is able to feel comfortable with youth and can wear relaxed clothing around them. The image of the pastor in a suit all of the time creates an unnecessary barrier between the leader and the youth. At the same time youth workers must remember that they work with parents and other community leaders. Dressing like a hip hop dancer or a gansta rapper will not fit with anyone. Each church has a certain culture. It is important to understand what kind of dress is appropriate for Sunday worship, what is appropriate for the church office, and what is best for campus visits or youth nights.

**You do not have to be able to do every sport imaginable.** Some leaders have felt too uncoordinated not athletic enough to participate in sports and wrongly assumed that they are not fit for youth ministry. What they do not realize is that youth workers do not have to be sports heroes. More important than athletic prowess is being a good sport. Pastor Jones is the senior pastor of a large downtown church in the city of Edmonton. At the same time he has coached an undefeated high school football team. He cannot play football nor has he ever been able to play foot ball but he is an excellent coach who has inspired young men to personal discipline and discipleship. Youth are looking for leaders who can facilitate sports and almost any leader can learn the rules. Helping students to participate in and enjoy sports can be an important part of ministry. When leaders participate in sports it is more important that they are good sport not good at sports. You should be able to lead sports but you do not have to be an iron person, just a good sport.

**You don't have to be a comedian.** Another erroneous expectation of youth workers is that they are funny. People assume that to keep youth interested leaders have to be able to be able to tell funny jokes, or stories that will make students laugh. While humor does open many doors some of the most effective youth workers do not consider themselves very funny. For many, using humor is hard work. At the same time it is important that leaders have a sense of humor and can recognize when a joke has been told. More important than telling funny jokes is recognizing when students are trying to be funny and laughing at their attempts at humor.

**You don't have to try to be like anyone you are not.** It is not always clear where it comes from but some youth workers have tried to emulate an effective youth communicator or youth leader that they have met. Popular youth speakers are sometimes copied right down to the style and mannerisms. Youth Worship leaders sometimes try to master the same expressions and sounds, even the accents of their favorite worship bands from Britain or Australia. The presentation becomes comical but it is not meant to be so. They mean to be taken seriously but that cannot happen while they pretend to be someone that they are not. One of the ways to ensure failure is to copy some successful leader. Youth will spot that you are not being genuine and will be repulsed by the phoniness.

Use the gifts you do have. Instead, of falling into any of the stereo types it is more important for a youth worker to recognize what are their special gifts and to use them for God's glory. The insecurity of the position of youth pastor can cause men and

women to do strange things. Yielding to the pressure to assume people's impressions of what a youth worker or pastor should be can result in bizarre inconsistent behaviour. Youth ministry becomes an act rather than an authentic expression of the leader's gifts, qualities and personality.

## Qualities and Abilities of Youth Workers

Instead of trying to conform to external expectations of others, potential youth workers would do much better to invest in personal growth. As the leader allows God to shape their personality and character they become more able to face the challenges of ministry and reject the silly notions that are some times held by God's people. As we examine each of these it would be valuable for you as a student to evaluate yourself and determine a few areas for personal growth.

**Maturity-** Instant maturity is unachievable. That is why some churches have made it a hiring practice to accept resumes from only master's level student or adults in their thirties. At the same time life experience matures people. Candidates for ministry positions should be involved deeply with people even while pursuing an education. Wide and varied life experience helps as well, so taking opportunities that are new and outside of your day to day routine are helpful as well. There is also much to be said for independence. While I would not encourage everyone to leave home, the responsibility of working, interacting with people of other beliefs, paying bills, taking care of laundry, meals, and transportation help develop character. If the first time a youth worker lives on their own is at their first position of youth ministry the demands of the position and the lifestyle could be overwhelming.

**Selflessness-** Once again this is not an instantaneous acquisition. Selflessness requires putting others first over a prolonged period of time. It normally requires a conscious decision to care for others rather than caring for oneself. Selflessness is so essential to youth ministry because all of the efforts are bent on the needs of the students. Those who enter this ministry seeking to have their own needs met should look for another line of work. Selflessness can be practiced in a relationship, with a room mate, and in ministry opportunities. It is a mindset that can be developed. Victor Frankl who was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp found the secret in his survival in serving others. It was the one thing that he had power over in his life and he chose to exercise this power. In a selfish culture selflessness is a radical concept but nothing short of a life of discipleship in all things. If there is any doubt about how to develop this outlook on life it would be valuable to study the gospels daily and observe Jesus' lifestyle.

**Integrity-** A few years back there was a collapse in an exclusive shopping mall. The investigation determined that inferior materials were used. An engineer can measure the structural integrity of an edifice, but it is up to us to examine our own personal integrity. When it comes to metals what the engineer is looking for is inconsistencies, cracks, or evidence of erosion. Examining ourselves we too can look for inconsistencies, weaknesses, and evidence of moral decay. Those who teach others have the added pressure of knowing that no student is greater than their master. We will not produce disciples who are better than we are. Eventually without integrity we, like the floors of the shopping center, will collapse.

Developing integrity requires complete honesty with ourselves to begin with. What are the areas of our lives that are inconsistent? What areas of our inner selves are not consistent with the image we hope others will see? In what ways are we trying to deceive others and possibly ourselves? Where are we hiding when it comes to our spiritual or personal lives?

**Perseverance** –History records that Sir Winston Churchill delivered a short but riveting commencement address at Oxford during the repeated bombings of London.

The nine words he spoke that evening were, “Never give up. Never give up. Never give up!” The call to persevere despite constant attack, times of loneliness, self-doubt, physical and emotional exhaustion is so appropriate for youth ministers. On average youth pastors change position every 18 months in North America. When difficulties arise, or better opportunities are presented youth workers move to other positions. In general Merton Strommen reports, that youth pastors are done with youth ministries in about five years from their first day in the vocation. Either they move to another age range in the church or they leave ministry altogether! On the other hand veteran youth pastors relate that in their ministry they did not feel they were effective until they had been at a place for more than two years and reached peak effectiveness in either their sixth or seventh year. Completing a program of studies is a good start in the process of perseverance as is interning with a ministry during ones education. For an excellent study in this quality please read, Eugene Petersons, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, which is essentially an application of the Song of Ascents in the Psalms.

**Considerate** -Being selfless and considerate are related. Consideration requires the added element of searching out the needs of others. It is selflessness in action. It is not doing what you would want done for you, but instead doing what they need done for them. There is a dark side of leadership that enjoys being in charge, having special privilege, and being waited upon by others. While pastors may be worthy of double honor laying down that privilege to serve others makes us worthy of that honour.

**Generous.** Generosity is one aspect of ministry that can be difficult to master. The youth in a group will likely have more disposable cash than a youth pastor paying off college loans or steeped in personal expenses. Not every youth worker will have an expense account and find that buying cokes for youth can become a costly proposition. At the same time generosity is required of leaders. A helpful perspective is recognizing that nothing really belongs to us and that we are stewards of what the Lord has given us. Having faith, we know that as we are generous to God’s children he will continue his generosity toward us. When we have little, all generosity is a sacrifice and an act of faith.

**Frugal** –this is a word that is seldom used in our consumer culture and yet careful use of our personal finances and church finances are a testimony to our times. Not only this but there is greater likelihood that donor will give more generously to a ministry that handles money wisely than one that squanders it on superfluous items.

**Self starter** –One of the most often asked questions of para church leaders and senior pastors at churches of a candidate for a youth ministry position is “Are you a self starter?” The question is really, “Can you take responsibility for your work with little supervision and do it with excellence without any prompting?” These kind of people do not procrastinate or make excuses. They do things right and invest time doing the right things. A person of great moral integrity must also be a person of vocational integrity which requires working when no one is watching.

**Honesty**-As with many of the above items it should go without saying that honesty is a prerequisite for ministry but studies have shown that mild lying and cheating are not regarded by young adults as wrong. Moral relativism finds its way into the church when we feel that it is possible to bend the rules here or there. Getting caught in a lie as a pastor or para-church worker can cost a worker the trust and respect of coworkers and students. Once that trust has been broken it is very difficult to rebuild. Dishonesty in little things has a way of growing and infiltrating other areas of our lives. This little deception poisons relationships and causes people to have to fabricate even more lies. This honesty relates to use of time, money, other resources.

**Patience**- James, a youth pastor from Toronto, lost his patience with a student who would not come out of his cabin to discuss a violent altercation that he had had with

a student from another cabin, down at the boating dock. John began to shout louder and louder and his pitch rose each time he called the student's name. His patience snapped and he ran into the cabin. He dragged the frightened but defiant teen out of the cabin and slammed him up against a large cedar shouting him at him all of the way. Because of this, and other fits of rage James was fired by Christmas of that year. Not only is this kind of treatment illegal in many countries, but the violent behaviour cost James his credibility with the group when he said that he loved them. Youth work will test a leader's patience to its limits. The key is to know your limits, expand these limits and develop a defense for when the line has been crossed. Dealing with emotional issues when we are exhausted, frustrated, or hurting can cost us our reputation. Learning our personal warning signs or learning how to manage situations so that they will not escalate will help us to maintain our patience in even difficult contexts of ministry.

**Loyalty** –If you do not work alone you will face issues of loyalty; internally, when there is a disagreement or externally, when others will try to pit you against the other leader. It is inevitable. Leaders need to decide in advance that loyalty is unquestioned. A divided team is a weakened team. Loyalty requires trust in the leadership and works ideally when we love and pray for those we work with.

**Confident** Some leaders are confident when they should not be. Because they are a leader at the church they consider themselves experts in every area of life. When it comes to youth ministry the well trained leader can find confidence in Christ and their experience in leadership. Students can detect when a leader is unsure and uncertain. In some circumstances this is unavoidable. When it comes to establishing a discipling youth ministry a leader should have a level of confidence. Over confidence is often interpreted by church people as arrogance. Managing the balance between confident leadership and egotistical arrogance can be a challenge for leaders and it this balance be monitored by a trusted friend. Confidence is built through a variety of leadership experiences. Students who wish to enter youth ministry would do well to find opportunities to be part of a leadership team or to take leadership roles in school or in the community.

**Teachable** the last person that a supervisor wants to work with is an unteachable employee. Students graduating from Bible College or seminary can sometimes try to set a church right by telling the church leaders all that they learned in Bible college. While it is wonderful that the graduate has remembered what their professors were sure they would certainly forget church leaders do not share the enthusiasm. Since each ministry is different the young fountain of wisdom may not be appreciated in that context. No doubt a student has learned important truths and possibly new ways of doing things but this knowledge should be tempered by humility. There is always much to learn. Supervisors are not looking for a know-it-all, but they are looking for willing learners.

**Pure** –Psalm 119 inquires about how a young man can keep his heart pure. The answer is by giving heed to God's word. Purity in men and women, even those in the ministry is in question these days. Guarding our hearts and minds is essential but not simple. Impurity surrounds us. Staying pure requires effort, shunning what is evil and clinging to what is good.

**Responsible.** This is associated with being a self starter. A responsible person is a person of their word. Their yes is yes, and their no means no. They do not make excuses or blame others. They can be counted on to do what they are asked and to do it with distinction. They do things well.

**Zealous** this sounds like an exclusively religious word and that is with intent. Before the youth worker is a leader or a minister, the youth worker is a Christian. It is important to ask what is the motivation behind service? Is it a paycheck? The lines

may be blurred at times between what is your job and what is your ministry. Zeal seems to signify that what we do we do out of a passionate desire to serve Jesus.

**Faithful** -In line with zeal is the notion of faithfulness. Scripture makes it clear that is a characteristic that God looks for in workers. Faithfulness means first and foremost that the worker is faithful to God. Taking the opposite of unfaithfulness it is clearer that the Lord is looking for someone solely devoted to him. If we intend to call young people to “single-minded obedience” we must remain faithful in our hearts and our lifestyle. We must practice the spiritual disciplines and be regular in our devotion.

**Compassionate** There is a lot of talk about loving youth. Love is such a misunderstood word. The love of a youth worker toward youth is that unconditional agape love that seeks nothing in return. This kind of love does not necessarily require affection. The object loved does not need to be love able. The youth workers heart must go out to those who are not naturally likeable. Students who are socially awkward, shunned by their peers, and held suspect by their teachers need to be loved. Compassion helps us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Compassion motivates us to pray for the needs of youth each day.

**Punctual** On the staff of a church in British Columbia one of the pastors continued to show up at least fifteen minutes late on a consistent basis. Although the senior pastor addressed this issue the staff member continued to arrive late. The senior pastor interpreted this as defiance, lack of respect, and opposition to his leadership. The younger pastor did not see this as a big deal. He felt he never missed anything important and it was no big deal since he was always early enough for the planning segment of the meetings. For many people arriving on schedule communicates respect, cooperation, and commitment.

**Enthusiastic** Above we discussed zeal and took a more religious meaning for the word. Enthusiasm does not denote spiritual fervor the way that zeal does. Instead enthusiasm reflects energy and vitality that motivates people to expect good things. Enthusiastic leaders inspire enthusiasm in youth. This is not just hype. There is a genuine excitement about what God is doing in a community or on a high school campus. While there are so many discouraging influences in the life of a young person a genuinely enthusiastic leader helps foster a positive outlook

**Self controlled** –In youth ministry, spontaneity is sometimes held as a higher value than self control. This is unfortunate because self control is what is often lacking in students and leaders. One of the fruit of the spirit mentioned in Galatians is self control and it must be modeled to the youth in the church and in the community. In the absence of it there is chaos and uncertainty. Blow ups, burn outs, and irrational acts are the result of those who do not keep a close reign on their emotions and personal life. While adults wish to be able to relate to youth this is not an area where they want to be just like teens. Instead leaders need to set an example of a life yielded to the Holy Spirit.

**Optimistic** –Closely related to enthusiasm is optimism. There is a bible study series entitled, “Staying on Fire in a Wet Blanket World.” It accurately portrays a world that is either apathetic or openly antagonistic toward the gospel. It is bad enough that Christians experience this in their dealings with those of other belief systems but sadly they sometimes have to experience this at church. There are some “realists” who are actually cynics and can kill a good idea faster than insecticide can kill bugs. Optimistic leaders are not oblivious to the challenges in a ministry but like Caleb and Joshua spying out Canaan they see the opportunities as worth the effort. Life can be difficult. Youth need leaders who are able to see God’s hand of blessing in even the tragedies of life.

**Not moody** –Can you imagine if your secretary warned people not to not on your door whispering, “Don’t bother the pastor today...the pastor is in a real bad mood!” Biographers record that Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher, was given to crushing bouts of depression. He would sometimes lay on his office floor and weep bitterly. It would have been so good if there had been some place for him to turn for help. Fortunately today there are places for leaders to go for help. With so many possible things to go wrong in a young man or woman’s life taking the opportunity for counselling, a support group, or an accountability partner can be so helpful. All of us have problems but we cannot allow them to cripple our ministries. It is much better to get help.

**Organized** –time management trainers rarely claim that they can completely transform a leaders life in just one week of training. Trainers for the Day Runner system do boast that if a person is a 5 on a scale of one to ten in the area of personal and professional organization they can bring that person up to a 6 or a 7 by helping them realize where they fail and integrate a few pivotal habits in their weekly routines. This kind of training could be very useful for youth workers who are very unorganized. Likely these workers would admit this weakness but would claim that people are more important than paper. This is an excuse for carelessness when it comes to the discipline of planning, organizing, and administration. Some youth leaders find help in this area so that they can concentrate on relational disciple-making. A disheveled office with papers every where may seem like a “cool hang out” for teens but it will not instill confidence in parents. If a youth pastor must take 30 minutes to find a students mission trip permission form parents may wonder how long it will take this pastor to find their son or daughter at customs on a mission trip to Romania. Pastors, who say that people are a priority, need simple systems for dealing with administration that are quick and efficient so that hours are not wasted in clutter and confusion. While there are jokes about cluttered desks being a sign of creativity they are sometimes evidence of a disorganized life. If you are interested in pursuing this area further. Two useful resources are “Youth Ministry Management Tool,” by Olson, Elliot, and Work and Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Covey.

**Fair** –Love and justice are essential elements of leadership. In balance these two are a powerful combination. Out of balance a ministry becomes either regimented and institutional or it can be wishy washy and chaotic. Here is an example. Kyle is late for the bus on ski day where the group will travel 2 hours to the mountains. Mercy may say, “Let’s wait until he arrives.” Justice may say “We told everyone we were leaving at 8:00AM. Most of the kids were here at 7:30 and have now been waiting to go for half an hour. It is unfair to make them wait for Kyle.” Grace may say, we will give him ten minutes. After that we are leaving. To make a whole bus load of kids wait until 8:30 shortening their ski time and lengthening the time sitting on the bus is merciful to Kyle but cruel to the other youth. On the next trip, the bus will have to wait even longer. Kyle and his family will be upset that you did not wait. Later you will need to explain with love and compassion that you could not make all the other students have to wait.

Fairness also relates to choosing favorites in a youth ministry. Some groups choose leaders on an appointment basis where leadership potential is recognized in students and they are chosen to be on a ministry team. Likely leaders will choose youth who are faithful to the group, responsive to authority and are eager to learn. Students with sporadic attendance, a disgruntled attitude, defiant behaviour will not be given invitations to join a leadership team even though their family may have been attending the church for years. Now these disgruntled students have another reason to be upset. In their eyes the leader has picked their pets to hang out with. If these students have added privileges along with their responsibilities students in the ministry may misunderstand and resent this as well. Being open about leadership

qualifications and the process for selecting leaders can help students and their parents understand. At the same time is essential that leaders devote time to all of the youth in the group and communicate love every family represented.

**Humble** –If a leader has all of the qualifications listed above they would have much to be proud of but they are not allowed to take pride in it. The Bible is clear that God opposes the proud and that pride comes before a fall. While teens may try to humble or even humiliate a leader, humility is a choice. It begins with the understanding that if we have any gifts or natural abilities the Lord deserves the credit. Any accomplishments that we can list on a resume are the result of God's grace at work in our lives.

Humility should not be confused with poor self esteem. Many leaders suffer from poor self esteem and this finds its way into a ministry. Compensating for a poor self image in the context of ministry is not healthy for anyone. These issues should be worked out elsewhere outside of the ministry. The balance is to not consider ourselves more highly than we ought but at the same time we should not deny the gifts that God has give us.

Humility also allows leaders to associate with youth, their friends and their parents without making them feel that you are above them in any way. There are many different roles in the body of Christ and pastors or leaders are not superior to anyone else and should never treat them that way. A humble leader will learn from all sources, community leaders, students, high school teachers, social workers, even children. All wisdom must be evaluated but our openness to listen humbly being more anxious to try to understand others that to preach at them will have a greater impact than spouting our wisdom in even conversation.

## **The youth worker should have:**

The list of characteristics and qualities listed above can be a life goal for those who work in the church. It would be good if a reference were done on you that many of those words would be used to describe you. The list below are some very useful qualities or skills that are useful for those who work with youth.

**Sense of humour** –While the stereotype that pictures a youth pastor as a stand up comic may be way off the mark, the ability for a youth worker to be able to laugh at things goes a long way. This does not mean laughing at youth, mocking them as some adults are in the habit of doing, but it means laughing with youth enjoying their attempts at humor. Humour in a youth ministry goes a long way to foster a sense of belonging and social comfort. A leader may not be able to tell jokes but humorous personal stories are normally well received by youth. This is what youth communicator, Ken Davis calls low risk humor.

A sense of humor also means laughing at ourselves in ministry. While the task we have been charged with is no laughing matter, there is no time that we should take ourselves so seriously that we cannot find something to chuckle about.

**Excellent people skills** –Emotional intelligence is a persons capacity to relate well with those around them. It involves reading people's emotions and responding in appropriate ways. Recently a roomful of pastors and teachers were tested on their emotional intelligence as part of an in-service training exercise. The trainer was not as surprised as the participants to discover that on average, the women scored much higher than the men, and the men with higher education scored more poorly than those with less education. For further study of emotional intelligence please visit, <http://www.eiconsortium.org/>

People skills, or what are sometimes termed “fuzzy skills” range anywhere from the ability to meet new people and strike up a conversation to making the effort to send out a birthday card on a friend's birthday. Interviews are often a test to determine how a candidate will work with others around them. If you find that you are weak in the area of interpersonal communication it would be wise to interact with others with the intentional purpose of being a better listener and conversationalist.

**Tact and diplomacy** –One of the essential “people skills” that leaders must develop when working with youth, parents, and volunteers, is the ability to approach situations carefully. In many cultures the direct approach causes people to take a defensive stance and creates opposition. Conflict in ministry is one of the reasons that most pastors leave. Some conflict is unavoidable and can be used to further the kingdom of God. Some conflict is the result of blunt, unfeeling, insensitive comments by leaders. Just because something is true does not mean it must be shared right away or it needs to be forced upon people. Caring gently for people

**Ability to inspire others** –Looking at your life can you see a time where you led a group or were able to direct them through motivation? A leader is not a leader if no one is following. Those who wish to disciple youth in groups will be required to lead groups. If this has not been part of your experience it is worth while to take on a leadership role of some sort.

**Ability to plan and follow through.** Project management is the way that work is done in many corporations. A project leader in conjunction with a group comes up with a plan and together the team executes this plan. If this is not already an integral part of your life, this is certainly a growth area with required results. In preparation for ministry a leader should determine to take charge of projects and events and do an excellent job with them.

**Ability to work with others as part of a team** –A youth worker is often a team leader, but they are equally a team-player. On the staff of a church or a para church organization the youth worker needs to contribute to a project or an event in the planning, execution, and evaluation stages. Pastors and executive directors of ministries want team players on their staff.

**A good listening ear** –Some students are drawn to youth ministry because they have a passion to teach and preach the gospel and this is an admirable aspiration. Others have a deep desire to help struggling youth with personal issues. For whatever reasons a person becomes involved with youth they must be aware that vast amounts of time must be invested in listening to youth. Those who teach youth must be ready to hear their needs so that they may be more able to address their questions and concerns.

**An understanding of weaknesses** –Jeff became aware that after a big youth ministry event he faced almost uncontrollable temptation. He recognized that this was a pattern in his life and arranged to spend the days afterward with his wife at a cabin out of town. Knowing our weaknesses instead of denying them will save us much grief. Those in ministry cannot be exceptional in every area of the work. Some pastors have recognized the need for administrative assistance, help in the area of music ministry, or counselling. While each of us can improve in almost every area of our lives knowing these weakness and finding help is crucial. Tony Campolo, noted Christian leader, has suggested that every minister go through a time of counselling to deal with issues that could become a problem in ministry.

**Ability to recruit helpers.** Youth ministry cannot be done alone. Whether a leader works on the campus, at a church, or a drop in center, working alone can lead to disaster. The growth of a ministry is limited by the leaders ability to recruit volunteers who will serve and extend the work even further.

**Ability to receive criticism.** Anyone who is involved in making decisions is likely to experience the criticism of those who the decision affects. Not every decision is warmly received. Leaders are sometime respected and idolized but they are also exposed to a high level of scrutiny. Not every action a leader makes will be perfect. Not every word that comes out of a youth workers mouth will be appreciated or be uttered in love. Sooner or later there will be a student, a parent, or a staff member who will offer some advice, correction, criticism or rebuke. Those who are overly sensitive and are crushed will suffer greatly. Having a clear mission for the ministry and a well thought through philosophy ministry will be a good insulation from the attacks on your character, leadership, or your motives. Wether or not there is any validity to the criticism, there is always pain associated with the confrontation. Almost every leader could benefit from studying conflict management.

**Willingness to learn.** Harold Hendricks is often quoted as saying that “If I stop learning today, I stop teaching tomorrow.” Constant learning is a requirement for today’s leaders regardless of what field that they are in. This may be particularly true for those who work in the constantly changing world of youth ministry. Those who want to work with youth are making a commitment to read, continue education, and constantly upgrade their skills.

**Healthy relationships outside of church** –At an recent interview a prospective youth ministry candidate was rejected on the basis that he had not friends outside of the youth ministry. He boasted that the youth ministry was his life and it did not allow for friendships with anyone outside of his ministry. The hiring committee did not see this as a positive thing. A leader who is looking to fourteen to nineteen year old students to complete their social circle is in trouble.

**Healthy self esteem** –while many of us struggle with personal issues, body image, ability to communicate as we would like, or lack of ability in one area or another, we need to come to a point where we love and accept ourselves. Being able to pray the serenity prayer that says, “*God grant me the serenity , to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him Forever in the next. Amen. --Reinhold Niebuhr*

Personal wholeness may be a life long process and no person can deal with every area of their life before entering ministry. Some people approach life and ministry with varying degrees of wholeness depending on their upbringing and environment. Allowing God to work deeply in our lives and being willing to grow in areas of weakness is essential for all youth workers.

**Ability to communicate** –Moses strongest objection to God concerning his call was his inability to communicate. In his case the Lord sent his brother Aaron to help with the communication process but as the story unfolds it becomes clear that Moses is also communicating independent of his brother. Communication in youth ministry may mean speaking in front of large groups or small groups of youth. Written communication is equally important. Poor communication can severe hinder a youth ministry. Communication is used for teaching, training, planning, coordinating, informing, motivating, directing, evangelizing, counselling, and many other purposes. Students who wish to enter youth ministry should apply themselves to excellence in public, personal, verbal and non verbal communication.

## Unrealistic Roles and Expectations

The catalogue of characteristics, gifts and abilities listed above may be intimidating for some potential youth ministry candidates. This is so because the demands placed on church and para church youth workers are some times extremely high. In fact, sometimes there are unrealistic. We will examine first the unrealistic roles and expectations placed upon youth pastors and then some realistic expectations held by various organizations.

As we examine the expectations below take note of the ones that contradict each other. This contradiction is what makes the expectations unrealistic and unfair. Note however that each of these expectations is a stereotype and expectations in each area are always much more diverse and complex than what is presented here.

**Expectation of the parents-** *Do whatever it takes to make sure that the kids stay in the church respect their parents and don't waste their lives.* While many parents do want their offspring to be deeply involved in the life of the church they are also concerned about their ability to make their own way in the world. Some parents would not be happy if their child chose ministry as a vocation. Parents want the youth ministry to be a safe place to send their youth and may also react if a program of aggressive evangelism has their fourteen year old interacting with gang members.

**Expectation of the senior pastor or director-** *Do whatever it takes to keep the parents happy and help me to accomplish what God has called us to do.* While this may sound different for a para-church or campus ministry parents do play a role. Recently the director for youth for Christ for the city of Edmonton was visited by a parent who accused the drop in center ministry of leading to his daughter's promiscuity. The director was able to show that if anything the drop in center was a deterrent for the girl's sexual activity. The leader of the drop in center was confronted on this issue and was fortunate that he was aware of the situation and had an adequate response. He was fortunate also that he was supported by the director instead of held responsible for the girl's involvement with boys from her junior high school.

**Expectations of the youth workers spouse-** *Do whatever it takes to Serve the Lord and put food on the table –just be home for dinner –be a good parent and spouse* As discussed in this Chapter and in Robbins' text, the family of a youth worker faces many challenges. Often the spouse who is not in the ministry is required to insulate the family from the demands of the church or para church organization. Since this work is seldom restricted to a 9AM to 5PM schedule meal times, bed times, and family time in general can be disrupted. Tension develops when the youth worker feels the need to protect the needs of the ministry from the demands of the spouse and the spouse feels the need to protect the family from the needs of the ministry.

**Expectation of youth** *-Do whatever it takes to keep us interested and motivated – help us to survive life, church, school and our parents. Be someone we can trust.* Students have high expectations for those who work with them. Jaded by media, video games, or exposure teen parties, youth are easily bored. Having experienced so much in early in life it is difficult for leaders to find activities that they will find novel and interesting. On the other hand they are willing to listen to someone who loves them. With the high turn over rate among youth pastors students in the youth ministry of a church may wait up to 2 years before they are ready to trust a new youth worker. Teens will some times gauge whether a youth worker sides more with the parents or more with the youth especially if the parents of the church are very restrictive.

**Expectation of the Lord.** *-Reach and disciple youth, equipping them to do the work of the ministry.* When all the opinions of the different segments of a ministry are considered it is possible to lose sight of what the Lord expects of a leader. The

statement listed here is an accepted mission statement for a major Canadian Denomination and fits the typical statement adopted by many youth ministries. While this is in no way more than the Lord can demand of a youth ministry it is not what he demands of a youth pastor. The youth pastor cannot save anyone. Only the Lord can draw a soul onto himself. Only He can regenerate a soul. Even discipling a young person is a work of the Holy Spirit and not the fruit of human exertion. One plants, another waters, but the Lord gives the increase. Any youth worker who places this burden on their own shoulders is destined for burn out or breakdown. There is only one messiah and his name is Jesus.

## **Realistic Roles and Expectations**

Despite the erroneous views that circulate in the body of Christ there are some reasonable expectations that youth workers should consider seriously as they enter this field. Some of these are listed below and others can be found in *This Way to Youth Ministry*.

**The youth pastor is a...real pastor...**First and foremost; a youth pastor is a pastor with all the biblical rights and requirements of a minister given charge of a flock. This is no small calling. It may be the highest calling imaginable and in itself is the over-arching portfolio for a leader whose vocation is to reach and disciple teens. Some of the aspects of this ministry are broken down in the following lists.

**Communicator** – As mentioned above a youth worker must be able to communicate through whichever means possible to coordinate the work of the ministry, preach, teach, inform, inspire, encourage, and lead a ministry. It unreasonable to expect that one can take a position of youth ministry and avoid this responsibility or delegate it to someone else in the church.

**Administrator** –While many youth workers have some kind of help, either volunteer or paid to help coordinate the work of the ministry this a role that a youth leader cannot abdicate to anyone else. Helpers need direction and this direction must come from the youth worker as leader. A closer examination of the word reveals that ministry and *administration* are closely connected etymologically.

**Counselor** –As described elsewhere in this book, counselling youth is an “Inescapable Privilege” Sooner or later a youth worker will be asked “Can we talk,” and the conversation could include anything from addiction to Zechariah’s prophecy. While youth workers may often have to refer students to professional counsellors they are called upon to do support work with the student as part of a holistic approach.

**Learner** –A favorite answer for pastor’s is “Let me look into that and get back to you.” If the pastor does not have the answer he or she should have the skill to research the answer and provide information for others. But a youth worker, as a learner, is also required to be involved in continuing education for the purpose of staying current in the ministry. For a doctor to maintain a license to practice medicine, there is the expectation of keeping their education current. While this is not always a requirement of denominations to stay in the ministry, pastors should be required to stay current despite their pressing schedules.

### ***Roles that the Youth worker must often fulfill***

In their comprehensive work on youth ministry, *The Complete Book of Youth Ministry*, Benson and Senter outline a number of roles that youth workers are often called upon to fill in the lives of young people. Each of these still hold true twenty years after the publication of this text.

**Youth expert** –While no one can claim to have comprehensive knowledge of youth culture, the youth worker with a bachelors degree in this field is likely the local church expert on the subject. When a student was thrown out of school for wearing a shirt with a pro Christian anti-Satan tee shirt in the city of Peterborough Ontario the local Youth For Christ worker Jeremy Gabriel was called upon for an expert response. Church leaders will sometimes turn to a youth pastor for advice on a youth issue and this is only sensible. Those who are involved in this field must stay abreast of what is happening within youth culture.

**Disciplinarian**- Discipline and discipleship share the same root. Youth ministries that hope to disciple youth in the midst of mayhem are quickly frustrated. While a relational drop in youth ministry may have fewer rules and be less regimented, for the safety of the participants some very clearly articulated and fairly enforced rules must be in place. If not, what was meant as a place to help bring youth closer to a commitment to Christ becomes a haven for drug trafficking, vandalism and violence. In the absence of a sense of order and discipline youth will do whatever they want.

This is a complicated role for a youth worker who hopes to develop a relationship based on trust and understanding. The balance must be achieved or the respect is lost. The youth leader or campus club director is not just a big kid but an adult. The boundaries should not be blurred. (See the article concerning this abuse of relationship from the victims point of view in the chapter 4 of the text book. Note that pastors can also be victimized and abused when boundaries are disregarded by youth.)

**Friend** –Jesus was mocked as a friend of sinners. Late in his ministry he calls his disciples friends. While he was a friend to his disciples it was clear that he was their teacher. At one point in his ministry Peter crosses this boundary and takes it upon himself to set Jesus straight concerning his future plans of suffering and death. Jesus is quick to put him in his place. The balance between disciplinarian and friend can be an awkward balance but it is not impossible to maintain.

**Team leader** –this role involves the coordination of youth activities. It assumes that the leader will be able to recruit a team and convince them to serve in the ministry. Whatever structure is adopted the youth pastor will be responsible to lead events, chair meetings, and delegate responsibilities to others.

**Advocate** –the word “*avocat*” in French means lawyer. In the church and community at large, the youth pastor needs to help people gain an accurate picture of youth. Helping adults understand and appreciate teens by sharing a more accurate picture of youth than the one presented by media helps teens in the long run.

**Surrogate parent** As much as this book would try to convince all students of the need for families to disciple their teens it is unrealistic to assume in all cases this will happen. Many youth do not have much of a home life. Many parents are estranged from their teenagers. Some youth find Christ in isolation from their parents. Some youth are looking for a loving parental figure because there is none in their life.

**Programmer** although, in some circles programming is a word that is held in disregard, programs are normally required to draw students together to foster opportunities for caring relationships. In is not a stretch to assume that a church will expect a youth ministry to organize retreats, parties, fellowship activities, small groups, youth services, sports nights, outings, even a service project or missions trip. A para-church worker may be called upon to organize leadership training events, special programs, outings, tournaments, fundraisers, campus clubs, concerts or outreach nights. While people are a priority programs such as these are required to create opportunities for people to connect.

**Servant** –Jesus was very intentional about leaving a lasting impression on his disciples concerning the nature of leadership. As he washed his disciples feet and

commanded that they do the same he was stressing that leadership never rises to the point where servant hood is not essential. Not even on the night our whole world comes crashing in are we given an excuse to assume a pushy leadership style. At their best the greatest leader in the kingdom is never more or less than a servant. Em Griffin author of the book, Getting Together stresses that “He who meet needs leads!” Students are impressed when a leader of a large group will take the time to get to know them or to get involved in their lives. One of the ways that youth ministries can provide a very real tangible help to students is by free tutoring help, support groups or counselling.

## **The youth worker is Accountable to:**

Another way to look at the role of the youth worker is to examine the accountability structure, in his or her life. Understanding this hierarchy of priorities puts life and ministry in perspective. Those who work with youth find their lives and ministries out of order when these relationships are out of place. While a ministry can function for a time with these shuffled around, in the long term their can be damaging affects.

1. **God.** It is entirely possible to be so busy for God that we spend no time with God. A proper perspective puts the youth worker in intimate relationship with God. The worker is not a servant of the people, the church or the community. The worker is a servant of God. When all is considered the youth worker has one boss. Loyalties are not divided when all other affections on earth pale in relation to this over powering love. Love for God motivates, directs, and strengthens the resolve of the youth worker. Put to the test there is no competition. Given the choice to serve themselves or serve the Lord, the youth workers path is clear.

2. **Family.** Often the family is squeezed out when the demands of the ministry are equated with God’s demands. Here it is essential to designate what is the youth workers “job” and what is the youth worker’s obligation to the Father. While youth ministry could never be considered a 9-5 kind of endeavour, it should never eat up a whole family life. A minister’s family is their best ministry asset. When a family is in ruins it is unreasonable for the ministry to proceed as usual. The youth worker’s obligation to the family is as much an extension of their devotion to Christ as reaching and discipling teens. Tragedy strikes when this priority is trivialized or where the family is forced to suffer because of the needs of the ministry.

3. **Supervisor-** The term supervisor is used here to cover a wide range of overseers who the youth worker may need to report to. This may include an executive director of a para-church organization, a senior pastor or a committee of some sort. Some youth pastors or youth workers can develop an anti-authority stance. This may be a reaction to the treatment that they see youth receiving or from feeling that youth are not given the proper status in an organization. Other personal issues can surface from a leader’s past giving them a tendency toward avoiding authority figures and providing information on only a need-to-know basis. This kind of negative orientation to authority weakens a youth ministry. Instead youth workers need to take a more cooperative stance and work within the system to achieve what is best for the youth involved. Misplacing this priority and forgetting that this is the source of one’s income is very unwise. A youth worker must carefully consider who they will work for before taking a ministry position. They should also be very careful to fulfill the aspects of their job description upon which they will be evaluated.

4. **The Youth-** Jesus compared the work of the ministry to tending sheep. Good shepherds are not those who run at the first sign of trouble. They are conscientious about their work and know the condition of the flock. They are concerned about even the stragglers and wanderers who are never really participating fully in the program. The good shepherd goes after the lost sheep. The youth leader may not

cater to every whim of the youth group but they should be concerned about the felt needs. Being compassionate and responsive to needs gives them the opportunity to give advice to youth about faith and life. Youth for Christ has stressed to its workers that they must, “Earn the right to be heard.”

**5. The congregation or organization.** While the church at large or other members of an organization should not make leadership decisions about the direction of the ministry, being accountable to this constituency is an obligation that should not be ignored. Shunning advice, or input from this source will hurt a ministry. Caring about how the youth ministry advances the overall vision of an organization is essential. The youth ministry does not need to be at odds with a church. Groups that are estranged from the rest of the organization never get the support that they could. Their plans are misunderstood and their motives are always in question. The leader can change all of this by communicating to the larger body in as many ways as possible. Fostering positive relationships and recognizing that the larger constituency normally funds the initiatives of the youth ministry should help build stronger ties.

**6. The world.** In what way is a youth worker responsible to the world? It is a valid question. The world that God loved and sent his son to save, will not clamor for attention from the youth worker. It will exist quite oblivious to the youth ministry. If the youth worker chooses to have nothing to do with it, it will have nothing to do with the youth ministry. This is not a peaceful coexistence however. One day the church will be accountable for its ministry to the world. A youth worker may be able to proceed to work with believers and have no dealings with those who do not know Christ. If there is a good number of youth and the young people are not in any kind of trouble it may appear that the ministry is proceeding quite well. There may be little or no incentive for a youth worker to open the doors to the lost if the sheep in the fold are in good shape. Some people in a church may be happy that unchurched youth are not in the building. Parents may be glad that the whole youth ministry is made up of “good kids,” but the youth pastor should not take pride in that. The world may demand nothing of the church but it is in desperate need. Youth workers who take this responsibility seriously may face opposition at the church, the campus, and the community but will know that they have fulfilled a higher calling.

## Conclusion

The entrance requirements for the space program at NASA seem almost unrealistic. That any person could have the level of intelligence and education expected is almost unbelievable. When added to the level of physical fitness and stamina expected of candidates, the program seems to be demanding super human beings. As we examined the qualities and characteristics of youth pastors above and evaluated the various “dangers, toils and snares” described in the text book it is possible that you felt Astronauts had it easy.

As mentioned earlier in this book, youth ministry is not for just anybody. Although some churches assume that almost anyone will do to take over the youth ministry, they are wrong. Both the scriptural and vocational requirements are exceedingly demanding and those who feel called to pursue this work should prepare with the utmost dedication.

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## Chapter 5 Relationships for Discipleship

### Introduction

Please begin this chapter by reaching for a pencil and paper and keep your eye on a watch or clock. Now that you have your pencil and paper, time yourself for exactly one minute and write down the names of the top 5 sermons that have changed your life. Now stop! Let's do this activity precisely the same way, except this time write down the names of five people who have changed your life. Now stop.

### A Person of Influence

If you are anything like the hundreds of students who have done this exact same activity with me, you found it difficult to come up with 5 sermon titles in the first minute. The average college age student has been able to remember two messages that have influenced their life in profound ways. (If you are like them, you are probably now trying to determine if you are above or below average!) When it came to the second part of this task, most students found it quite simple to list five names of people who have influenced their lives in profound ways. In this connection activity you get to tell us more about this important person of influence.

### The Relational Youth Worker

When it comes to youth ministry, you may have heard it said, "Relationships are everything!" Studies show that students are greatly affected by their friends. If you are considered a friend by youth, your level of influence increases dramatically (Bibby, 2000).

On the other hand, recent studies also show that when youth have a problem, in the vast majority of cases, they turn to pastors, teachers, and counselors only as a last resort (Bibby and Posterski, 1997). If we are to disciple and pastor young people we need to enter the circle of influence in a young person's life. Once we are there however it would be nice to have something worth copying.

Since, no student is greater than her or his master, the students you or I will work with will not go beyond our level of spiritual maturity. He or she will copy not only our good qualities but also our faults. In this module we will examine our personal readiness for relational ministry, and begin to pinpoint areas for learning and growth.

### To Be Like Jesus

Can you imagine how different the gospels would read if the disciples needed to make an appointment with Jesus' secretary between 9AM and 4:30 PM on a Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday? Or what if Jesus met with them once a week on Tuesday morning at 7AM for bagels at the local bagel, loaves and fish establishment? It sounds ridiculous doesn't it? How could he expect to transform the lives of these Galileans in these brief routine encounters?

Discipleship, for Jesus, meant more than sharing information at regularly scheduled appointments. It meant sharing his very life with those he had chosen to mentor, and others who stuck to him like glue. If there were any glaring inconsistencies in his life

they would have shown up. Eventually the disciples would notice the flaws in his life, but they did not.

Here we see two essential elements of ministry.

**Enter their world.** Firstly Jesus took the time to enter the world of his disciples. He ate, traveled, and talked with them constantly. To accomplish this he had to leave his very comfortable existence in heaven. He had to take upon him the dress, customs, language, and suffering of those he wished to reach. This is the bedrock of relationships; spending time with the people we wish to influence. People could tell that his love for them was not a show. His love was evident to everyone by his actions. It was not something he could turn off and on. He really practiced what he preached.

**Have something to offer.** The second essential element is the quality of life that Jesus lived. Rather than become like the fisherman that he rubbed shoulders with he challenged them to a higher standard of living. He was like them but did not use cheap shots to become noticed. He did not resort to coarse joking or abuses of power to make a difference. His lifestyle showed intimacy with God. His disciples became aware that to get closer to Jesus would mean getting closer to God. He wore this relationship on his sleeve. Out of the richness of this relationship and the quality of his personal life Jesus interacted with his people. The details of Jesus style of relational ministry can be observed in his post resurrection appearance to disciples on the road to Emmaus. Please follow along in the bible and try to observe the following elements.

*Luke 24: 13-36 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16but they were kept from recognizing him. 17He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. 28As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" 33They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

## The Emmaus Model

### *Come along side of them*

The passage indicates that Jesus walked the same road as them for a little while before he strikes up a conversation. One of the names for the Holy Spirit in the Greek Bible is *Para-kletos* or the “One who comes along side of.” Much of relational ministry is coming along side of people in good times and in bad times. In this sense we are available when they are ready to talk. We take a supportive role to believers and unbelievers.

**Walk with them.** There is a sense in which we cannot share authentically without empathy. Listening empathetically requires “walking the same road with people for a time. One model of counselling gives the counselor the role of walking through problems with the counselee and then helping them to walk out of them.

Another implication of this model of ministry is that the relational ministers can’t send a message they must be there.

**Be with them.** As threatening as this can be for those who work with youth being in places like the campus, the mall, the corner store, or the hockey arena is essential. Most youth leaders know that youth do not choose to suddenly open up just because they have been dragged into a youth workers office, or because they have showed up early at the drop in center.

**Requires being right where they are.** The obvious implication is that ministry takes place in unscheduled meetings in locations that may not seem conducive to ministry. Given the demands of contemporary youth ministry one leader cannot do all of this. A network of relational ministers including, parents, college students, and high school students must be trained and released into ministry. That being said, the main leader or pastor cannot abandon this responsibility.

### *Listen to Them*

**Hear their hurts and doubts.** It is instructive that Jesus waits before he jumps in to set the dejected disciples straight. He listens to them without correcting. Working with youth requires patience with emotions that adults may not necessarily approve of. Their language may not be polite and they may have some very negative opinions. The quickest way to shut these youth down is to start criticizing or giving advice unless they ask for it. Students may even become blasphemous in their angry outbursts. Leaders who maintain a calm and open stance with even abusive teens will gain ground where others will be offended and lose an opportunity to minister.

**Hear them out completely.** The urge to correct wrong attitudes and ideas or to provide information before a youth has really explained their problem or opinion should be resisted. Youth are used to being corrected by adults and have grown to expect and detest it. As Jesus deals with his mistaken disciples he allows them to vent, to chide him concerning his ignorance, and yet does not speak until they are done. One youth pastor launched into a long lecture on the facts of life for a girl in his youth group who asked him why she looked like both her mother and her father yet she came out of her mothers body. After the long and stressful teaching by the youth pastor the girl responded, “thanks I already new about sex but it was sure interesting watching you turn red and sweaty. What I was asking is why God gave me my Dad’s looks and my Mom’s brains –Now I am a dumb blond with dark hair who has to shave once a week!”

**Don’t be too quick to give advice, criticize or condemn.** In the story above the youth worker was too quick to give advice and because of it find himself in an

embarrassing predicament. In general most of us do not like unsolicited advice. When youth talk about problems they are not necessarily looking for answers. Since youth workers are so used to teaching or preaching they can forget that counseling is a big part of what they need to do with youth. In the case of the confused disciples on the road with Jesus it was important for them to talk about their feelings. Jesus recognized this and let them continue with their story without stopping them and saying, “Hey its me! Chin up guys!” Sometimes the best thing a youth worker can do is just listen and stay silent.

### ***Share the Word with Them***

**Share faith not doubt.** –As youth worker who are growing disciples of Christ it is possible to be working through some issues that need to be resolved concerning aspects of theology. The temptation to be open about these concerns with youth or to try to relate to their doubts just to be transparent with them can be destructive rather than helpful. There are things that they are not ready to handle. As Jesus trained his disciples he gave them what they were able to handle, and only on the last night in the garden do we see him sharing his inner struggles with his disciples. Youth need to be encouraged in their faith since they are in such a formative stage. Over disclosure from a youth worker can be harmful to a teens development.

**Share hope not doom.** Jesus had good news for the dejected disciples. He was able to show them from the Scripture that God had a plan and that the crucifixion was not a hopeless tragedy. In a youth worker’s attempts to relate to youth it is possible to agree too much. Youth have often been very critical of the church and too many youth workers have been too quick to affirm this criticism. Nothing good comes of this. While the youth may feel closer to the youth worker they do not feel closer to the members of the church. This kind of interaction has not built up the body of Christ.

**Share his word not man’s.** Jesus had the opportunity to make up new scripture, as every thing that he says is the word of God. Instead he helps the disciples to see that this is not some oversight on the part of God but his plan from the very beginning. Students are easily swayed by the opinions of their leaders. This places great responsibility on those who work with teens to share what only is helpful and edifying. Kind words of comfort go only so far. Used appropriately scripture touches a person’s life at a much deeper level.

**Share Christ not Trivia.** When volunteers begin in youth ministry they are sometimes confused about what they are supposed to do when the spend time with youth. For the most part, spending time, showing interest and listening to teens is enough. However, while relational ministers do not preach at teens there is a time when teens need to be challenged to higher levels of commitment or shown a biblical perspective on an issue. When the time comes it is important to know the word of God and always point the teen to Christ.

### ***Go the Extra Mile***

*As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.*

**But don’t be pushy.** So often, relational ministry already feels like “going the extra mile. Most youth workers do not have to report to anyone about how many contacts that they made each week. At the same time there are youth that can be very demanding and time can be eaten up. As Jesus interacts with the disciples he did not overstay his welcome, if that had been possible. He did not force himself upon them

and only stayed on their request. A skilled relational minister knows when to back off and when to meet with a student.

**Eat with them.** This may seem to be a trivial point and not in the story as an imperative except in the fact that so often ministry takes place over food. In this relaxed atmosphere it is surprising how open students can be.

**Don't over stay your welcome.** Jesus was ready to leave except for the invitation. It is important to respect the wishes of students and not hound them to spend extra time with them if they are not interested. The point of relational ministry is to let students know that we care enough to spend time with them outside of our group meetings. It is also an opportunity to extend the effectiveness of the teaching that they may have received at the youth group. Some students are completely resistant to spending any time with leaders in the youth ministry. In those situations it is important to respect their wishes but continue to communicate love.

**Spend quantity and quality time.** Looking at the time that Jesus spent with these disciples it seems that he is willing to give them the better part of his day. Youth workers need to take some extended times with groups or pairs of youth sometimes. There is a myth concerning quality time, that time together can be short as long as it is quality time. Youth do not operate this way. They cannot be given a ten minute window in which they must open up and tell the youth worker about serious problem, or their deepest darkest secrets.

**Need to put aside your own agenda-** As the story progresses it seems that Jesus is headed somewhere else. Maybe he really was. It may be that he would not have gone to eat with them if they did not request for him to do so. Maybe he changed his plans because of the opportunity. Relational ministry sometimes presents itself to a leader and the leader may have to put aside their schedule to pursue the opportunity to minister. A good strategy for weekly planning is to insert one hour each day that is unplanned into the daytimer. This helps the leader to be able to take time for the unexpected.

## ***Serve Them***

**Lead by serving.** It is interesting to note from this passage that although the disciples invited Jesus to dinner he acts as the host. He serves them. This was the chapter that he was trying to teach his disciples before his betrayal in the garden. Relational workers who understand this concept find ways to serve youth by providing transportation, buying them a coke, inviting groups into their home, or even just listening to their stories.

**Express love in practical ways** –Serving youth is an act of love requiring understanding the needs of youth well enough to anticipate them in advance. Tutoring can be a very tangible way to help. One youth pastor helps teens pass their driving test by providing free driving chapters. Others provide social gatherings for lonely teens or go out of their way to provide transportation.

## ***Reveal Christ***

The last part of the story is a surprise ending for the disciples but not for the readers, *31Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

**Christ lives in you.** It may seem impossible to replicate what Jesus did in the upper room, or in the breaking of bread experience with the Emmaus disciples. Most volunteers who begin to move into relational ministry feel intimidated by the task. Youth workers and volunteers should take comfort in the fact that Jesus lives within

those who are his. Not only this, but the Holy Spirit has been sent to lead us. Jesus can be seen in us as we live lives of devotion and are motivated by the love of Christ.

**Do what Jesus would do.** Another way in which Christ is revealed is when we do what he would do in a situation. If we are truly living in discipleship we not only believe what he taught we also practice what he preached. This type of modeling, almost unintentional modeling helps people to recognize Christ in us.

**Openly share a crisp presentation of the gospel.** There is a point in a relationship where the relational minister has earned the right to be heard. At this point it is appropriate to challenge a student to a higher level of commitment. For the youth who has not committed his life to Christ it is the right time to share a personal loving presentation of the gospel. This will be good news to a youth instead of feeling like a condemning judgmental lecture. Other students in a ministry who confess Christ but are not growing in the area of their faith or inconsistent in their lifestyle need to be confronted kindly about the need for discipleship. Others will be mentored and challenged in areas of ministry or leadership.

## Lessons from the Road

**A summary** -Jesus journey with the down hearted disciples has provided some useful insights for relational youth ministry. His unassuming approach and gentle listening ear helped the disciples begin to open up and share their confusion and disappointment with them. Earning their trust even though they did not know that this was the Lord, they were ready to receive teaching from the word of God. His personalized approach to the scripture actually warmed the hearts of the two pilgrims. Not wanting to over stay his welcome he is willing to move on but willingly goes the extra mile by spending even more time with them. Whether it is because they were tired or because he is such a gracious host he serves them and immediately they are able to make sense of the whole encounter.

As youth workers seek to get past the cool veneer of the average youth, this kind of open authentic approach will go much further than any top down style of ministry. Students need to feel a loved by their leaders the way the disciples felt the love of Christ. This is the basis for relational ministry and the start of a disciple making relationship.

## Relational Youth Ministry

The short story from the gospel of Luke demonstrates a warm personal approach to ministry that has become an essential element of contemporary youth ministry. For this reason it is important to examine the dynamics of this kind of ministry and develop interpersonal skills relate better with youth.

### I. *Why Relational Youth Ministry*

David Veerman has been a strong proponent of relational youth ministry. Much of the material below and the outline is inspired by Veerman's contribution to *Reaching a Generation for Christ*, Dunn and Senter (eds)

#### 1. Relational Ministry is Biblical

In 1 thess 2:8 Paul describes a life of relational ministry. He explains, *We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.* There are numerous other examples of one to one ministry by Jesus (with Nicodemus, Peter, the rich young ruler, and the woman at the well.) The book of acts reveals personal ministry by

Philip toward the Ethiopian, Ananias to the Saul, Barnabas to Saul, and Paul to Timothy. Relational ministry was normative in the early church.

## **2. Relational Ministry is Responsible**

Paul explained that the impetus for his ministry was that the love of Christ constrained him. The motivation for relational ministry is that Christ loved us and gave himself for us. If we are going to take the responsibility for the ministry of those in our care we will need to take the call seriously and do it in the most effective way possible.

## **3. Relational Ministry is Effective**

Benson and Senter, in their text, the Complete Book of Youth Ministry state that youth ministries that they studied that were the most effective were the ones where leaders spent the most time with teens per week (at least 1.5 per leader) outside of the group. There are at least three reasons why relational ministry is so effective.

a) **breaks through all the clutter**-- As we noted in this book youth are inundated with thousands of advertising messages each day. Everywhere they go they hear music with even more messages. Teachers at school may present an alternative worldview to Christianity. There is a lot of noise. Thoughts become cluttered in the mind. It is difficult for teens to stay focused on God's will for their lives. A person who comes along side of them in the midst of the week just to ask, "how is it goin?" is able to penetrate through all of the psychological noise better than a preacher speaking to a roomful of youth.

b) **builds communication bridges**-- There is much greater likelihood that a student will listen to someone preaching at a youth group meeting or doing a wrap up at the end of a campus club meeting if they know that leader cares about them as an individual. Not only is the time spent with the youth productive, but it increases the effectiveness of other meetings during the week. In the case of the student who has never attended a small group of a youth group event the personal invitation will be some much more effective than junk mail, email, mass phone calling or a handbill.

- **demonstrates Christ's life in action** –Gandhi said that he would have become a Christian except that he met too many Christians. In fact he was turned away from a church in South Africa because of the color of his skin. If he had a personal invitation from a trusted friend as a young man he may have had a positive encounter with the body of Christ. As youth workers we can help people know Christ as his trusted representative.

## ***II. What is Relational Ministry***

A student at a bible college submitted his Christian service hours and was not awarded credit because he claimed that his work cleaning the McDonalds' lobby constituted, "Relational Ministry." While the student may have made good contacts with some of the youth who frequented the establishment, likely he needed some clarification on what constitutes relational ministry. Listed below are some of the aspects that together constitute relational ministry.

**It is friendship** –Toward the end of his ministry Jesus referred to his disciples as friends because they were privy to their Lord's business as a slave would not. They experienced this friendship. The Pharisees condemned Jesus for spending time with people who had bad reputations in the community. They thought that they were insulting him when they called him a friend of sinners. Of all the titles for Jesus, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Son of God, the most comforting to the sinner is that he is the friend of sinners. Youth need to feel that they are friends with the youth pastor in the same sense that the disciples were Jesus friends.

**–not just a means to an end** – it is essential to realize, however, that evangelistic plans that tell youth to make friends and when the trust is built hit their friends with the Gospel make friendship less than genuine. Loving people enough to befriend them is what the Lord did and calls us to. Teens would do well to redeem existing friendships by using them as opportunities to reveal Christ and introduce them in a comfortable way to their savior.

**kingdom/ redemptive relationship** –On the one hand relational ministry is genuine friendship; the kind of friendship that would continue even if the friend decided that they could never commit their life to Christ. On the other hand relational ministry is not just hanging out with friends and goofing around. Relational workers recognize that while friendship must be genuine there is a purpose. Jesus friends were challenged to live a godly life and to share the good news with others. His lifestyle in itself was a testimony to how the disciples should interact, believe and behave.

**It is fellowship** –in Christ. As youth workers minister to those who have accepted Christ, relational ministry is still crucial. Hebrews emphasizes that believers are to encourage one another daily. The early believers met daily and broke bread in each others homes with glad and sincere hearts. Ministry that goes outside of the church into the students school week brings Christian fellowship to the place where it is needed. Youth need this kind of uplifting interaction. In a very real sense a visit from another believer is like a visit from Christ because when they are together Jesus is in the midst of them.

**Good kids need relational ministry too.** There seems to be some justification for spending time with troubled youth, or teens who do not know Christ as Lord. It is possible, with limited time and resources to neglect the teens who obey their parents, are not a problem at the youth group or at school and are cooperative most of the time. These good kids may get the notion that for them to get attention from the youth worker or volunteers they need to either make up a problem or cause one. Giving students attention before they go looking for it is much more proactive and effective than running around from student crisis to student crisis.

**It is discipleship.** Relational ministry may have many aims, counseling, coaching, mentoring, training, or confronting but all of these aims should be part of the bigger picture of discipleship. As noted earlier in this book the bible provides new and old testament examples of one to one discipleship. In some of the biblical instances discipleship meant “watch what I do.” Other instances record stories where the teacher was saying “work with me.” There are also instances where the disciples are instructed, “go and do what I have done.” Relational ministry personalizes these statements. The student hears his or her name in the request. Discipleship takes on a personal dynamic.

**Mentoring and peer ministry, allows opportunity to be real.** Relational ministry is not only for adults. Not every teen will be able to take on the role of a peer mentor, but some will. These students can be effective helping other students deal with the real issues of high school life. The relational peer minister does not condone or excuse unchristian behaviour though. They can be real about triumphs and tragedies. They can be open about weaknesses and strengths in areas that the local youth pastor should probably be a little more guarded. When teens get inspired about the ministry that they can have to peers encouraging, challenging, supporting, and mentoring great things happen in a youth ministry. Students begin to see other students actively engaged in ministry on a daily basis. The results are nothing short of revolutionary.

**It is leadership** –Old top down leadership styles are less effective with post modern youth who are less likely to follow a leader just because of a title posted on a door. Students follow authentic caring credible leaders. A new youth worker coming into a group has so much work to do on the relational level because youth do not automatically warm up to the new leader. In fact with the incredibly high rate of turn

over in youth ministry most students are pretty guarded in this relationship for over a year wondering when this leader will leave. The amount of time the leader spends with students in informal settings, and in relational ministry will determine how quickly students will respond to their leadership.

**Christ led by example, not by proxy.** The leader who designates a significant block of their work week to spending time in relational ministry is not wasting their time. Youth ministry cannot be done from behind a desk or staring at a computer screen all of the time. Being where the students are is essential. Jesus gave the greater part of every day in his active ministry to the development of his disciples. They were able to observe his body language when he talked to a leper, his intensity when he prayed, and his frustration level with their immaturity. Youth workers who minister relationally and can be seen outside of the church in situations where they are just normal people are much more effective than leaders who emerge from their office one a week for a youth meeting and retreat there when the meeting is over.

### ***III. How to Minister Relationally***

While this chapter alone cannot provide everything a relational minister needs to know, Dave Veerman's outline of the essentials is a good place to begin. Those who wish to work with youth would be well advised to make this a priority and to spend time learning more about relational ministry, observes those who do it well, and then try out the process ministering to youth whenever possible.

#### **A. (love is spelled T.I.M.E.) Time spent in their world**

There is no way to get around it. Relational ministry is not going to take place at the back of the room where the youth group meets. Aspects of it can take place on "youth night" but so much more needs to be done all week long. Teens feel loved when someone goes out of their way, out of their comfort zone, to spend time with them.

**This is the incarnation** –Jesus left all for our world so that he could relate to us and redeem us in the incarnation. As Duffy Robbins explains so well, relational ministry is incarnational because it is patterned after what Christ did by taking on humanity and relating to us as one of us. While youth workers do not have to act like teens or go through puberty again, it is essential that they leave the comfort of their normal life and enter the world of a teen.

**Time spent on their schedule.** This is rarely convenient for your schedule. Even if youth workers plan their week around relational ministry it is always a struggle to keep that time sacred and protect this time against the encroachment of administrative responsibilities. As the ministry grows, so will the need to be involved with administration.

**Love=Time** Gary Smalley has written on the subject of love languages and has explained that people share and receive love in different ways. One of the ways that teens feel loved is when people spend time with them. It is ironic that their parents work very hard to give their children what they want, but given the choice most children would choose to have more time with their parents, up to the point where they don't care anymore. Youth workers, whether part time or full time or volunteer are already pressed for time. Relational ministry and spending time with youth is such a priority that if a leader cannot spend time with youth outside of the youth night they are either using their time improperly or they need to drop some other good thing from their schedule. This means abandoning some good thing for the best thing.

**Be responsive to their needs.** Beginning in relational ministry often means finding a natural point of contact. For some youth workers that point of contact is coaching, or tutoring, providing transportation, counseling or buying lunches for teens. As Em

Griffin has written in his book “Getting Together,” the person who meets needs leads!

**Time in their lives.** Jim Burns a veteran youth worker tells the story of picking up a group of guys from the high school campus and just hanging out as he did some errands for his family and the youth ministry. He comments, “It is amazing to see how the sex talk you did at the youth group comes alive when you are standing in a lingerie shop with a group of seventeen year old guys trying to pick out a gift for your wife!” Most relational ministers will agree that the most teachable moments do not happen at the end of a youth meetings. Instead students are more willing to listen and learn when driving up to a retreat, or over a coke at the local fast food establishment.

**Being there**—Students may not remember what youth workers taught them from week to week but they will remember who was with them for the crises, the important events, and the memorable moments of their lives. In the same way that a senior pastor will drop everything when there is a death in a congregation a youth worker needs to gauge very carefully what are the non-negotiable-have-to-be-there kind of events in the life of the students in the ministry. Some youth pastors who have their whole group coming from only one high school will be at every major sports event to meet their group members and their friends. Some leaders will even organize events after these games. It is important however to support those who are not involved in sports like the students who play at piano recitals, or perform in school plays. Youth workers who are there for the good times will be so much more effective in the lives of students when the bad times arise. (Students are who are interested in this topic can do a search on the internet for “the ministry of presence and find an number of articles on this topic, some pertaining directly to youth ministry.)

**Be persistent, think long term.** Youth who have seen their parents marriage break up and witnessed a series of youth workers go through the church are going to be less interested in investing in relationships with youth workers. Those who demonstrate the love of Christ over an extended period of time will find a greater openness from students. They will begin to develop a reputation in the community as a trustworthy person. Persistence will win over school administrators, and community leaders. With these inroad established effectiveness increases dramatically.

#### B. 3 Phase approach

Veerman outlines a process for the full time youth worker who spends a lot of time on campus. While this will not work for the volunteer youth leader, part time and full time youth workers are provided with an excellent process for making, maintaining, and capitalizing on relationships at the high school campus. In short, Veerman suggests that workers should, 1. Be Seen, 2. Be Known, 3. Be Understood

### **Be Seen**

The first stage in developing relational ministry on the high school campus is finding some comfortable way to meet students there. An introduction to the high school principle and volunteering in some capacity is a good step forward. One young life worker in Kelowna BC has worked for years as a lunch monitor even though he does not need the money. He does it to be around students as much as possible in a school that has been resistant to having any kind of Christian ministry on campus. The point is that youth workers enter their world. Sheldon Arends, executive director of Edmonton Youth For Christ has coached football for years and is known by all of the

students and teachers. Developing this relationship he has been given a large area of the school for a lunch club that meets every day as a drop in ministry.

Creative youth workers look for authentic avenues of access, including tutoring, coaching, visits, creating events and honoring teachers once a year. When students invite a youth worker to the campus and have a note from parents, this is often enough to gain access to the high school property. Some leaders have been restricted in some ways but rather than give up in defeat they have made ways to meet students off of the property or shown up at the school for every public function. Eventually trust can be built and access can be gained. One Toronto pastor ministering to Korean students in that city would work on administrative tasks at a popular downtown library that was a common hangout for Korean students. He would have meaningful contact with youth every day as students from all over the city would congregate there. Another pastor uses coffee shop ministry knowing that so many of the youth in his area always go by the restaurant slash gas station on their way to school. Some days she even buys coffee for teenage girls smoking outside of the school before the first bell in the morning.

**Pray for contacts** –Part of the whole “being seen” process involves praying for opportunities. The apostle Paul often prayed for open doors of ministry. This is an integral part of relational ministry. It is always encouraging just how powerful prayer is when praying along these lines!

**Be strategic.** Be in the right place at the right time. Excellent relational ministers have a knack for being in the right place at the right time. Part of it may be the work of the Holy Spirit leading them and part may just be good common sense recognizing where the best opportunities will be. One youth pastor made the controversial choice to chaperone at school dances. Although she was criticized at first over time she had prayed with so many of these teens to accept Christ that other parents in the church started chaperoning and had positive contacts with teens who had never attended the youth group.

**Be friendly.** Dale Carnegie has written the classic text, “How to Win Friends and Influence People”. While this is was used in the past for salespeople and business leaders his ideas for learning and using a persons name at least twice in the initial meeting has helped people make better impressions. As an adult youth workers are held suspect on campus. They are seen as a quasi-teacher type figure and as such represent the establishment. Having a friendly rather than a critical face all the time makes a big difference. In the same way that basketball player prepare their minds for competition youth workers need to prepare their hearts and minds for relational ministry so that their face is a true representation of the love in their hearts.

**Be positive and uplifting.** One way that leaders try to gain acceptance with youth is by being critical of the administration of the school. This is totally inappropriate and eventually will result in limited access to the school. Teens are not looking for adult who are as bitter and disillusioned with life as they are. They gravitate to people who though they struggle have genuine hope and direction. Youth workers do not need to be fake and pretend to be happy all of the time but they need to be focused on what they are at the school for. They should share what is useful to edify youth not side with them in their criticism of life.

**Develop and love for the people before you meet them.** The best way to have love for teens is to observe with eyes of Christ. These are the eyes of compassion that see humanity for what it is, helpless and harassed like sheep without a shepherd. Rebellious and abusive youth who may mock Christians and defy authority need to also be loved. Jesus died for them. Often these hard students are the ones who make the greatest impact on the school when they give their hearts to the Lord.

**Show interest in their interests.** Many novices in the area of relational ministry are intimidated when they consider making small talk with teens. While there is an art to this an excellent approach is to look for signs of what a student is interested in. If they are carrying a skateboard to their locker, likely skating is a big part of their life. Ask about it. Goth students will be known by their dark clothing and white faces. In this case they probably do not want questions about why they dress that way but if you compliment on their accessories they may be more willing to talk. They are expecting criticism from adults. Shock them with a genuine compliment.

**Be yourself.** In the Disney Classic, Aladdin, the Genie urges his young charge, “Bee yourself!” That is good advice for any youth worker. There is a big difference between putting your best self forward than putting your false self forward. Some youth leaders have developed a kind of ministry persona whether tough, or funny, or authoritative. It is good advice to discover what kind of a persona you are developing and if it is a put on drop it instantly. Likely it is already infecting your personal life. No one likes a faker. To minister to youth requires being genuine. Relational workers would also caution against coming on too strong. This will also repulse youth. They would caution, “don’t be too pushy!” Teens love freedom. Guys will choose freedom over friendship. If a youth worker walks up to them and comes across like their best friend the results will be very disappointing. Most students will be polite and then avoid you forever. Other students will look right through you as if to say, “Who are you and what makes you think you can talk to me without an invitation.”

**Don’t interrogate.** In an attempt to be very friendly and initiate conversation youth workers sometimes make the mistake of asking too many questions. This can be threatening for teens who feel that some how this person is going below the surface too fast. Student work hard to project a certain image and they are not ready to drop the masks that they wear after only a few chance meetings. Youth workers should definitely show interest but they need to recognize when they are being invited to go beyond small talk. It is best for the student to initiate this with some kind of a question like, “So you are a minister or something?”

Be disciplined persistent, faithful, and courageous. The only way to be seen is to be there. If this means being in the library, driving school bus, volunteering in a class room or sports program, or just taking students to lunch on a regular basis. Effective youth ministers cannot give up. It is good to be patient and not over anxious in the first year in a community. Over time the inroads will be made and eventually you will be known.

## Be Known

**Develop a file and keep excellent records.** A campus worker for Young Life who has a proven record of effectiveness, stresses the importance of logging every contact. She feels that writing things down will create opportunities in the future and help with memory. A leader who remembers the students will be remembered

**Know them and you will be known.** There is amazing power in know a students name. Some youth workers scour the local newspapers for the names of youth who have been recognized for academic, or athletic achievement. Sending a card out recognizing this puts the youth worker on a higher level of importance in the life of that teen. They move from stranger status to the status of friend if they keep at this consistently. Students will be interested is youth workers who show interest in students.

**Create opportunities for shared experiences.** Dave Veerman suggest that youth workers establish events that are run after significant football, basketball, or volley ball tournaments to provide a safe place for students to hang out and to provide

opportunities to interact with the players and their supporters. Some youth workers have sponsored on campus coffee houses, tutoring clubs, or even food drives at the local school. One effective event has been sponsoring the planned famine where students raise money for starving children by going without food for 30 hours. This event is sponsored by world vision and all of the materials are provided to the group. Youth workers will be surprised that even rebellious youth will be interested in such an event. By the time the event is over the youth worker and the youth ministry are well known in the area.

**Divide and Conquer --Small groups have greater impact.** There is truth in the saying, “divide and conquer.” Effective relational ministers know that large group meetings have limited impact and provided limited surface level conversations with students. In smaller lunch groups, coffee shop talks, kids are more open to talk.

**Make invitations** -When trust is built and the youth worker becomes part of the life of a campus or a community it is time to arrange opportunities to meet youth in groups for a coke date. In this circumstance the youth leader has greater influence in the life of a youth.

**Time to invite to ministry events** –While youth leaders need to exercise caution when working on the high school campus a time arises when it is appropriate to invite students to ministry events. This should be done with the full awareness of the school principal and can never include a trick invitation to a “party” that turns out to be really an invitation to a worship service or youth crusade. Many youth workers err on the side of making these invitations prematurely and building barriers to effective ministry rather than building bridges.

## **Be Understood-**

**Encourage, counsel and support.** Over time relationships are built. Students understand who the youth worker is and what they stand for. As trust is built students will begin to open up about many areas of their lives and the youth worker should be prepared to lend support. In these circumstances it is crucial to work with the school system rather than try to work around it.

**Look for opportunities to share Christ, pray and watch for them.** Eventually a teachable moment occurs. Sheldon Arends, director of Youth for Christ Edmonton notes that questions about Christ come up regularly now that he has been working at a high school for over 12 years. Not only students are asking but so are the teachers. He notes that youth will now ask him how to become a Christian. Some are full ready at that moment to pray and receive Jesus as Lord. Others know that he believed in prayer and are comfortable to ask him to pray for their cat to a parent diagnosed with cancer.

**Care Enough to Confront.** Youth workers who have developed genuine friendships with students have earned the right to be heard. If it is a true friendship the youth worker does not need to be afraid to confront. There is a point where it is appropriate to confront a student about their belief system and present Christ as the only way. One student in a youth ministry in Montreal, Quebec explains that he met his best friend at his locker in the last week of school and told him with tears in his eyes that “I have told you over the last year everything you need to know to make the decision to accept Jesus as Lord. I cannot bear the thought of you missing God’s plan of salvation and going to hell. So Dean, I have to ask you, will you pray with me and accept Jesus into your heart.” Dean did not pray that prayer but it must have left a very deep impression on his life to have someone share so personally with him.

## Conclusion

“It’s all about relationships man!” The young adult blurted out to the youth pastor along with a blast of acrid cigarette smoke. The young adult had requested a meeting at the pub in the university and nursed a beer as he spoke. He had asked for the meeting to receive pointers on interpersonal ministry on the university campus. Not wanting to form an opinion based on externals, the youth worker went on to discover in the conversation that the student’s personal life was in chaos. His devotional life was a distant Sunday school memory and his church attendance was sporadic. His theology was questionable and his ethics were equally skewed. The longer the conversation went on the more the youth pastor wished this student would *not* develop relationships and “pour into” unsuspecting seekers or new believers. All he had to offer others was a life spiraling downward in a tailspin. His method may have been correct, but the content was all wrong. Relational ministry is only effective to the extent that the relational minister has a healthy relationship with the Lord.

There is a computer term “GIGO.” It stands for garbage in garbage out. When applied to the world of ministry, the implications are frightening. Can you imagine pouring garbage into someone’s life? Whereas we are instructed to pass on the teaching of Christ, our life style has to match our knowledge of Christ. No wonder the Bible repeats again and again the importance that those who teach will be judged more harshly. Those who desire to minister must pay close attention to their doctrine and their lifestyle. The potential of relational ministry is yet to be fully determined but it is nothing short of revolutionary.

# Part 3 Discipleship in Context

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## Chapter 6 The Context of Pop Culture

### Introduction

While culture varies widely from one country to another, the cultural analysis below demonstrates the kind of work that can be done to understand aspects of youth culture and how to draw implications in this context. Also, as the world become more westernized, commercialized, and urbanized researchers are finding some commonalities across cultures. If you are a student studying in the united states you might be surprised to see how similar this study is to George Barna's study of youth culture or some of the work coming out of the Search Institute in Minnesota. If you come from an agrarian society you will likely seem some serious contrasts. Make marginal notes beside the text as these will be useful later on.

### Teens 2000 –The Survey

A study of 3500 interviews and questionnaires across 150 school 10 provinces and the territories in the early fall and late spring of 2000. The study was conducted with the utmost integrity and the most reliable research methodology. This material is often quoted as the most reliable study of teens values, behaviour and aspirations available in north America.

Please examine each of the statistics with top and lowest numbers in mind. Please also examine the relative values of items. These relationships are more significant than the actual numbers in some instances comments will follow the charts to emphasize important data.

What teens do each day	Nationally	Males	Females
Watch television	92	93	91
Listen to music	86	84	88
Spend time with friends	60	59	62
Do homework	44	34	54
Use a computer	41	48	34

Use e-mail	27	27	26
Access web sites	24	31	18
Follow sports	21	37	7
Keep up with the news	16	19	14

In the table above notice the huge difference in the interest that males and females have with sports. Youth workers who introduce each talk with a reference to the latest sports event are connecting with only 37% of the males present and only 7% of the females. When they are hoping to build bridges with an audience as a speaker, the youth worker is being ineffective.

Notice also that less than half of teenagers are doing homework each day, with girls more apt to do homework than males. This statistic is effected by ethnic diversity with some cultures emphasizing daily homework and other chapters much more than the dominant Canadian culture.

### **What teens value...**

% Viewing as "Very Important"			
	Nationally	Males	Females
Friendship	85	80	90
Freedom	85	84	85
Being loved	77	65	87
Having choices	76	73	79
A comfortable life	73	71	74
Success in what you do	71	70	73
Concern for others	62	51	73
Family life	59	51	66
Excitement	57	58	55
Your looks	39	40	39
Recognition	32	34	31
Spirituality	29	23	35
Having power	24	32	16
Being popular	16	21	11
Religious group involvement <sup>10</sup>	9	9	10

Friendship and freedom are the big leaders when it comes to the important things in teens lives. Notice that being loved is more important to females than to males. For the purposes of this book it is important to examine the very least important value in the chart and that is religious group involvement. Ministry activities that promote freedom and friendship may be able to increase student involvement and enjoyment but for the sake of evangelism it will be essential for youth groups to come across as less "religious" and more concerned about the personal well being of youth.

### **Where Teens Turn**

<b>Resources When Facing Problems</b> <i>"When I face a serious problem, I turn to..."</i>			
	Nationally	Males	Females
<b>Friends</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>39</b>
Boyfriend/girlfriend specifically	5	5	5
<b>Family members</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>
Parents specifically	18	18	18
Brothers/sisters	3	3	3
Friends and family members	22	18	26
Myself/no one	12	17	7

Other	10	13	7
Drugs, alcohol	1	2	<1
Totals	100	100	100

In terms of the influence the church has in the lives of teens it is included in the other category. Bibby and Posterski were able to determine that 1% of teens will turn to coaches, teachers, or pastors. Youth workers who consider themselves as pastors, or counsellors may be the last to know when a teen is in trouble. Although they desire to help, unless they are viewed as friends the actual influence they will exert in the lives of teens will be greatly diminished. Effective youth workers learn to develop meaningful friendship with teens and train youth group members to be peer ministers thus expanding their ability to help teens on their campus, at their church, or in their community. It is equally important to recognize that teens still turn to their families for advice. Teens are least likely to turn to their fathers in times of trouble and yet the influence of fathers, according to so many psychological studies, is essential for the healthy development of the self concept in teens. One sad aspect of this chart is the 17% of males who do not turn to anyone in times of trouble.

### **Teens' Top Ten Social Issues**

Teens were asked what they see as Canada's single most serious problem. Here is a ranking of what they said:

1. Crime
2. The economy
3. Racial discrimination
4. Drugs
5. Violence generally
6. The environment
7. Poverty
8. Violence in schools
9. Unity
10. American influence

Note that these items were ranked exactly in order of the amount of news media coverage that they were given that year. The inference being that although students say they are *not influenced* by the media, their concerns mirrored what the news media considered news worthy.

### **Who do Teens Trust**

"How much confidence do you have in the people in charge of..." % Indicating '~4 Great Deal' or 'Quite a Bit'

institution	Nationally	Male	Female
Schools	63%	58	68
Police	62	59	65

Newspapers	60	57	63
Movie industry	60	57	63
Music industry	54	53	54
Court system	52	50	54
Computer industry	51	56	46
Major business	48	50	47
Radio	48	46	49
Television	44	46	40
Provincial government	41	41	40
Federal government	41	40	41
Religious organizations	40	38	41

Considering the negative media exposure given to religious organizations, it is understandable that they would rank low on teen's list of trusted institutions. Religious extremism has resulted in terror in this century, and scandals at the end of the last century have shaken our confidence in the church. Given the level of trust awarded the school system, the influence of Christian schools, Christian teachers, and campus ministries should be tapped to build bridges with teens in society.

### ***What teens think about sex***

% "Strongly Approve" or "Approve"

<b>Sexual Tolerance Limits</b>	<b>Nat</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>
Consenting adults doing whatever they want sexually	61	67	56
Consenting teens 15 to 17 doing whatever they want sexually	56	66	46
<b>Sexual Behaviour and Rights</b>			
Sex before marriage when people LOVE each other	82	85	80
Sex before marriage when people LIKE each other	58	68	48
Sexual relations between two people of the same sex	54	41	66
Homosexuals are entitled to the same rights as other Canadians	75	62	87
A married person having sex with someone other than marriage partner	9	13	4

### ***Sex and Church Attendance***

Differences in sexual attitudes are readily apparent between teens who attend religious services weekly versus those who attend less often. Those who attend church less than once a week are more likely to approve of sex before marriage, living together and homosexual behaviour. At the same time it should be noted that even among regular attenders, half of the respondents felt that sex before marriage was okay if the couple is in love. Since love is almost impossible to define in this culture, and because teens are more apt to believe that they are in love after only a few dates, sex before marriage is still an issue for youth who attend church.

<i>% Approving</i>
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	Weekly	Less than weekly
Consenting adults doing what they want sexually	36	68
Consenting teens 15 to 17 doing what they want sexually	28	63
Sex before marriage when people LOVE each other	49	91
Sexual relations between two people of the same sex	25	62
Sex with someone other than one's marriage partner	4	10
Homosexuals entitled to same rights as other Canadians	59	79
A couple who are not married living together	57	94
A couple having children without being married	29	72
It being possible to obtain a legal abortion for any reason	24	64

### **What teens are doing on dates**

<i>If two people on a date like each other, do you think it is all right for them to..."</i>			
	Yes, on the first date	Yes, after a few dates	No
<b>Hold hands</b>	89%	10	1
Males	92	8	<1
Females	87	12	1
<b>Kiss</b>	73	26	1
Males	78	21	1
Females	68	30	2
<b>Neck and pet</b>	32	57	11
Males	43	50	7
Females	22	63	15
<b>Have sex</b>	11	40	49
Males	18	50	32
Females	4	32	64

There are a few things that should be highlighted from these statistics. Firstly, it is essential to be note the difference between male and female attitudes towards dating activities. In particular note that while 18% of males are in favor of sex on a first date only 4% of females feel that way. Secondly note the change in attitude after only few dates. While females do not approve of petting on a first date, this rate triples after only a few dates. With regard to sex, females are more ready to approve of sex after a few dates. This may be due, in part, to the fact that girls are more likely to approve of sex if the couple is in love. Likely females feel that they are able to determine if they are *in love* after only a few dates.

### Teens and Drugs

<i>% Indicating Regular or Occasional Use</i>			
	1984	1992	2000
<b>Smoke Cigarettes</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>
Males	34	32	36
Females	42	37	39
<b>Drink Beer, Wine, or Other Alcohol</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>78</b>
Males	77	75	80
Females	76	76	75

<b>Smoke Marijuana or Hashish</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>37</b>
Males	18	19	43
Females	14	17	31
<b>Use Other Illegal Drugs</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14</b>
Males	12	8	16
Females	9	8	13

As indicated earlier, alcohol is by far the drug of choice with regular or occasional use by teens 15-19. It should be noted that for every other drug males are more frequent users except for when it comes to nicotine. Since 1984, smoking has been more prevalent among teenage girls.

One other observation that should be made is the increase in the use of drugs in the most recent study. Researchers are attributing the increase in drug use in Canada to rave culture, the availability of illegal su

### ***What Teens believe***

Table. Beliefs and Spirituality

"I believe..."	1984	2000
Conventional		
God exists	85	73
Jesus was the Divine Son of God	85	65
In life after death	80	78
Have felt presence of God/a higher power	34	36
Less Conventional		
Some people have psychic powers	69	55
In ESP	54*	59
In astrology	53*	57
We can have contact with the spirit world	45*	43

### ***Spiritual Teens***

Spirituality	1992	2000
Spirituality is important to me.	62	60
I have spiritual needs.	58	48

The two tables above indicate that students are open to spiritual beliefs but that window of opportunity seems to be closing. More importantly there is a marked decline in the amount of youth who see Jesus as the unique, divine Son of God. Recently youth and young adults have been strongly influenced by a book called the DaVinci Code, which leads people to believe that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and sired a child. Students who have not grown up with Sunday school rely on the media and folk religion to provide a picture of Christianity.

## **Great Expectations**

Expectations of Teenagers, 1992-2000 "Do you expect % Indicating "Yes"	1992	2000
<b>Career</b>		
Pursue a career	96	95
Get the job you want when you graduate	83	86
Have to work overtime in order to get ahead	41	44
<b>Family</b>		
Get married	85	88
Stay with the same partner for life	86	88
Have children	84	92
<b>Success</b>		
Own your own home	96	96
Be more financially comfortable than your parents	77	79
Travel extensively outside Canada	73	72

Although teens may have high expectations for the future the reality is far less encouraging. Teens hope to marry and not divorce and yet of the one who marry young, most will be divorced in less than five years. Those hoping to have a higher standard of living than their parents will also have a much higher debt load. For many college or university will not be an option because they will not all successfully graduate from high school or be accepted into the institution of their choice. Helping teens develop life skills and a more realistic picture of the future without crushing their dreams should be

## **Tweens**

It is important that as we examine youth in context that we also examine the younger generation coming up behind them who have been dubbed “tweens” These are the 10-14 year olds who are being targeted by merchandisers as the new demographic to dominate. In this section we will quickly examine some of the key characteristics of this group. Keep in mind that in many ways ministry to this group should now be considered a concern for the youth ministry in churches and communities.

**Over anxious for teenage roles** –This group is as anxious for teenage roles as teens are for adult roles. This desire is being exploited as marketing companies have been creating clothing and other products that cater to this desire. Sadly it seems that merchants are delivering the worst of youth culture to these pre pubescent youngsters.

**Trend and fashion conscious to the extreme.** Peer pressure is being downloaded to the younger brothers and sisters of the teenager in the house. Grade four and five girls in particular feel increasing pressure to wear the right shoes, skirts, tops and accessories. Designers have created shirts for girls to show midriff and low rise jeans to expose their bellies. Pressure on younger girls to have flat abdomens has seen a rise of the number of girls ten and under of diets to control weight. For boys, the

trend to have baggy jeans and the right kind of boxer shorts to show off has hit elementary schools. Boys at this age are also concerned that the jeans are the right brand.

**Physically maturing earlier than any previous decade** –Part of the reason for this trend is that puberty for girls hits at around age ten in most of the G8 nations. Physical development at earlier ages is also results in earlier dating and earlier first experience with sex. Early onset of puberty brings with it other adolescent concerns like working at part time jobs. The Province of Alberta, Canada has recently lowered the working age to 12 years old. Canada also has a very low age for sex without parental consent at age 14. In other countries this would be considered statutory rape.

Recognizing this new demographic in his study, Reginald Bibby predicts the behaviour and values of this group. Listed below are some of the emerging trends that he sees for these young people.

**Values:** Tweens will value relationships and freedom more than anything else, with success and a comfortable life not far behind. Religious group involvement will likely be of little importance for tweens as they enter adolescence.

**What they like:** They'll continue to find their primary enjoyment in friends and music. Likely music styles will be more and more diverse. Music videos and downloading music will continue to be the main ways that students will interact with their favorite songs.

**Technology:** Bibby explains *“And in the book of spending a lot of money on “being comfortable,” they will be targeted relentlessly by companies of every kind, increasingly via the Internet. They will embrace technology with far less awe than adults and their teen predecessors. Interest in professional sports will continue to wane.”*

**Media;** Like the generation before them they will deny that the movies they watch, the songs they listen to, and the TV that is constantly on has any affect on their choices, attitudes or behavior, or as Bibby puts it *“They'll continue to play down the influence of an array of key sources, with the exception of family and friends.”* Their dominant social concerns will depend primarily on what the media convince them matters.

**Personal Concerns:** The primary personal concerns of tweens will be school and life after school, along with a sense that they have neither enough time nor enough money, despite what everybody says about their relative affluence. Most will be too preoccupied with personal issues to give much attention and time to addressing social problems on their own -- unless the issue affects them directly.

**Sex:** Bibby predicts that sexual attitudes and behaviour will change little, except for the growing acceptance of homosexuality. Canada is now the fourth country to recognize homosexual marriages.

**Drugs** will continue to be widely available, but continue to be used by only a small minority. At the present rate, clinics and addiction centers will not be able to treat all of the addicts who are looking for their next fix.

**Great Expectations:** Most tweens-turned-teens will continue to expect to go to university, pursue careers, and get good jobs, regardless of the state of the economy. Sadly like the generation before them most will also expect to be more comfortable than their parents despite the growing awareness that education does not guarantee success, or even a job. Almost all of them will plan to marry, have children, and stay with their partners for life, despite the fact that over half of them will experience the divorce of their parents.

## Youth Culture Implications

What does all this mean? Peering into the world of youth only to describe what is going on to those who are not aware is not good enough. Youth workers need to be able to see how this data affects how youth ministry should be done. Listed below are just some of the implications that can be drawn from Bibby's research. For a much more detailed examination it would be useful to read *Canadian Teens 2000*, and *Teen Trends* by Reginald Bibby and Don Posterski.

**The Friendship Factor:** Friends have the greatest impact on the lives of teens, teens must reach teens and youth leaders must be considered friends. For this to happen youth workers will need to think small before they think big. Any group that is so large that it cannot provide individualized attention to students at some time will not continue to grow. Don Posterski has written a separate work, "Friendship a Window on Ministry." This is a short but very useful book for those who wish to be effective in their ministry to teenagers.

**Friendship Clusters:** We must see youth as members of a friendship cluster -it explains much of their behavior. While this was not highlighted directly, Bibby and Posterski's earlier work, *Teen Trends* has described what is become widely accepted as an aspect of adolescent behavior. Small groups of youth create surrogate families of 3 to 8 youth who may not operate as gangs in terms of violent behaviour but they look to each other to provide emotional needs. If just one member of such a cluster attends a youth group it should be understood that they are defined by the group they belong to and not the youth group that they attend. Meeting a student's small circle of friends provides a window to their soul. Students who find their identity with a small group of Christian friends sometimes find the necessary fellowship to overcome the pressures of teenage life. Developing friendships with a student's friends has been usual method for campus ministry.

**The Attendance Factor:** Church attendance does make a difference in the attitudes and practices of youth. Low attenders are at risk of developing a more permissive attitude toward sexual behavior. Parents who do not see the value of consistent church attendance should be made aware of these findings. Groups that meet infrequently for a few youth activities a year are likely not doing enough and another method for helping students develop a Christian worldview should be explored.

**Family Ministry:** The study shows that families continue to be a source of strength and counsel for young people. At the same time their mother's and father's sometimes feel inadequate to deal with their questions. Parents need help to understand their teens world. Youth workers need to be an advocate for youth and a resource in family conflicts.

**Worldview:** One of the striking challenges raised by George Barna and Josh McDowell is the need to help teens differentiate themselves from the moral relativism of our society so that they can begin to develop objective Biblical standards for making positive moral choices. If you were to look over the statistics again you may note that while church attendance did seem to have some influence on attitudes toward sex, large numbers of students who attend regularly approve of standards that directly oppose the teaching of Scripture. Youth workers should not assume that church youth have a Christian worldview. We need to help them develop one.

**Restraint:** One of the statistics that defies the notions that all teens have sex before college is that statistic that says that only 56 percent of teens have been sexually active in this study at least. Christian teens sometimes feel that they are the only ones who believe in chastity, but they are wrong. Teens need to know that not everyone is "doing it " They need a clear message on abstinence and control

**Reality:** Youth ministries need to prepare teens for the reality of the future. While youth workers should not devastate youth and take away all hope. Instead, leaders should help teens look toward the future with faith, trusting in God's goodness while at the same time building discipline to face the hardships ahead. At the same time the church must be sensitive to teen stress, anxiety and burnout. Youth ministries can operate as if they are the only activity in a student's life. This is so far from the truth. Youth ministries must address the concerns that they face if we hope to catch their interest and touch their felt needs.

**Spirituality-** Today's teens are still open to Spiritual things –campus, church and community outreach programs must appreciate this openness and reach them while there is time. Youth groups need to also recognize that Christianity is only one option on the spiritual buffet table. There are other groups and ideologies vying for their commitment.

**Diversity** – Statistics represent a spectrum of opinions. Not all teens are the same. Expecting that each teen will fall into the categories described in the tables will lead to many misunderstandings. Some students defy description and most resent being treated like a text book case of pubescent emergence. Youth workers must always be sensitive to different tastes and personal issues. Youth leaders must know their members.

## **Applications –Ministry Principles!**

Above we examined some implications for ministry derived from the study of pop culture. Translating these into practical ministry principles is the logical progression to effective application of the material. The principles listed below are in no way comprehensive but do some direction when charting a course of youth ministry.

- 1. Think people not programs.** Programs are necessary in youth ministry. They provide the context for meeting people and sharing the love of Christ. The danger with programming is that it so easily becomes an end in itself. Since freedom and friendship are the two highest values, at least among North American youth, programs need to be designed with individuals in mind. Whereas in the past some experts have promoted a one size fits all mentality this restricts freedom and individual expression.
- 2. Build relationships with teens.** This statement is so obvious that it should go without say however experience shows that as a youth ministry begins to grow the administrative aspects of the ministry also increase. Youth workers can become preoccupied with organizing events, preparing proposals, writing sermons, monitoring small groups, and developing web sites. In this flurry of activity the youth worker may wrongly assume that the work of the ministry is being done. Unless relational ministers are being released into the campus and the community the youth worker has neglected the most important aspect of ministry. Mark Senter, in his axioms of Youth Ministry leads off with the statement, "Youth ministry begins when the youth worker finds a comfortable way of entering a students world."
- 3. Help teens reach their friends.** You programs that are completely adult run miss their greatest resource. Students already have the greatest influence in the lives in their friends. They may lack the training to introduce Christ into their conversations or the mind set to turn interaction into fellowship and encouragement, but in a ministry they are the greatest resource of all. When teens are motivated to influence their friends, their campus, and their community the impact is deep and sustained.
- 4. Stay in touch with the culture** –be culturally relevant. Recently a youth pastor showed a video clip from the matrix and expected the audience to be riveted to the

screen. Instead, conversations filled the room as students discussed plans for after the rally or other movies that were coming out in theatres. While the youth pastor thought he was connecting with the crowd, the crowd was at a different place culturally. They had moved on to new interests. While a youth worker does not have to watch every movie that comes out it is essential to stay in touch with the current interests of youth. What is on their minds? What sparks their imagination? The best source for this material is teens themselves. Those who are speaking daily with youth will know what they are thinking about. Following up on leads, by looking at teen magazines and being in places like the campus or the shopping mall, will provide clues to how the culture is changing.

**5. The youth group must be a loving group.** In Bibby's study, the third highest value for teens was being loved. Students have indicated that the main reason they left a group was because they did not feel accepted. Even if teens feel loved by the adult leaders this is not enough. Teens need to feel welcomed by their peers. Groups that are just a replica of the high school campus hierarchy of popularity based on beauty, athletic ability, or wealth, will not make a difference in the lives of teens.

**6. Youth Ministries must provide what tv and technology cannot**—warmth and love. While the youth ministry is not able to provide million dollar media productions each week like the teens' favorite rock video or television show it can provide a loving, uplifting environment. John Nesbit, author of *Mega Trends* was correct when he wrote that we would need "high touch for high tech times." While students may spend hours communicating using MSN and chat rooms like Nexopia, when they log off, they emerge from their rooms ravenous for human contact. Ministries that place students in rows talk at them and send them home without providing opportunities for them to interact are robbing them of one of the greatest blessings of following Christ. Fellowship is a right that students should come to expect from a campus, drop in, or church based youth ministry. Effective groups are counter culture with regards to the erosion of typical barriers between youth.

**7. The church must challenge teens to think for themselves.** When the scripture describes our struggle against invisible principalities and powers it is unlikely that the writer had huge multinational marketing companies in mind but when it comes to who is dominating the minds of youth today they are a very strong influence. Helping teens recognize this influence and become aware of the various ploys being used to exploit them prepares them to think for themselves. Bibby's study shows that teens trust the media yet they deny its influence. Youth should be taught using interactive strategies, discussions, debates, simulations, and any means that require them to engage their minds. One useful activity is just having teens identify the exaggerated claims, half truths, or outright lies in advertising aimed at them.

**8. Freedom is paramount.** Parents and church leaders may be frightened to promote freedom to young people despite the fact that freedom is a biblical theme beginning with the exodus and culminating in the cross. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free even if it seems to youth that the whole point of Christianity is to restrict their enjoyment of life. Understanding students' objections to the gospel effective youth workers preach liberty and grace above legalistic rules. Emphasizing the biblical theme of being free from sin, addiction, fear, guilt, and the curse of the law will help teens appreciate the protective nature of God's rule in their lives. Effective youth ministries provide choices. Likely, this is at the heart of drop in ministries which appeal to youth because they are able to have fun with their choice of activity in a safe environment. Church based youth ministries can provide choices by creating elective Sunday school classes or small groups based on interest.

**9. There are two genders and they are different.** One of the important aspects of Bibby's research is the gender difference on so many issues. Assuming that a ministry can constantly cater to the males and ignore the interests of the females is a

critical error. Youth ministries that have a strong attendance by males and females recognize this in everything they do. Token efforts like “girls night out” are not enough. Recognizing gender differences when communicating to the group, when planning activities, choosing leaders, or providing refreshments helps provide an environment that is supportive of both genders. Over compensating in this area is equally dangerous. Attracting males who prize freedom over friendship or love (see charts above) can be tricky. Paying attention to this balance is essential.

10. **Get plugged in –get online.** Music and media don’t replace human touch but they are essential to ministry that connects with this generation. Students often view the church as archaic and irrelevant. This assumption is often verified on Sunday morning when the worship service caters to the senior citizens in the congregation. Youth programs need to keep pace with technology, not because it will impress youth but because it is something that they have come to expect. Students may not check their email regularly but when they do it would be good to have something from the youth ministry. Websites can be costly and complicated but teens are often willing to help with setting one up and maintaining it. The price of video projectors and laptops are dropping quickly. Most groups could make use of power point for worship or for announcements. Some pastors make use of bulletin boards, and msn to keep in contact with youth. Since many teens use cell phones leaders should contact students on these devices.

## Conclusion

Jesus said “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Matthew 7:13, 14.

In this statement Jesus describes two possible roads for humanity. The broad way, which the majority of humanity would travel, headed to ultimate despair and destruction. The narrow, less traveled road that only a few would find, went off in another direction than the thronging hordes. The masses inundated with popular culture and blinded by what the world has to offer would travel that perilous thoroughfare. Isn’t it obvious that teens would sucked along with the traffic flow. Left to the natural flow of this life, and without some kind of intervention, youth will coast along with the culture to their eternal destiny.

Disciplemaking youth ministry calls teens to take what Robert Frost, and more recently M. Scott Peck, call the Road Less Traveled. For Frost, this way off the beaten track made all the difference. Those of us who work with youth recognize that we walk this same lonely road and plead with others to do likewise. Our study of culture is both encouraging and challenging. Encouraging because we see that there is openness to spiritual realities. We are challenged because we know that the cultural forces are monumental, the influence of the media is pervasive, and the options available to kids are legion!

It is exciting to see that work is being done. In roads are being made into the culture. There is hope that although we might not be able to reach and disciple every teen, we can definitely develop disciplemaking followers out of some of them.

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## Chapter 7 The Context of Post Modernism

### Introduction

Many people are tired of hearing about post modernism like it is the new and latest incurable disease. All the hubbub over it seems to have diminished everywhere except in the church. The rest of society has sort of accepted it in stride buying in or rejecting various aspects of it at will. Maybe that is what makes it more pervasive and ubiquitous. As one someone has written, "it is the air you breathe." To postmodern young people grown up on a steady diet of alternate lifestyles, moral relativism, a plurality of worldviews, and a smorgasbord of religious options, postmodernism is a big deal. Like one of my bible college students says "Postmodernism is here. Get over it!"

But maybe, like me, you would prefer to understand the spirit of the age rather than swallow it. The song below is a bit of a post modern primer depicting a popular view of reality that has permeated the consciousness of a cross section of our culture. Please read it slowly and carefully paying close attention to areas where it corresponds or contradicts your perception of reality.

### Reality=River of Dreams?

River of Dreams –by Billy Joel

*In the middle of the night  
I go walking in my sleep  
From the mountains of faith  
To a river so deep  
I must be looking for something  
Something sacred I lost  
But the river is wide  
And it's too hard to cross*

*And even though I know the river is wide  
I walk down every evening and I stand on the shore  
And try to cross to the opposite side  
So I can finally find out what I've been looking for*

*In the middle of the night  
I go walking in my sleep  
Through the valley of fear  
To a river so deep  
And I've been searching for something  
Taken out of my soul*

*Something I would never lose  
Something somebody stole  
I don't know why I go walking at night  
But now I'm tired and I don't want to walk anymore  
I hope it doesn't take the rest of my life  
Until I find what it is that I've been looking for  
In the middle of the night I go walking in my sleep  
Through the jungle of doubt  
To a river so deep  
I know I'm searching for something  
Something so undefined  
That it can only be seen  
By the eyes of a blind  
In the middle of the night  
I'm not sure about a life after this  
God knows I've never been a spiritual man  
Baptized by the fire, I wade into the river  
That runs to the promised land*

*In the middle of the night  
I go walking in my sleep  
Through the desert of truth  
To a river so deep  
We all end in the ocean  
We all start in the streams  
We're carried along  
By the river of dreams  
In the middle of the night*

*(River of Dreams by Billy Joel)*

Does the song make you uncomfortable or did you find yourself humming along to a tune that was at the top of the music charts for a number of weeks and still finds its way onto the easy listening stations in North America? Billy Joel is describing a search for a spiritual non-material world that for him is not described by traditional religion. The search is personal, individual and elusive. There is something out there but he cannot determine what it is. The song resonates with this culture because they too concede that there is more to this life but do not know how to find it.

Here is how the experts describe these seekers:

*“In terms of evangelicalism, we have a generation coming up that doesn't speak the same language, doesn't go to the same places, doesn't have the same needs and isn't looking to Christianity to answer their spiritual concerns.”(George Barna, the Disillusioned Generation, 44)*

*“Being less in tune with linear thinking, rational argumentation and final answers, postmodernists often walk away from classic Christian apologetic presentations which assume that a logically articulated argument will carry the day. Such a presentation is likely to be met with the typical GenX response: “Whatever.” (Stanley Grenz, Touched by Postmodern Spirituality Faith Today, September October 1997)*

## Understanding the Challenge

**Understand the times** -1Chronicles 12:32 –. The oft quoted biblical record concerning the men of Issachar is that they understood the times and acted accordingly. Taken in context they recognized that Saul's reign was over and that God had handed over the future of the nation to a man named David. Recognizing the change they decided to pledge allegiance to the new order instead of trying to perpetuate a kingdom that had no future. Church growth experts have seized upon this story to encourage believers to understand the times and take decisive steps toward responding to the needs of the age. In this era the new challenge that they suggest needs to be addressed is the challenge posed by a post-modern, post-Christian culture.

**Eatons and the Frog in the Kettle** –It is not only the church that is scrambling to find a response to the post modern challenge. Business has also been struggling to keep up. A case in point is the story of famous retailer Eatons of Canada. This company had survived the great depression, the first and second world wars, the Baby Boom, the Korean conflict, and the FLQ crisis in Quebec. Unfortunately for the prestigious Eaton family their main enterprise could not face the cultural upheaval brought about by postmodernism. The company was forced to seek bankruptcy protection because the stores were no longer profitable. Despite desperate attempts to reinvent themselves the stores could not gain the loyalty of the younger generation.

George Barna has described this phenomenon in his book, *The Frog in a Kettle* in which he compares the church to the frog in a pot on a stove that does not recognize the water has moved from cold to boiling hot and thus stews in his own juices. Barna explains that unless the church becomes aware of the rapidly changing cultural context it will face a similar fate.

**Where are the Children?** Some Christians are waking up to the reality on Sunday morning when they look around and see predominantly white hair in the congregation. Churches that built large Christian Education wings and gymnasiums in the 1950's recognize that most of their facility is now dormant or rented out to generate income. Those in urban centers are renting their seldom used buildings to ethnic churches with many young families. If all of the teenagers had left at once the impact would have been devastating, but because they left in the ones and two's the congregations are not alarmed.

**Losing a Whole Generation?** When the news of the Columbine school shootings flashed on televisions around the world, people were shocked by the senseless tragedy. Although youth have not been murdered at church they have gone missing never to return. Are people shocked to hear this news? We are seeing children grow up without Sunday school or even the most basic understanding of the gospel. As they grow up they are not looking for answers to the ultimate question of life in the local church. Unless innovative strategies are put in place the church in North America stands to lose this generation completely.

## What Is Modernism: Philosophy 101

To begin, Post modernism should be recognized as a reaction against modernism. Modernism found its roots in the enlightenment and a scientific orientation toward the universe. In time everything would have an explanation and all of the mysteries of the universe would be revealed. Progress would usher in a Utopian era through greater peace, literacy and modernization.

It may be valuable to examine the main tenets of Modernism and thereby gain a better understanding of its antithesis. Essentially modernism sees knowledge as certain, objective, and good.

### ***Knowledge is Certain***

In the modern world **facts are always true**. East is east and west is west. What is black cannot also be white. Snow falls down it does not fall up. These relationships are verified and correct. There is no need for debate and conjecture. The modern person's world is predictable, organized, scheduled. If black was black yesterday it will be black tomorrow. Facts are dependable, a person can count on them. They provide order and meaning for everyday existence.

**Truth can be discovered using the scientific method.** Students were taught that scientific discovery follows definite rules. The scientific method begins with a research of the facts in that area of study. After a review of the literature an hypothesis is formed concerning an aspect of the situation. From there an experiment is devised and conducted. If the hypothesis is proven true it becomes a theory. If the experiment is repeated and the same outcome is received in all circumstances then the theory becomes a law.

### ***Knowledge is Objective***

**Facts are true for all.** In the scientific, modern world, not everything is a matter of opinion and interpretation. There are sixty seconds in a minute, never sixty one. A minute may be measured with various devices but it cannot deviate from the sixty second rule. Regardless of who measures the minute it will not exceed the sixty seconds. The time will be equal measured in any country on earth.

**The universe can be explained by logic and rational observation.** Galileo, Copernicus, and Newton devised a mechanical model of the universe. It may have been as complex as the inner workings of a watch but it operated on precision timing and orderly sequence. The laws of physics described matter, energy, force, friction, velocity, acceleration and motion. In the Newtonian world an object at rest tended to remain at rest and an object in motions tended to remain in motion.

**Supernatural and myths are unscientific and unreasonable.** When the scientific method was applied to the Bible, many of the stories seemed to be pre-modern, superstitious and unscientific. Archeological evidence did not seem to support the existence of Jericho. Other records did not seem to validate the historicity of Scripture. The miracles in the Bible seemed to defy the laws of the universe and needed to be explained from a rational point of view. Attempts to “demythologize” scripture and determine the moral teaching beyond the myth became the goal of some liberal theologians. Others dropped the notion of religion altogether, embracing instead atheistic evolutionary theories for a scientific basis for existence. The famous Scopes trial which pitted evolution against the Bible was the inevitable clash between science and religion.

### ***Knowledge is Good***

**The enlightened society is the good society.** Ignorance and illiteracy, according to modernist thought, were the enemies of humanism, and civilization. Backward, savage, barbarians could become gentlemen through education and modernizing their way of life. Eventually self actualized individuals would drop their weapons work together toward world peace, and the abolition of hunger and disease.

**Education leads to fulfillment.** Silly notions of a savior were not needed for the enlightened individual. Religion was a crutch for the simple and the weak. The modern person was educated and sophisticated.

**Progress is inherently good.** The eradication of small pox, yellow fever, and other modern plagues raised hopes that science and progress were making the world a better place. Modern conveniences that made life easier such as the automobile, the spinning jenny, and radio convinced people that the brave new world of the future would be a much better place than the past.

## What Is Post-Modernism: Culture 101

Whereas the modern world regarded knowledge as certain, objective, and good, the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought many of the modernist hopes crashing down. The First World War revealed that educated humanity was not necessarily good. Progress had given rise to weapons of mass destruction. Right and wrong became a matter of opinion and brutality became a means to an end. The modernist experiment was a failure but what was left to replace it? To the generation who followed post-modernism seemed the reasonable option. For the post-modernists, experience had proven that truth is ever changing, relative, as well as both good and bad. Each of these aspects of post modernism will be briefly considered below.

### ***Truth is ever Changing***

**Reality is what you make it.** One of the early antecedents of Postmodern thought is existentialism. The existentialists believed that life only has meaning as the individual finds purpose and meaning. Reality is defined by the individual. Two people can walk out the door in the morning and determine that the weather is good or awful based on perception. Advertisers today use this maxim: “Perception is reality.” In a post modern context facts are less important than the interpretation of those facts and interpretation is based on consensus not objective truth.

**Experience supersedes reason.** If facts are less important than interpretation then experience is more important knowledge. In evangelism people sometimes say that a person with an experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument. Post modernists are of the opinion that if an experience contradicts the facts, the facts must be either out of date, or just plain wrong.

**Yesterday is a poor predictor of tomorrow.** If modernism is to be believed then what was true yesterday should hold true tomorrow. This generation has seen so many changes, retractions and reversals in the disciplines of astronomy, political science, and especially medicine that what scientists are saying may not necessarily be true. What textbooks assert so boldly concerning the natural universe may be irrelevant when the next discovery is made. Contrary to what modernism held *facts* are not always *true*.

**There is truth that can be known in non-rational means.** The empirical sciences of the modern era were convinced that all reality could be measured or quantified. In the extreme love could even be reduced to a series of chemical reactions in the brain. Christians have always believed in the miraculous and the efficacy of prayer. We assert that there is a way of knowing by faith. Reason has its place to bring us to the edge of belief but beyond that we must place our trust in an unseen God, who speaks in a still small voice. There is a way of experiencing beyond the five senses. It may be called extrasensory perception, the language of the heart, or a work of the holy spirit but it cannot be measured by scientific instruments.

**You cannot always trust your senses or science.** The popularity of Star Wars can be explained, in part, by its comfort with postmodern thought. Technology is inferior to the power of the Force. The popularity of yoga, naturopathic medicine, acupuncture, and astrology indicate that people are losing confidence with modern medicine and are less convinced of the value of science.

**There are supernatural ‘realities.’** The once popular television series, *The X Files* boasted that the truth was *out there*. The two characters, Molder and Scully represent postmodern and modern approaches respectively to the paranormal. Molder is open to the unexplained accepting it without having to explain it in scientific terms. Scully, the modernist requires rational explanations for all of the phenomena she encounters. Christians may be more like Molder. Christians are convinced that there are spiritual realities beyond our senses. Heaven, Hell, blessings and curses are all spiritual realities that Christians accept without scientific explanation.

### ***Truth is Relative***

**Newton vs. Einstein –truth is a matter of frame of reference?** The theory of relativity shook up the scientific world because it challenged or complicated Newtonian physics so much so that Newton’s explanations of reality held true only in ideal circumstances. The real world was more complicated than the modern mind could conceptualize. The concept of objects traveling at the speed of light and how this affected time, challenged earlier notions concerning the nature of the universe. Studies in atomic physics showed that the position of electrons around the nucleus of an atom were always relative with respect to time. While this is a very complex theory to grasp, studies seemed to be pointing to the idea that an electron could be in two places at the same time.

**If you believe it is true it is true for you** –Applied to life and history, these theories in physics imply that ones point of reference makes all of the difference. If truth is relative and there is no objective standard to measure it by then people define reality by their own standards.

**You are the ultimate judge of right and wrong.** Taken into the realm of moral individuals decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Laws are not based on an objective standard like the Bible; instead the laws reflect the political will of the people. Right and wrong are decided by consensus.

**Two contradictory “facts” can be true at the same time.** In the post modern mind, two contradictory views exist in harmony and each is equally valid. If it is good enough for electrons to be in two places at the same time it is good enough for ideas. Ideas are more tentative held with less certainty also because time will probably make both opinions invalid anyway. Trying to convince people that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven may be met with an affirmative by a non-believer. At the same time they may say, “You will go to your heaven and I will be reincarnated into a higher being. We are both going to happier in the after life!”

**Reality is a matter of interpretation** –Postmodern people know that their distant ancestors lived in on a flat world. They moved and operated in that reality. To them the world was as flat as a pancake. For the peasant in 12<sup>th</sup> Century Milan it did not make any difference if the world was round, flat or elliptical. For those on this planet at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Sun was a friendly thing, good for tanning and growing crops. Today direct sunlight on our skin is cancer producing and we required layers of sunscreen to block out its harmful radiation. It is the same planet and the same sun but people have perceived it differently over the centuries.

Years ago it was believed that the human body could not travel over 40 miles per hour without serious injury to the internal organs. It was believed years later that the highest running speed for a human was one mile in 4 minutes. The four minute mile record was broken years ago and is now broken by high school students. Reality from a postmodern perspective has been a matter of interpretation, not scientific reasoning.

## ***Truth is Good and Bad***

**Progress has brought health and devastation.** A famous line from one of the earliest star wars movies states: “Your science has placed us in crisis, Admiral” Darth Vader the dark overlord who uses his understanding of the dark side of the force suggests that science is flawed. Women who took the drug thalidomide to deal with morning sickness and produced deformed babies recognized that progress is not always good. For the modernists facing the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the wars of that era saw that education did not usher in a brave new world of peace and philanthropy. Likely, when the nuclear bombs devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki those who had placed their hopes in science began to wonder if science would lead to the destruction of human civilization. The Kyoto accord designed to reduce greenhouse emissions has been designed to rescue the planet from industry.

**Internet good and evil.** When the military first devised the internet it was to create communication systems that could not be compromised by even a nuclear attack. As the internet went public it was used mostly by academics for research. The phenomenal progress made on the human genome project links researches immediately to map the human genetic code. But at the same time the internet is also filled the worst filth of humanity with one of its main uses being the distribution of pornography. Very disturbing cases of child pornography, and sexual addiction have been associated with the internet. These advancements have revealed how primitive mankind has become.

**Education is not a panacea for all our problems.** Researcher George Barna has referred to this generation as the disillusioned generation. Part of this disillusionment has been with the educational system. While some countries see education as the only way to success and strengthening the economy, the down turn in the north American economy and the changes in the information technology sector has left highly educated adults standing in unemployment lines. At a recent graduation at York University in Toronto, one of Canada’s leading economists encouraged students to work in the service sector and eventually there will be jobs. As Don Posterski quips, our educational system prepares to students to ask the question, “Will you want fries with that?”

## **Responding to the Challenge**

In a special report to Christianity Today, Andres Tapia wrote that postmodernists are looking for five main characteristics in faith groups: (1) *authenticity* - since they have been burned by so many broken promises, they want to know the bottom line and they prefer honesty over politeness; (2) *community* - they are looking for the family unlike the broken, dysfunctional ones in which they were raised; (3) *a lack of dogmatism* - experience is more important than dogma; (4) *a focus on the arts* - where faith can be shared and expressed through various art forms; and (5) *diversity* - racial, economic and ethnic diversity authenticates Christianity's claim of loving ones neighbour (*Reaching the First Post-Christian Generation*, Christianity Today, September 12, 1994).

Let’s take a moment to consider what it will mean to pursue cross cultural ministry relational ministry, community, diversity, and the supernatural

### ***Pursue Cross Cultural Ministry***

**Don’t assume that they are like you.** Adults in north America grew up in a different culture than their children have. Many of these adults grew up with two parents, a stay at home mother, and a Dad who stayed at the same job until

retirement. Teens have grown up with just the opposite. They have also been influenced by postmodern media, a spectrum of religious options, and as well as influences from various cultures. Technologically teens have seen a few generations of media, from walkmans, to Discmans, to mp3 players.

On the philosophical front Stanley Grenz has pinpointed ways in which other world views have become mainstream in our culture he describes the infiltration of monism into Western culture. Cyclical pre-Christian world-views rebirthed in the growing religion of Wicca; the pantheism of philosophical Hinduism, now repackaged and marketed in The Celestine Prophecy and Star Wars; the nihilistic monism of Buddhism; the pagan psychology of Jung: These views are now accepted in popular culture. Grenz says, these become the bearers of a "new immanentalism," the belief that God (not the biblical God, but the Force) is not only with us, but he *is* us--and the old-growth forests and the living, breathing Earth. Grenz exposes the hopelessness and the helplessness and the resignation implicit in this immanentalism, and says, If you want hope or help, come to Christianity with its transcendent God who is directing history toward his own bright ends. (Stanley Grenz- What Christians Really Believe and Why)

The blind assumption that teens have a growing Christian worldview is a classic error in these postmodern times. It is best to assume nothing. It is better to listen to what teens believe. In listening alone and asking genuine questions without trying to criticize, teens will see for themselves that their theories are weak, flawed, and empty.

**Be sensitive to needs.** Em Griffin, in his book, Getting together suggests that we "find an itch and scratch it, find a need and meet it." This makes good sense. Jesus went about Judea teaching, but he also went about healing the sick. Our great needs today may not be healing from leprosy but many social lepers need to be rescued with love and understanding. Lonely, angry teens need to be cared for. There are actually so many needs it is difficult to know where to start. But we must start!

**Apply the indigenous principle.** Missiologists tell us that Christianity thrives best in a culture where missionaries use cultural symbols, language, and ethnomusicology to propagate the gospel. People worship best in their own language, and worship styles. If youth sub cultures were studied by ethnologists they would find a language system, dress code, and social mores that are quite different from those of their parents. Allowing born again teens to write worship songs and lead worship is one step in this direction. The worship should be indigenous to their culture. Other ways to affirm positive aspects of youth culture in the youth ministry will connect with teens.

### ***Pursue Relational Ministry***

**Breach the credibility gap.** Studies show that pastors are about as trusted in north America as lawyers and lawyers are even less trusted than politicians. That places pastors and religious leaders at the bottom of the credibility hierarchy. Only through genuine interaction with young people over a prolonged period of time will leaders earn the trust of students on the high school campus or in the community at large.

**Be known for integrity and authenticity.** It is better to be fallible and weak while making these weaknesses known than to pretend to be perfect. Students are not looking for perfect leaders but they are looking for people who are who they say they are. Some pastors appear to teens to be people who live and sleep in their suits. To teens they reek of the established phony religious system. They are looking for people who will not abandon them and will follow through on all of their promises. To gain the respect of the community kids, church groups and their members are better to be known for loving gay people and reaching than for opposing game marriage just as one example.

**Spend the time to build relationships.** New style ministries sometimes called “emerging churches” allow for long visiting times, lunches, or even smoking breaks instead of the quick impersonal handshakes during the worship service. These churches feel the body of Christ ministering to body members on Sunday is as important as the preaching of the Word of God. Youth ministries that allow for extended periods of time together in retreats, lock-ins, trips, and mission experiences are more effective at attracting and retaining new members. Volunteer leaders who take the time outside of group meetings to interact with teens are seen as the most effective workers.

**Train relational ministers.** In a postmodern context where truth is up for grabs and perception is reality, mass evangelism techniques will be roundly ignored by the general populace. While large concerts and rallies may generate a lot of interest for teens real impact will be made by trusted friends who are able to touch their lives. In the maddening noise of this culture, the voice that will break through is the one closest to the heart. Training teens and adults to forge relationships and through these relationships bring students to Christ is far more effective than flashy large group activities or Christian entertainment.

### ***Pursue Community***

For a group that is suspicious of the motives of the church they can be won over only by genuine community not fake love and pretentious manners. One pastor suggests, that we provide a context for developing relationships, a chance to commit to the community and a cause that they can believe in.

**Give them a context for developing relationships** - Postmodern youth have separated themselves from any meaningful interaction with others for fear of sacrificing too much of their perceived independence. If they encounter a place where genuine and meaningful relationships can be found they will respond positively. Youth groups and churches can provide such an environment.

**Give them time to make a commitment** - they need time to build trust that will help them make a commitment. Postmodern youth must be allowed to experience the church for a long period of time before a commitment will be made. Some churches offer seeker services where the message they communicate with Postmodern youth is that they should try Christianity as a possible option for their lives. They provide a safe place where seekers can investigate Christianity and give church another try. They are saying to postmodern kids: “we won’t confront you, ask you to make an immediate commitment - just come to the services, get involved and see how it feels.” In most churches people are expected to become full members and to make a big time commitment right from the first visit.

**Give them a cause that they can connect with** - Xers will commit to a cause that they identify with. They are the product, in part, of a certain cultural complacency, which is evidenced by their commitment to social causes. Service opportunities will appeal to them. Much of this kind of altruism could be seen in the high school responses to the Tsunami that hit Indonesia and Thailand. Wise youth ministries found ways to partner with kids who did not know Christ but were willing to do something alongside Christians.

Stanly Grenz, in his Article, *Touched by Postmodern Spirituality* suggests, *The postmodern longing for relationships helps us understand anew the biblical focus on community. We must take seriously the biblical truth that spirituality involves being in relationship to God, to others and to creation—not as isolated elements of a spiritual checklist but as inseparable and interrelated dimensions of a single whole.*

**Establish small groups.** These days groups are growing from the outside in. Many students will be a part of a fun, open small group before they go to church. Campus

clubs, home fellowships and outside events are non threatening and provide the kind of warmth that teens are searching for but can find no other place.

**Share the leadership and ownership.** Emerging churches seem to incorporate team leadership. This resonates with postmodern people who are skeptical of the superstar pastor. Since truth is determined by the community in the world students expected to be part of the decision making process. They wanted to be consulted and have a say. Students can believe in something more when they helped create it. Son Life ministries has developed a plan for a vision casting retreat. By the end of the retreat the ministry comes home with a long term plan and short term goals that everyone has committed to.

**Empower people.** Some churches are termed “power withholding churches” because all of the policies are written to restrict the rights of the members. Empowering ministries are designed to release the members as ministers in the community. When the membership is responsible for the growth of the ministry there is a sense of purpose and community. It also means that people do not wait for the pastor to do all of the work. People see what needs to be done and they do it because they have been not only permitted, but expected to do so.

### ***Pursue Diversity***

**Embrace different expressions of dress and worship.** With the fragmentation of youth culture and the dozen brands of music finding a homogenous group of youth is next to impossible. Celebrating the fact that all different kinds of youth are accepted at a group is one way to make every kind of teen feel welcome. Rather than implementing a dress code or forcing one style of music upon the group, youth leaders should not make a big thing about piercing, tattoos clothes or music preferences. Allowing students to use different worship styles in youth services will affirm students who listen to hip hop, or alternative music when they hear their style being used to glorify God.

**Model acceptance.** The Pharisees stalked Jesus to find some charge against him. It incensed them that he spoke with women, touched lepers and consorted with notorious sinners. Youth ministers should be conspicuous for their love for people, especially the unlovely. Students will watch closely how the youth worker interacts with the student with attention deficit, or the local sociopath. Teens will feel loved when they recognize that the group accepts the worst of the worst.

**Create a kingdom value system in the people.** In the teenage society students are evaluated on the basis of their looks, money, or athletic ability. Losers are those who are over weight, poorly dressed and useless at sports. Groups that value people using a biblical value system ignore the worldly system and treat people with love without bias. For postmodern youth this will communicate the love of Christ much more effectively than a thousand sermons.

### ***Pursue the Supernatural***

*Postmodern young people are looking for transcendent meaning, and in this sense, they are a spiritual generation. Again, with their postmodern mindset, they don't believe that science alone- the empirical method-can solve our problems. They believe that something is wrong with the world, and that there must be something beyond what they can see, feel, touch, taste, and smell. This makes them as open to Christian revival as is any generation, but it also opens them to cult activity. Many toy with various forms of New Age and Eastern religion, including the pantheistic idea of connecting with God through nature. The following characteristics make Xers open to spirituality (quotes from Kevin Ford's Jesus for a New Generation):*

**Seek God.** This may seem so obvious that it should not need mentioning, yet some ministries have downplayed the importance of God stressing instead the loving fellowship of believers. Others have downplayed the religious element of a ministry to make the non-believers feel more at home. As Leith Anderson says in *A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* this strategy is flawed because when people come to Church they “expect to hear about Christ.” While we should always be sensitive to those who may not understand we do not have to apologize for the fact that we desire to worship God.

**Desire the work of the Holy Spirit.** Some of the charismatic churches are attracting postmodern people because they provide an experience that postmoderns are seeking. Tired of rhetoric they are looking for signs and wonders. Churches do not have to be Charismatic however to be open to the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, convict of sin, draw sinners, and sanctify believers. All that he does is supernatural by definition.

**Allow for spontaneity.** Many of the emerging churches that are attracting postmodern families allow for interaction, and contributions by church members. There is risk when anyone can participate but these churches are willing to take these risks and correct believers who abuse the opportunity to read scripture, testify, sing a song, or lead out in prayer. Youth ministries that break the ice with short games, mixers, or interaction activities lend themselves to this kind of spontaneity. This also allows the Holy Spirit to use members to encourage and edify one another.

**Be sensitive to His leading.** Is it possible that God has an objective for each church meeting? Pastors and preachers are careful to allow God to use them to speak a timely word to a congregation. Without becoming too mystical, the word of God promises that the Lord will guide us. This does not mean that he will decide what colour socks we should wear today or if we should shower or not, but it does mean that as we do his Work he will provide direction. Groups that know that the leaders pray and seek God’s direction will have greater confidence in the group and may begin to practice seeking the Lord for direction in areas of their personal lives.

**Connect on a Spiritual Level.** Postmodern people are not moved by carefully argued apologetics. The postmodern apologetic cuts to core issues of spirituality. In some ways these days are more like premodern society where people are looking for a demonstration of a supernatural dimension that is not explained by science. Many churches sing a song saying that these are the days of Elijah. In Elijah’s day people followed what seemed to be the most powerful God. To demonstrate God’s power Elijah did not exegete the book of Deuteronomy. Instead he set up a contest. While we would not want to put the Lord to a foolish test people need to see the power of God at work. This can be seen powerfully when different generations can worship together, or when different ethnic groups can be integrated and love one another. Where science has disappointed the church can make inroads.. Grenz explains, *One dimension of the postmodern ethos appears to give us a head start in this task. Postmodern people tend to be far more open to the supernatural and to spirituality than their modernist predecessors. Thus Christians need no longer begin their evangelistic efforts by proving such things as the existence of God*

### ***The Paradigm Effect***

Seeing from another perspective. Those who cannot relate to postmodernism or feel that they cannot comprehend what this has to do with ministry should consider for a moment how they felt before they became a Christian. The things of God seemed like nonsense. Justification by faith may have seemed almost unfair. All that changed when Christ became Lord of their life. A word for seeing things from such a different perspective is paradigm. It is another frame or reference to see a situation from. Writers have used the pictures of an old woman and young woman over

lapped. From one perspective the picture looks like a young woman. From another she looks like an old woman. Once the viewer is able to see both images they can focus back and forth between the two. However the observer who only see one of the perspectives there is frustration because they cannot see it. Postmodernism is a new paradigm. A new way of looking at the world and interacting with it. It may be hard to recognize at first but once it is perceived it can be seen. At this point it becomes more clear why old strategies will not work for this segment of the culture.

**Caring enough to try to understand.** Those who choose to ignore postmodernism have, in a sense turned their back on the lost. Churches who rose to the challenge of evolution, atheism, humanism, and liberalism cannot take an apathetic stance toward postmodernism. We are not required to love this world view but instead love those who have grown up with this orientation toward the world.

### **Post Modern Times**

Decades ago there was a movie called *Modern Times* about a man's frustrations with machines and the modern society in which he lived. Here are two post modern responses to our times taken from a web site. Look at each to see how postmodernism affects life at this time.

*Mike is a 28-year old graduate from a technical university. He works as an engineer for a large Multinational, where he makes good money for doing a job that entails huge budgets and large mounts of responsibility. He works 70 hours a week, parties moderately on the weekend, and enjoys hiking through National Parks.*

*Out of the blue (well, at least for everybody around Mike), he one day quits his job, empties his bank account, and cancels his rent. He books a ticket to Nepal, where he starts on a round-the-world-trip, which will take him through Nepal, Tibet, Hong Kong, Malasya, Singapore, Java, Australia, New Zealand, South America, North America and finally Canada, where he joins a wild-life activist group that cleans animals affected by oil spills. En route he investigates different types of spirituality by participation (as opposed to observation!). You think he's weird? Actually, he's fairly normative!*

*John is a young guy living in Pomona, near Los Angeles. Having grown up in a broken home John has always been somewhat aware of his own emotional pain, and he is a quick convert when he meets some Christians one day who befriend him.*

*John joins a House church whose vision is to be the best representative of the Kingdom of God it can be in the local neighbourhood. It turns out John has an amazing gift for drawing and painting. In the context of this house church he becomes a full-fledged artist, using his skill to honor God and express his love. Want to know how he makes his art? He walks through his neighbourhood, picking up trash from the streets, and using what he has found to make art out of it. "This is what God does," he says: "God takes trash, and then he makes something beautiful out of it."*

*Do I need to tell you how the people of Pomona regard John? To them he is qualitatively different from the Christians they see driving their big cars to church on Sunday, or the Christians they hear on Talk-Radio. No comparison. John drives a beat-up old car, that drives if it feels like it. He lives by the words of St. Francis of Assisi: Preach the Gospel everywhere you go. If necessary, use words.*

*(an excerpt from <http://www.thejourney.nl/artpm.asp?ID=9>)*

## **Conclusion**

Postmodernism brings both a challenge and an opportunity to youth ministry. On the one hand it is difficult to explain Christianity in rational terms to young people who may be more inclined to think that yours is just one opinion of many or that you can disagree and both be right. Discipling young postmoderns may be complicated when moral questions are considered. Morality may seem grayer than it ever was before. The opportunity inherent in postmodern approach to the universe is the openness to believe in a creator God instead of resisting on the basis of science and evolutionary theory. Postmodern people have the suspicion that there is something out there. Christians have the opportunity of introducing them to this unknown God.

# Part 4 Youth Ministry in the Church

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## Chapter 8 Discipleship in the Church

### Introduction

Discipling youth can be done in the one to one context but happens best in the context of a healthy loving group of other disciples. When Jesus began his ministry he purposely chose a group. The group was not homogenous except for the fact that they were all men and all Jews. As much as Jesus had desires that they individually would follow him, his great desire is that they would love one another. His frustration with their petty jealous and desire to lead must have made him sad in the way that a mother is heartbroken as she sees her children slapping, punching, and biting each other.

In this chapter we will examine six characteristics that have been popularized by Son Life ministries. It is important to acknowledge Dave Garda who has described these so well in Youth Ministry Foundations. Students who are interested in looking at eight characteristics proposed by Christian Schwartz in Natural Church Development will see that the ones that he has proposed match almost all of Garda's six.

### The Healthy Group

Recently a salesman inspired by a recovery group held at Saddleback Church decided to launch a recovery program for people with "hassles, hurts, and hang-ups." Unfortunately, after just a few meetings, members who were excited at the start decided to leave. The members ignored the rules and were openly hostile to one another. A similar thing happened in a ministry to junior high youth in the city of Kelowna, British Columbia. At first youth loved to come to the group and invited all of their friends. After a short time fist fights began to break out on the buses that were picking up the teens. One girl had her nose broken. One teen never came into the meeting room and decided to use his skate board in the parking lot with

some friends. After scratching up the park cars by doing tricks over them he eventually broke his leg. This story became known in the community and the group was branded as wild and unruly.

These very negative stories underscore the importance of having a good group, but the positive stories of groups that have surrounded students with love and support are even more inspiring. Students in youth ministries sometimes find their groups the one place where they are loved unconditionally and believed in no matter how many times that they fail. For some teens the drop in center, the campus club, or the youth ministry is the place they long to be all week long.

## Creative expressions of Love

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.

**Building Community**--One resource that is particularly helpful when attempting to get love flowing in a youth ministry is called Building community in Youth Groups, by Denny Rydberg. The book lists many ideas that gradually move students from being strangers to being able to openly share with one another. These, in themselves, are not able to do build community, but introduced cautiously they can help move a group in this direction. It is also critical to remember that these ideas are only the tip of an iceberg of external expressions of love one to another. Each idea needs care and cultivation to keep the vision for love in your group alive. Each idea can have a host of implications and applications when used a second or third time. Love is a creative and not a stagnant process. Rydberg suggests that youth workers should feel free to reject ideas inappropriate for their group. Instead leaders are encouraged to experiment with and modify each idea to make it most effective within each unique group.

**Love and Fellowship**--We enter a new group as an individual. It is not until we sense acceptance by the group that group building can occur. Studies have demonstrated that learning is accelerated when individuals feel accepted by those around them. True fellowship is the culmination of this process. As the group moves on to deeper interaction and involvement, members can interact on the basis of past experiences with the group. Without careful planning we can run a host of events that provide activity, but do not lead to deeper and richer relationships. An over abundance of activity can even lead to a smorgasbord where students pick and choose what to do as individuals, rather than cooperating as a group. We need to program for deepening friendships in a way that lends momentum to our group identity.

During the initial stage of implementing the strategy, the burden for the communication falls upon the key lay leaders. Over time, this responsibility is shared with the youth ministry team and growth level teens. Although some expressions of love may become traditions in a ministry, it is best to stay open to the activities that will work best with those who are new to your group and leadership team.

When applied to an non structured drop in program love and respect are communicated by the volunteers. However helping drop in members interact with kindness and respect with others who use the facility moves

students one step closer to appreciating the love of Christ and what it does for relationships.

While developing an ongoing environment of loving acceptance, regular attention must be given to this process. Dave Garda suggest that At least five minutes a month should be devoted to the leadership agenda as an evaluation of the progress in this area. If one new idea on love is attempted every other month the groups will be well on the way to being the places of healing and care in a hurting world.

## Modeling 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. The bible speaks to this issue: when a student is fully taught he will be like his teacher. Luke 6:40. Proverbs reminds us that "bad company corrupts good morals." Luke 4 retells the words of Christ, "when a student is fully taught he will be like his teacher." 1 Thessalonians tells us that out of Paul’s affection for others he hoped to impart his very life. He even proclaimed boldly, "follow me, as I follow Christ." The people with whom we spend our time mold who we are. The music we listen to molds our thinking. The time we spend with Christ will Make a lasting difference in our lives, including a transformation of how we think (Romans. 12:1,2). Dave Garda that because of this "likeness" principle, three truths, become evident:

*“the leadership’s understanding of Jesus will be a key ingredient in shaping the group’s understanding of Jesus. The dynamic of the leader’s “walk” with Christ will be reflected by the group students need to fully reflect the lifestyle of the perfect teacher model Christ through regular study of the gospels. The leadership’s understanding of Jesus will be a key ingredient in shaping the group’s understanding of Jesus.”*

With this background in mind it is imperative that leaders spend time cultivating a relationship with the savior, by being regularly in his word. Leaders need to cultivate listening ears to his quiet guidance. Not only that but it is crucial for those who work with youth to consider what their own understanding and concept of Jesus Christ is. According to Garda, effective leaders “visualize his active presence as one who desires to transform us daily into his image ”Christ?

For this reason it is unwise to place a young Christian who has not walked with the Lord very long in a position leading youth. This person may have zeal and enthusiasm but the relationship may be lacking in depth and knowledge. The bible is clear that those who teach should not be a novice in the faith and that leadership should not be given easily or lightly. At the same time those who have been in the faith for a long time may be as dangerous. The last thing that should be modeled to youth is a stagnant relationship that has not developed in five years and youth ministry has become a job and not a ministry flowing from a relationship with Jesus.

## Consistency of contacting

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 student who attend the group, frequently, seldom or never. Les Christie, a veteran youth worker and professor of youth ministry challenges his students to train teens to do peer visitation in small teams. He has seen how these teams have been very effective in evangelism as well as in encouragement.

Garda warns that this passion for contacting students can never diminish..” We must have the conviction that contacting is as important two years into our ministry as it is during the initial months of our ministry. We must guard against the "sigh of relief syndrome that says, "I used to do that, but I am glad I am past that stage." contacting is an unending responsibility that communicates our commitment to the value of people in our ministry, apart from their involvement in our group.” Regular contact with the teens in the youth ministry will help the youth worker to be aware of the many changes in each teen's life through the year.

The consistency of our contacting ministry, Garda explains faces several threats. It would be useful to examine some of these threats

**It takes time and effort.** To build new relationships, make new contacts, and penetrate new circles of friendship does not come naturally. If we fail to take the time, or fail to encourage other lay leaders and key students to continually be penetrating new circles of friendship, we soon will become an ingrown youth group without any non-Christian friends close enough to impact.

**It takes courage and boldness.** A problem that we face in maintaining a contacting ministry is what Pat Hurley refers to as the *stomach problem*. To go on the high school campus, to visit the kids' homes, to go to teen hangouts when you know no one, to try to get to know the student body president; all of these require a certain amount of guts or courage. There is a sense in which a youth worker feels vulnerable going into an unknown circumstance. There is also the fear of rejection. Garda explains, “fear is a natural response as we leave our own spiritual and peer comfort zone to "cross-culturally" contact teens. But if we are afraid to go to them, isn't it easy to see why they would be terrified to come to a church youth group?” Youth workers should allow Christ's promise of, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" to be a source of courage.

**Results may be slow.** Youth must be aware of and face this possibility. Garda retells his experience with contacting ministry. *“How clearly I remember my first contacts. Not only was I nervous, but i felt awkward and out of place; yet all the time I was praying and asking god to help me know what to say. I wanted them to know that I was truly interested in them, and concerned enough to spend time with them.”* Contacting is slow, often discouraging, but trust is only developed over a period of time. Leaders need to remember that Galatians 6:9 says: "let us not get tired of doing what is right, for after awhile we will reap a harvest of blessings if we don't get discouraged and give up."

Garda suggests that the youth worker must evaluate their ability to begin contacting ministry and determine:

- How much time do we have available for contacting?
- What will be our approach to students?

- What are our goals in contacting?
- How will we divide up our teens to insure they are being regularly contacted?
- When and where will we make contacts?
- What will we say?

Until comfortable relationships are established it is good to have some reason for the contact whether it is to get a tour of the school, to bring something to a student, to meet the student's friends, being picked up for an event, or providing information about an upcoming event. When calling the members of the group for the first time it is good to let them know in advance, verify all of the numbers, and have a reason for the call, like an inquiry about their attendance at a retreat.

### **Organizing a contacting ministry**

The following goals are suggested by Son Life to help us organize a contacting ministry

- establish a workable level of commitment. How much time will you be each week in spending contacting ministry?
- Schedule a sample week in advance to determine where your time for contacting really is.
- choose two or three possible methods of contacting for you and your students. You may have a weekly trip you take which you could bring them along on or you may be easily able to have one or two kids over for dinner each Thursday night. Choose whatever is best for you.
- Some initial guidelines to consider in organizing our contacting.
- spread your contacts out. Don't try to contact everybody all at once, but make sure everybody gets contacted over a reasonable length of time.
- establish the purpose of your contact before you go. It might be simply to get acquainted; it might be friendship; it might be to explain the ministry; or it might be confrontation.
- assign a sponsor couple to a specific class of students for the purpose of making personal contacts. Consider having this couple stay with that class throughout the four years of high school.
- establish accountability for your staff. Suggest a minimum number of contacts to be made during each month, quarter, etc.
- Always be on the lookout for informal events you can go to with your students. Look for events already happening in your life that would be natural opportunities to include a student.

### **peer contacting**

In addition to organizing yourself, the youth leader also needs to think through how to help key ministry students in their contacting.

Peer contacting involves students initiating time with other students they would not regularly spend time with. These contacts should be informal and outside the regular flow of group events.

Peer contacting is essentially the same as volunteer contacting if the student involved has ministry in mind. A student has less barriers to overcome, since he is already a teen among teens. Fear still exists though, since teens are also moving beyond their own group to build bridges with

## 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 worker thought that love was very important so he would hug each student before the bible study began and stood in the door afterward and gave each a hug when it was over. The students felt so uncomfortable that they stopped attending the group.

When it comes to “positive” it can mean a lot of things. A youth ministry, campus ministry, or drop in center needs to know what kind of image their members have of the ministry. Anonymous surveys and comment cards as well as feedback from student leaders should provide some of the picture. One youth ministry veteran explains that he measures the three f’s. He wants to make sure that there is food, fun, and fellowship. At the same time, some students are coming to the group to learn. They like the feeling that they now know something new. 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.

**The Process:** Garda provides an overview of this process:

- first, we must continually assess our group. What is the average age? How well/long have the group members known each other? How well do they work together? What are the physical abilities and disabilities of group members? What is the male/female ratio? What do group members expect of each other?
- the second step is to plan appropriate objectives for the group, based upon where they are and where they need to be as a group.
- the third step is to select and sequence group activities as a unified whole keeping in mind our objectives.
- -The fourth step, executed alongside step 3, is to be on the look out for opportunities to encourage and nurture the group that is forming.

## Prayer

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 big part of the ministry the depth of transformation in the lives of the student will be stunted. Even Jesus saw this essential element to his ministry. The scripture records, But he (Jesus) himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. Luke 5:16

Jesus provides our strongest model for building prayer into the foundation of our ministry. We must also seek prayerful dependence and empowerment

for each area and for each member of our youth ministry. 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."

Each of the phrases can be examined to understand what they are trying to say more fully.

**To enlist concerned students and adults.** • Who you recruit for the prayer base will affect the supernatural success of your ministry. The members of the prayer base should be individuals who exhibit the qualities of faithfulness, thankfulness, and holiness. Recruits need to be individuals with the maturity to keep confidences when necessary. Recruits should also be individuals with whom the youth leader can trust. This way open communication lines can be maintained. Below are some sources of recruits:

- fellow youth workers
- church staff (e.g. pastor church boards and committees etc .)
- personal friends
- parents
- concerned students
- senior adults
- shut -ins
- sunday school classes
- former youth group members
- other existing church groups and organizations

**•.to regularly and specifically pray...**

We need to recruit a core of individuals who are willing to reorganize their schedule to prioritize a ministry of intercession for youth ministry. These individuals will become an essential part of our youth ministry team.

One method to keep student in the minds of the prayer partners is to produce a sheet with all of the names and pictures of the students. One parent of a teen decided that a mom's prayer meeting each week would be a wonderful way to support the ministry.

**The total needs of the youth ministry:** The great thing about so many different praying for all the needs of the ministry is that all the needs are prayed for. Some the needs being prayed for may not have been on the mind of the youth worker but would be on the minds of the parents. All of it is useful

**Resulting in a spiritual impact.** Galatians speaks of sewing to the flesh and reaping from the flesh corruption. Prayer is definitely the opposite. It is sewing to the spirit. The results are life! Prayer changes hearts. It touches areas of lives that are untouched by other aspects of the ministry. In this sense prayer is an essential ministry.

## Communicating the word

When the Young Men's Christian Association no longer shared the word of God, the original founding principles had been abandoned. Some youth ministries do very little with the Bible and apologize when it is opened. Rather than the high point of the evening it is snuck in where it will not cause offence. The reason for the apologies is the lack of preparation that has gone into the delivery of the word. You are probably the most difficult members of the church to speak to. Knowing this, Ken Davis has written a book called, *How to Speak to Youth and Keep them Awake at the same time*.

**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.

**Visual-** To help students relate to the word, students will hear better if they "see" what the youth pastor is talking about. With the computer revolution in schools students are now capable of producing their own power point presentation and are used to being visually stimulated while they learn. Object lessons, video clips, the bible on video and other sorts of visual media or live drama will help students learn better.

**Interactive** –When youth are watching TV and they see someone standing and delivering a speech, lecture or sermon their face is just a blur on the way to something that they find interesting. To engage the mind of students effective bible communicators find ways to get youth into the word of God. Short interactive activities during a teaching session, where students are involved in the learning process, increase interest and retention of the material dramatically.

**Personal-** In a large group setting it is difficult to personalize a message. Allowing students to apply the message, using some interactive strategy, such as writing their sins on a piece of paper, or reading a bible verse in silence, helps students personalize the content to the teaching to their own life. Concrete examples given for application, or surveying the group to get input also helps to make the message more individualized. It helps from the start to choose topics that apply to the students present. Challenging students to make ethical stock investments would not apply to them during their high school days. However issues like self esteem, guilt, anger, and fear are much more personal and relevant to their daily experience. Providing case studies and real life situations

As we consider presenting the word of God to junior and senior high youth it is possible to assume that bible study alone equals growth. We need to consider more than content if we are to become effective in discipling one another. Teaching is most effective in an environment of balanced~growing relationships.

Dave Garda discusses the inter-relation between teaching and relationships, explaining that: *"As we move into our communication of god's word we must go beyond a presentation of content and consider: If a student does not sense god's love flowing through our group to him, how open will he be to our instruction? If our group is not convinced that the church is god's idea for his chosen people, how can we gather our focus to fulfill the great*

*commission? If we never see our students outside of formal teaching time, how will they know we are genuine? If we have stopped growing in our relationship with Christ how can the excitement and power of the Christian life be "caught" from us? If we neglect to cover our ministries and students in prayer, will we be ready for the battles that are inevitable? If we expect students to learn, are we giving them creative and relevant experiences in God's word?"*

## Conclusion

These six characteristics of healthy youth ministries are not comprehensive but they are fundamental. 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.

Christian Shwartz compares his eight characteristics to eight slats of wood that make up the sides of a barrel. The barrel can only hold as much water as the length of the shortest slat. Water will leak out over the top of that slat until the water level stay precisely at that level. This one area limits the overall effectiveness of the barrel to hold water. Ministries that neglect one area will be less effective. The approach that Schwartz suggests is bring the weaker area up to the standards of the rest of the ministry and the effective of the ministry increases proportionately.

In considering our six essentials Garda suggests that youth workers ask: *What is our relationship as individuals? Is love flowing between us? What is our relationship as a group? Are we committed to one another? What is our relationship outside of formal gatherings? Are we in regular contact with one another on our students turf ?.What is our' relationship with our living lord? Are our daily lives controlled by the holy spirit? What is our relationship to god in prayer? Is our prayer base established? What is our relationship to god in his word? Are we seeking to know him better through his word?*

Ministries that deal responsibly with these questions will eventually gain strength, wholeness and effectiveness.

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## Chapter 9 Administration and the Team

### Introduction

If a youth ministry was a ship, then the crew of this “Disciples’ Ship” would have a very clear task. The crew would be responsible for the movement, maintenance, and safety of the craft. In youth ministry it is not always clear what the crew should be doing or even who is part of the crew. In this chapter, determining who that crew should be and what that crew should do is the central issue. Related to that issue is, “How does the vision, mission, and philosophy of ministry become reality through the ministry of the leadership team?” In essence what is being discussed is what type of leaders, fulfilling what kind of roles help make everything else discussed in this book possible.

Dr. John Wilkinson who is the Director of Youth Unlimited Toronto and professor at the Wycliffe College once advised this writer that the extent of my ministry would depend completely on my ability to share leadership with other likeminded youth and adults. These words have proven true in twenty years of youth ministry. As John Maxwell says, everything rises and falls with leadership.

Earlier in this book Stump stressed the importance of student leadership. In this section of the chapter we will revisit student leadership. In our text Robbins discusses both adult and student leadership providing excellent detail that must be read and understood.

### Student Leadership

**Passing the Torch or Playing with Fire?** There are some youth leaders who are not willing to give students positions of leadership and many of their reasons for doing so are completely valid. Choosing leaders from among peers can be fraught with difficulties. Envy and jealousy can be the result when some students seem to have privileges that others do not have. It may seem to some of the students that the youth leader is playing favorites choosing certain pets to be on the leadership team. There is also the danger that students will be either irresponsible and neglect their duties or they may go power mad and start pushing other students around. Some youth workers had to deal with students who felt that they made the rules are were not bound by the youth group rules. Another danger is that the leadership team can become a clique that excludes others in the group. Since these leaders will have at least one meeting separate from the other students in the group they begin to establish an identity and sometimes that identity is a negative one.

Despite these potential pitfalls, student leadership is still a good idea and the risks can either be avoided dealt with through a wise selection process and excellent training. Groups that use either an election or a pure appointment approach may find difficulty getting the support of the whole group. However, when the leadership

criteria are clear, when the selection process is fair, when leadership is truly servanthood and when the group plays a role in affirming the leadership choices students are more likely to support the leadership structure.

## Benefits

There may be some dangers involved with empowering students to ministry to peers but there are also many benefits. These benefits are listed below.

**Involvement** –many youth ministries and drop in programs face days when the attendance is very low. Students who are committed to the ministry because of a responsibility to serve will be there regardless of the latest concert of television event. Student involvement increases with increased commitment and vice versa. Students who are determined to be at the group regardless of the workload at school or the weather will also influence their friends to be there as well. If these students genuinely care for their friends in the group, likely their friends will be loyal also. It always takes a committed core of students who will be at the group whether the group is praying or playing to move the rest of the group to come out. As leaders get involved enthusiastically this enthusiasm becomes infectious and other students want to be part of what is going on.

**Ownership** Student leaders who are already sacrificing their time to help create events are more likely to care about what goes on. As a core group of youth begin to think about the group during the week they have begun to feel ownership of what goes on there. In general people care much more about what has cost them something than those things that they received for free. When student have a say in what happens in the youth ministry they begin to want to share this with their friends and are more apt to invite others from their school.

**Attendance** –Robbins tells the story of his early days in ministry in which he worked a ninety hour week to organize a spectacular evening for the students at his church. He had planned every detail for months and was sure the students would be amazed at the fantastic night he had single handedly created. He describes his profound disappointment when none of the youth showed up and he looked so bad in front of the adult sponsors. Students, who are required to be there, will want to be there if they have been part of the planning, set up and promotion of an event. Students will attend what they create and bring friends.

**Better ideas** –A youth leader may feel humbled to know that they do not always know what kind of games will work with students. In many cases this is not their fault. Students have an intuitive sense about these kinds of things and often they automatically know what works. On youth pastor turned over every activity for a Saturday at the provincial park to two grade eight girls and reported that it was the best event *he* had ever planned. Youth are an incredible resource. Neglecting their input in planning and running events is irresponsible leadership.

**Enthusiasm-** Many youth pastors may say that they are very excited about a youth event but likely it is for different reasons than the youth. The kind of genuine enthusiasm that teens exude about ski trips, fund raisers, concerts, and camps spreads through the whole group. The way to boost that enthusiasm is to allow some students to be part of the planning process. Students get excited about what they created and when students get excited they can not contain the excitement. Soon others are excited as well!

**Student development.** Students grow best when they get involved. Mark Senter, in *Reaching a Generation for Christ* sates as an axiom that effective youth ministries release students into postures of leadership sooner rather than later. In the same way that faith without works is dead youth ministry without opportunities to serve is also

dead. Another analogy comes from athletics. Those who use their muscles will recognize quickly that those muscles develop. Students who put their faith in action through serving the ministry grow at an accelerated rate.

**Retention** When students can be making money or doing homework on the night that the youth meet it may be necessary to find something more than fun and games to keep them coming back week after week. Students who are serious about life and their commitment to Christ need a greater challenge or they will abandon the program. These students need to feel that they are part of kingdom vision to reach and disciple youth in the community. As one youth pastor uses as his slogan, "Join the community. Change the World!" Week after week students keep coming back to a group they have invested in that group. Eventually these youth may return as adult leaders and make an even greater impact.

**Recruiting** –Students who are in leadership and excited about youth group or campus club events will promote the group everywhere they go. Not only this, but likely they will influence their friends toward accelerated growth and eventually leadership. Darryl Winter a camp director in Saskatchewan explains that some of his best camp counsellors are former campers and friends of current counsellors. Their involvement in the camp keeps them volunteering year after year.

## Characteristics and Qualities

Rather than a list of external qualities, looks, communication skills, popularity, or charisma, youth leaders look for other qualities in the lives of students. In fact most youth leaders while desiring that students are living in relationship to Christ they are not looking for sinless perfection in their leaders. Listed below are some valid criteria that should be considered when selecting leaders.

**Disciple and disciple-maker** –It seems obvious that if students will lead other students they should first be a disciple of Jesus. This may exclude students who profess to be believers but there is not evidence of commitment to Christ or his church. Students who may have been part of the group for years may not qualify because they are living in rebellion to God, their parents and the church. As a disciple a student has a desire to know Christ. Dann Spader used to use a desire to win their friends to Christ as his bench mark for discipleship. If they were not desiring to make disciples they were likely unprepared to take any leadership role in the group.

**Devoted to Christ, the church, and the group-** This too should go without saying by leaders are often chosen because they have many friends in the group and they are opinion makers. Getting the opinion makers on board with the leadership is a usual strategy. This arrangement turns sour when an opinion maker hates the church and despises the leadership of the ministry. While this student may have obvious leadership skills they are not ready for leadership in your group.

**Desire to reach the lost-** There are many reasons why a student would desire to be in a leadership position even if it is called servanthood. Students may enjoy the status or certain privileges. They may desire the attention of the ministry leaders or the other students in the group. It can be seen as a ticket to popularity. However, discipling ministries need leaders who are motivated by the thought of seeing people come to Christ. Not even a desire to minister to the group will do because there will be times when evangelism will require accepting new comers to the group.

**Exhibit the fruit of the Spirit** –while no one has mastered the fruit of the spirit leaders should begin to demonstrate the existence of the fruit of their spirit in their lives. Jesus said that by their fruit you will know them. One of the best evidences for Christian maturity is not a students age but their patience, love, joy, peace,

gentleness, meekness and self control. It is not sinless perfection that is required but genuine Christian growth should be evident.

**Daily devotions including prayer and the word.** Some leaders set specific standards such as one chapter of bible reading and fifteen minutes of prayer each day. More important than time or page lengths is the willingness to commit to the discipline. Students will be inconsistent if they are not accountable. If a leader expects youth to keep up this discipling a reporting system should be used and the leader should also report to the group.

## **Other important Qualities**

### ***Reliable***

Reliable people can be counted on to get a job done right. A leader can rely on these people to do what they volunteer to do and they will provide results not excuses. It is essential that a leader gauge what students are capable of and not overburden them. Reliable people would rather leave the leadership team than continuously let a leader down. In the case of these dependable students they will follow through with a request and eventually pass on what they have learned to other reliable people. This has been labeled the 2Tim 2:2 principle in different Christian circles.

### ***Available***

Youth ministry is priority. Some of the most capable youth on campus will not be Christian group leaders because they are already over committed to many other good things. Leaders on the campus, at the youth group, or volunteering for a drop in ministry are of no use if they can never be at the group. Often these busy people seem like a natural choice for leadership but student would sometimes damage their health go without sleep to try to make everything fit in their lives. Youth leaders would do well to bless these young people in their busy lives rather than demand that they drop everything for the sake of the gospel.

### ***Faithful***

Faithfulness is an attitude that is expressed in acts of loyalty. Students leaders need to be faithful to God and to group. This faithfulness is expressed in church and youth group attendance or attendance at the Christian club on campus. This is not token commitment of keeping up appearances at church so the student will be able to go on the mission trip. Faithful people are not motivated by extrinsic rewards. They are driven by a love for Christ and his kingdom. As Paul confessed, “the Love of Christ compels us.” This compulsion is demonstrated through attendance and active participation in the work of the ministry; work that continues when no one else is watching. This faithfulness continues when the youth ministry is in its building stage and continues on when the group has more members. It is steady when student get older and more of their friends abandon church related activities for the steamier party scene.

### ***Teachable***

Student or adult leaders must be responsive to the leadership. In other words if they do not respect the authority of the youth worker they should not be serving with him or her. Some students can be have the impression that they know it all. They believe that they know everything that should be done in a youth ministry. Sometimes they feel that the previous leader did things the correct way and this new leader does not have a clue about how to run a youth ministry in that community. Some leaders keep the stipulation that no leader can serve in the youth ministry unless they participate in the training and team building events during the year. Students and adults who are responsive to the leadership will have a good attitude toward the training and be willing to listen. Those who are unwilling may be better to find another ministry in the church or community to support.

Together these qualities spell the word RAFT. Some youth professors have explained that these kinds of leaders will help *keep the ministry afloat* despite the raging waters of culture and society.

## Training

**Student leaders need to be instructed concerning *peer ministry*.** Youth who think that they need to “lord it over” the others in the group are not fit for leadership and yet as peer servant leaders they are required to understand the following principles.

**The person who meets needs leads.** Students need to understand that ministry is not about telling people what to do, preaching to others, or standing in the spot light. Students need to understand that they will be respected for their ability to care for the students in the group. Those who go out of their way to befriend newcomers, share with other in need, and lend a helping hand whenever possible will have greater influence in the group.

### Service Oriented Ministry

Jesus taught his disciples that the greatest would be the servant of all. If student leadership is going to be successful student leaders must recognize that their highest calling is to be a servant. It is essential that they understand that

- Students who serve are following Jesus’ example -jn. 13:13-17 If any student feels that this ministry is too demanding they should recognize that this was the model set by Christ. Leadership is not about respect, rewards, or recognition—it is about service.
- Students who serve are serving Jesus -matt. 26:40 –Jesus said that when we serve the very least in the kingdom we are serving him. The point being made is that the least prominent ministries are of equal or greater importance than the “up front ministries.”
- Students who serve will be rewarded by Jesus -matt. 10:42. It is clear that although the rewards in this life may seem unequal to the sacrifices made, the Lord will not miss even the smallest act of kindness done in his name. Student and adult leaders can take comfort in the knowledge that the Lord will honor those who practice a lifestyle of service.
- Students who listen to others will be listened to. The power to positively influence others increases when we patiently listen to their needs. Students who are trained to listen, gain access to the hearts of their peers. Later when these student leaders facilitate small groups or even lead group games, students in the campus club, camp, or church will be more willing to cooperate with their leadership. They are willing to cooperate because that person was willing to listen/
- Students who help others will be helped. In a side note concerning Jesus’ activities Luke mentions that Jesus went through all the towns and villages doing good. Had he been like the Pharisees, pushy, pompous, demanding the crowds would have been much thinner. However because Jesus had enough compassion to reach out and touch those in need, they hung off of his every word. Because he provided for his disciples the disciples were willing to follow him anywhere and do anything he asked of them, even if that meant death. Student gain influence in the lives of peers when they go out of their way to help in an appropriate manner.

### The Game Plan

One of the pitfalls associated with teenage leadership is that youth workers do not always have instant respect for student leaders who were selected by a previous leader. They also miss out on the respect of the church even though they would be quick to point out that Paul taught that we should not look down on them because they were young. Because of a history of name-calling and tenuous relationships student leaders may not have the respect of the church as a whole.

- Student servant leaders earn trust loyalty. Trust must be earned it is never awarded. Students will be trusted by the leadership of the church when they have been consistent over time.
- Student servant leaders refuse to criticize and back bite. Much of the distrust that happens between leaders and students is the knowledge that youth have a tendency to speak about what is bothering them with their friends. Students who refuse to give in to disparaging remarks will gain the trust of their peers and the leadership of the church.
- Student servant leaders are open and honest with church leaders. “Are you hiding something?” These are probably the most threatening words that a teen can hear. Students who have a no lying policy in every area of their life may find that people will not come to them looking for compliments, but they will come to trust the person for a truthful response.
- Student servant leaders support church leaders making them a success. It has often been the case that students who are loyal to the previous youth leader are very critical of the incoming leader. Part of this may be related to issues of loyalty, the circumstances under which the leader left, lack of trust in the new leader. Students who are excellent in the faith will go out of their way to pray for and support a new leader. This support can almost come across as
- Student servant leaders devote themselves to prayer for the leadership

### **General Responsibilities for Student Leaders**

While students leaders will serve in various ways at different churches and in para-church organizations the following list is fairly typical of the kinds of responsibilities for student leaders.

- Greet each person each week
- Pray with and for your pastor
- Pray for your group every day
- Encourage someone every day
- Promote your group activities
- Attend all youth group events
- Participate fully in worship, etc
- Be an example 1tim 4:12
- Do daily devotions
- Minister to others (pray with/ for) be a listener -hear their feelings not just their words
- Spend time with others outside their circle of friends
- Develop a prayer list and keep it up to date

- Deny self -put the needs of others first
- Don't wait to be asked -if they won't step in then no one will
- Participate in all training activities

## Retaining

Keeping student leaders serving year after year with all of the changes going on in their lives can be a challenge. Listed below are a number of factors that will determine the depth and length of a student leaders commitment to the leadership team.

**Selection** –if you tell them that, “anyone can do it” they will feel that their contribution is minimal. If you say that there will be a trial period to determine the best place of ministry there is the possibility that they will not continue on but having the out for the leader and for the student is very valuable.

**Orientation**- When you take the time to give a volunteer the big picture you have not wasted a minute of your time. The sooner that student or adult leaders gain an understanding of how they contribute to the kingdom through their ministry the sooner they are willing to commit wholeheartedly. On the other hand, after a good orientation to the ministry, students or adults feel that they are not able to commit, then it will avoid conflict later on.

**Training** –People resent being asked to do something without being given the proper instruction. Conversely people enjoy the mastery of a new skill when they come to practice it with relatively little effort. Excellent training produces excellent teams and highly motivated ministers.

**Proper Placement** –use their gifts for the ministry. When students are given the opportunity to use their gifts they soar. The tech crew at a church that this writer worked at were so into their area of ministry that they would work far into the night to set up the lights in the best way. Eventually these same high school guys led two of their techy friends to the lord back in the sound booth. In this placement the students grew and provided an important service to the group. Others found there place in the worship band and were thrilled at the opportunity to practice for hours on a Friday afternoon. Saddleback youth ministry helps student and adult volunteers determine their “shape” for ministry and this helps to place them where they will flourish.

**Community** –leadership team builds affirming bonds, eat together. The glue that keeps them coming back –potlucks after church –appreciation dinner –Students need to have a sense of belonging. Although they may work hard at time and be tired while others are having fun there is a camaraderie that is a special blessing for servant leaders.

**Coaching** –Everyone can use some coaching from an expert from time to time. Training can be far removed from the situation. Coaching on the sidelines at a drop in center or at a camp is powerful because of the immediacy. Right there in that context the student knows that they are being noticed and they are being counted on to contribute to the ministry.

**Evaluation** –This need not be a scary thing. In fact it should really be a time to encourage and challenge a student to excellence. Without evaluation students may feel that it does not matter that they have given a poor effort. Also evaluation is an opportunity to show a student how they have improved in the last six months.

**Affirmation** –constructive feed back, group affirmation. Encouragement notes, a pat on the back, a quick phone call or an email just to say that a student did well. The youth leader is not the only one who can participate in this. Other students should be encouraged to thank student leaders for their ministry. One camp sets up secret prayer partners for the counsellors each week. The junior and senior counsellors take this responsibility seriously not only taking time to pray but also the time to put little notes, chocolates, or bottled water in their camp mail slot.

**Public Recognition** This can begin with a church commissioning service even if the students are working with Youth for Christ, Young Life, or another ministry. If there is a regular Sunday to recognize leaders it is imperative that these student leaders are not left out. They may shun the recognition but over time these students recognize that their ministry is an officially sanctioned role within the body of Christ. It is a good idea to publicly thank youth leaders in a wider forum.

**Promotion** What is meant by promotion is not that students' faces are used to promote the youth ministry. Instead this means that when leaders have proven themselves "faithful in little" they are given the opportunity to become "faithful in much." It is a good management approach to keep challenging them up to higher levels of responsibility and privilege. Anyone who sees the position that they are in as a "dead end," is more likely to give minimal effort to the responsibility.

## Peer Leadership Issues

**Singed Saints** At the same time that youth leaders want their students to understand the vision and rise to the level of leadership in the group there are issues related to getting students "on fire." The dangers are that students may blow up, burn up, or burn out.

**Blow Up.** Some students who are given more responsibility than they can handle face the danger of blowing up. When students blow up it is normally related to anger. The fruit of the spirit still ripening in their life is not ready for the frustrations of leading peers. It is not uncommon that a student will take out their frustrations with a group by even yelling at them.

**Burn Up.** Burn up is a situation that has been identified among students who are dealing with sin but hide to it to maintain their leadership position. Rather than confess their weakness they conceal it and live with guilt and depression. They may work even harder during this time to compensate for the inconsistencies in their personal lives. Some youth workers have fallen into this same trap and gone up in flames. Rather than burn up with sin, students should be aware of a process of accountability and restoration.

**Burn Out.** Burn out is the one that most leaders are more familiar with. In their own life and in the lives of the students, this must be avoided as it is an occupational hazard that cripples the church. Much of the talk about being "driven" can add to this danger. There is a balanced drive to complete what we are called to do but there is a temptation to be driven headlong into destruction. Gordon MacDonald makes this distinction in his book "Ordering your Private World." Our study shows that students greatest pressure is to do well in school and the also feel that they do not have enough time. In this situation heaping responsibilities on youth can have a destructive effect.

## Addressing Failure

**Affirmation,** It is crucial that a relationship of trust is built with the leadership team. Students are aware that they are loved as a student in the ministry first before they are loved as a leader. The foundation of trust will prevent students from hiding when

they are suffering. It is essential that the youth leader reaffirm their unconditional love regularly. Sometime standards, expectations can overshadow love and this can not happen. Youth leaders need to let grace abound. When student see that both standards and grace are important they are more willing to confess when they are struggling.

**Confrontation** A leader who has built a foundation of unconditional positive regard and trust is able to address the issues when they arise. Youth workers should pay attention to the signs of lagging commitment, guilt induced service, avoidance or withdrawal. Intervention in the life of a student demands that a leader listens more than they speak. Giving students the opportunity to confess exhaustion, anger, frustration, or compromise in their commitment helps them to take ownership of their situation. Helping them is easier when they are asking for help instead of finding themselves facing disciplinary actions or restrictions.

**Restoration** Scripture makes it clear that none of us is sinless: 1 John says that those who claim to be without sin are liars in fact if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1Jn1:8,9 There are times when a leader should be removed from leadership for their sake and for the sake of the group. Yet even in the case of Peter's denial of Christ the Lord did not take back his call to leadership. Instead he restores him with love and understanding. In the same way wise youth workers will seek a solution that involves support and growth instead of punishment, censure, and disciplinary action.

## Conclusion

When Jesus began his ministry he chose twelve men who would be with him to observe his lifestyle, hear his teaching, and serve alongside of him. Eventually he sent these novices into ministry, even though one them would eventually betray him. These trainees were green, rough around the edges and seemed even at the end of their training to be swayed by envy, jealousy, and lack of vision. It is a wonder that Jesus was able to leave the fate of the church to these men who never really seemed to grasp the full extent of his vision, or operate with the same high level of integrity that he constantly displayed. Despite the weaknesses evident in his ministry team, Jesus must have also seen greatness. He believed in them and entrusted to them the task of reaching and discipling their generation.

The task of youth ministry is every bit as significant. God entrusts to leaders the responsibility to equip others to do what Jesus' original disciples were commissioned to do. Although so many centuries have passed since that last directive to disciple the nations, the orders have not changed.

As for the content of this book, it too is part of this directive. The point has been to train the student to be able to give leadership to church, campus, or community based ministries for the discipleship of this generation of youth. The Lord places his confidence in you the student to take what you have learned and apply it in the cause of reaching and discipling youth, who will in turn reach and disciple others.

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## Final Thoughts

At no point does Jesus instruct his disciples to just hang out and hope that something happens. Instead he sends them out in his authority to go make disciples. The task of making disciples is much more difficult than making converts.

As has been seen in this study the discipleship process requires moving youth from one level of commitment to increasingly higher levels. Eventually kids who have become part of the crowd will move into the congregation, become committed and some of them will be part of the core.

The method for moving kids to higher levels of commitment is relational ministry. This requires a team approach. We looked at a team made up of student and adult leaders who minister to the youth who are part of the group, or who show up at the meetings. Training them in relational ministry is crucial.

On my Bible College graduation day Robert Taitinger and missionary statesman told our class a story about a firefighter who was trained to fight fires and went on to teach about fighting fires. At the end of his life he had only one regret... he had never fought a single fire. As you have worked your way through this book you have looked at so many aspects of discipling teens. Unlike the fire fighter in the story, I hope you will have many opportunities to put what you have learned into practice and be actively engaged in Jesus command to “Go and make disciples.”

# THE YOUTH MINISTRY LAY INSTITUTE

Other Books in this Self Study Series by Ron Powell

Each of these books represents a core subject in most Bible College Youth Ministry programs in the USA and in Canada. Each book has been compiled from actual youth ministry lectures.

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## FOUNDATIONS OF YOUTH MINISTRY

This book begins by working through a very detailed Philosophy of Youth Ministry that involves the theological and philosophical basis for a specific strategy of youth ministry. One-to-one ministry, junior high ministry, parent ministry, and student leadership are just some of the topics addressed in the various chapters. The book also gets behind the scenes to discuss various aspects of managing a ministry while balancing your life, leading a team of volunteers, as well as establishing a vision, goals and programs for a ministry.

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## LEADING A DISCIPLE MAKING YOUTH MINISTRY

This book attempts to prepare the reader to nurture faith development in young people. Beginning from a biblical perspective on discipleship in general, the focus will move to the call and character of the youth worker. From here we will examine the challenge of ministering in a post modern pop dominated culture. From here we will examine discipleship as it relates to the church and the outworking of a philosophy of discipling youth ministry.

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## UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS IN YOUTH MINISTRY

This book attempts to introduce you to two very important interrelated subjects; the study of adolescent development and the application of that knowledge to relating to youth. Obviously, each of these subjects requires much more study. This information will whet your appetite for further study while preparing a foundation for effective interaction with youth today.

The latest research on youth has been investigated while preparing this book so that the material is current and reliable. At the same time, the study of adolescence is constantly changing as youth and youth culture continue to change. Note also that there is a purpose to studying the biological, cognitive, psycho-social, and spiritual development of contemporary youth. The intention is that by understanding how teens think and feel, that the Christian teacher, sponsor, or minister can more effectively connect with youth.

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## YOUTH MINISTRY ISSUES

This book is designed to prepare the lay and professional youth workers for the complexities of youth ministry today by analyzing approaches to dealing with key issues and solutions to typical problems faced by teens. The chapters presented in this book are a compilation of lectures and notes on a number of important youth issues. Some of the material has been researched by students and edited in my office. In general this book should be used as a starting place to further study or a quick reference for ideas when helping a teen.