



Keys to Effective Youth Ministry

Rob McFarlane

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Index

Introduction	Page 3
From Generation to Generation	Page 4
Leadership for Youth Ministry	Page 6
Preaching God's Word to Youth	Page 8
Activities for Youth	Page 9
Opportunities to Serve	Page 11
Balance in Youth Ministry	Page 13

Introduction

This book was originally published in 1998. I wrote it after serving as a youth pastor in Zimbabwe for 10 years. 2000 copies were sold and it is no longer available in print.

The purpose in writing this book was to share principles I learned in youth ministry. It is written with local church youth ministry in mind.

I have decided to update this book and make it available as a free e-book in 2011. I hope it will equip leaders in local churches to be effective in youth ministry.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book. Please pass it on to others who you think will find it helpful.

Thank you,

Rob McFarlane

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From Generation to Generation

“Where do you see youth ministry in the Bible?” I was asked this question by a pastor who did not see the need for a youth ministry in a local church and I was not sure how to answer him.

The best I could come up with at the time was Acts 5, where Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead for lying to the Holy Spirit and the young men took them outside and buried them. I am sure you will agree that this was not a strong Biblical basis for youth ministry.

The question got me thinking. I already knew that the Bible says in Ecclesiastes 12:1 we are to remember your creator in the days of your youth and in 1 Timothy 4:12 that young people need to be an example.

I was aware that over 50% of the world’s population is under 19 years old - making this the world’s largest unreached people's group.

But I needed a strong Bible basis for why we need youth ministry in the local church. So I started asking the Lord to give me a strong foundation to build a ministry to young people upon.

The Lord showed me something - I saw a relay race. A running race where one runner runs his section of the race and then hands the baton to another runner. I saw myself running with a spiritual baton and passing it to the next runner, so that they could begin to run their section of the race.

I saw that youth ministry is passing a spiritual baton from one generation to the next generation. As I looked the Bible I started to notice what it says about passing the spiritual baton on to the next generation.

Let us look Psalms say about reaching the next generation:

Walk about Zion, And go all around her. Count her towers; Mark well her bulwarks; Consider her palaces; That you may tell it to the generation following. (Psalm 48:12, 13 NKJV)

O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake

me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come. (Psalm 71:17, 18 NKJV)

We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, (Psalm 78:4, 6 NKJV)

This will be written for the generation to come, That a people yet to be created may praise the Lord. (Psalm 102:18 NKJV)

One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts. (Psalm 145:4 NKJV)

It is important that we pass the spiritual baton to the next generation.

Joshua's generation served God in their generation, but failed to prepare the next generation to serve God's purpose in their generation. The result was that the next generation did not serve the Lord and did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; (Judges 2:7, 8, 10, 11 NKJV)

We must think further than our generation. Let us serve God in our generation and prepare the next generation to serve God in their generation.

For this reason, I believe that youth ministry is one of the most important ministries in a local church.

Leadership for Youth Ministry

If we are going to reach the next generation we need leaders who are dedicated to youth ministry.

Many leaders do not make an impact on the next generation, because they have wrong thinking about youth ministry.

There are 3 things people think youth ministry is:

(1) Some see ministry to the next generation as just taking care of kids so that parents can receive ministry – like a baby sitting service.

(2) Others think it is just providing activities to keep them busy.

(3) For some it is just a place to develop your gifts and abilities before you can minister to adults.

These are all side benefits, but not the purpose of ministry to the next generation. The purpose of youth ministry is preparing the next generation to serve God's purpose in their generation.

Young people need leaders who are an example or positive role model. They need leaders they can follow.

So often I've heard Christians say this, "Don't follow me, only follow Jesus." But in the Bible do not we see the apostle Paul or any one else saying "Just follow Jesus." They say "Follow me as I follow Jesus."

If we are going to reach the next generation we need to be examples that they can follow. Let us see what the apostle Paul says to the believers who are following him.

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1 NKJV)

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. (Philippians 3:17 NKJV)

God wants Christian leaders to be an example to those following them. They need to see leaders who are living for Jesus every day.

I know you are probably thinking “But what if I make a mistake? I am afraid to say follow my example, because I might make a mistake.” Being an example does not mean you can’t make mistakes. It means, when you make a mistake, take responsibility for the mistake!

As a leader the eyes of a generation are on you. Their reference point of what Jesus would do, is what you do. Live the Christian life before them. We must not have the attitude of “Do as I say and not as I do.” They will always do what you do.

Teenagers will only follow you if they think that you are authentic. If they think you are a fake, they will not follow you. As a leader, God wants you to be an example. Be a good one!

Preaching God's Word to Youth

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:19, 20 NKJV)

As leaders we must teach God's Word to young people. There are four things that our teaching must be if it is going to be effective with young people - it needs to be enthusiastic, relevant, creative and credible.

(1) Enthusiastic. We need to be passionate about preaching the Word of God. The Gospel is the greatest message that the world has ever heard. We could have excellent content in our message but unless we are enthusiastic about our message the young people are not going to listen to us for long.

(2) Relevant. We need to share Jesus in a relevant way with this generation. Our message needs to have life application. We need to speak about things that effect their every day lives - relationships, temptation, peer pressure, etc.

(3) Creative. This generation are part of the information age. For us to get and keep their attention, we need to be creative in the way we communicate God's Word. Our message never changes, but the methods do. Do not try and use out dated methods, be creative. Use illustrations, interviews, discussions, drama and personal examples.

(4) Credible. As I said in the previous chapter, we need to be an example. The young people are watching to see if what you say is real. Often we have heard that we must "practice what we preach" but in fact we should "preach what we practice". This generation not only needs to hear God's Word preached they need to see it lived. Let us not just preach the Word of God, let us live it.

We have the most awesome message in the whole world. Let's preach the good news to the next generation!

Activities for Youth

A key to developing an effective youth ministry in a local church is to form a positive peer group. Peer pressure works both in the positive and the negative.

As youth leaders we must provide an atmosphere where youth can develop meaningful relationships with each other.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, (Hebrews 10:24 NKJV)

It is important that young people can build friendships with people their own age in the local church.

The company that we keep affects us in our day to day living. If negative company will affect us in a negative way, then positive company will affect us in a positive way.

Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." (1 Corinthians 15:33 NKJV)

The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray. (Proverbs 12:26 NKJV)

He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed. (Proverbs 13:20 NKJV)

The main reason teenagers stay in a youth group is because of the friendships that they have developed in the youth group.

I would like to give you 4 ways you can develop meaningful relationships and a positive peer group within your youth ministry.

(1) Have games and ice breakers in your youth meetings. We need to keep a balance between fun and spiritual input. Choose inter active games rather than individual games. Also make sure that what you do builds up the individuals value and worth with the group, rather than tear it down.

(2) Have interactive Bible study and application of your teachings. Have group discussions, a Bible quiz or interviews.

(3) Organise regular events. Give them something to look forward to. It's important that we develop momentum within the group. The best way to do this is to always have something that they can look forward to.

(4) Organise regular outings. If you can take the group for a couple of days on a camp or a retreat, it would be excellent for your youth ministry. Have events when they get away from their normal environment and spend time together.

It is important to get the youth involved themselves. They have got a lot of energy - let us use it for the kingdom of God.

A key to an effective youth group is to create an atmosphere where young people develop meaningful relationships, where they encourage one another and where peer pressure becomes positive.

Opportunities to Serve

It is important that our youth have opportunities to get involved. A good way to do this is give them responsibilities in the youth group.

If you do not provide them with opportunities for involvement, your young people will become apathetic and self centred.

It is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth. (Lamentations 3:27 NKJV)

To bear the yoke means to take responsibility. It is good for young people to start to take responsibility. If they do not take responsibility and get involved in giving, they will become like the Dead Sea. In Israel, the Dead Sea is very rich in minerals but has no life in it because it does not have an outlet.

The same principle works with people. We must not only receive, but we must also give - we need a spiritual outlet. We need to provide opportunities for the young people to have a spiritual outlet.

Any ministry is limited by the quality and quantity of its leadership. Many of us have grown up with the idea that the pastor must do everything and often that is because the leader is insecure.

But God wants leaders to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. Often people say, "they are too young, how can they get involved?" I'm amazed at how young people have grown and developed spiritually as we have given them responsibility.

There were times it would have been much easier for me to have just done it myself. I would have saved myself many problems but getting the young people involved is part of making disciples.

Your job as a leader, according to 2 Timothy 2:2, is to take what you have received and commit it to faithful men, who will be able to teach others.

The key to making disciples of young people is to get them involved in your youth ministry. If we are going to get them involved and give them responsibilities we must make sure that we do 3 things:

(1) Get them to see that the part that they play is important in the big picture.

(2) Provide training and coaching. Jesus trained His followers with four steps. (a) I tell, you listen, (b) I do, you watch, (c) you do, I watch, (d) you do and report back to me.

(3) Be encouraging. Try and catch them doing something right.

There are 4 areas you can get young people involved:

(1) Involvement in your regular meetings may include, ministry of helps, getting them involved in setting up, helping with the offering, shaking peoples hands at the door and serving refreshments.

(2) In service projects. Whenever you need to get something done try get the youth involved. It may be cleaning up the church building or putting up posters for an event.

(3) Evangelism. The most exciting thing that a Christian young person can be involved in is leading somebody else to Jesus.

(4) Missions trip or outreach experience. Their lives will change as they go out of their cultural experience and comfort zone to minister to others.

Get the young people involved and they will grow!

Balance in Youth Ministry

We have looked at preaching, activities, outreach and opportunities to serve.

We need to keep these in balance in our youth ministry. We can compare them to our body - we have two legs and two arms.

Preaching God's Word and spending time in prayer are like our legs. They provide strength and mobility. Opportunities to serve and activities are like our arms. We relate to people with our arms. We need all four to be effective.

If all you do is preach but do not have times of fellowship, your youth ministry will be out of balance. In the same way lots of activities but no preaching your youth ministry will be out of balance.

In conclusion, I hope you have found this book helpful and will take what you have learnt in this book and put it into practice in your youth ministry. God wants to use you to reach the next generation for Jesus.

You are welcome to visit my blog at www.robmcfarlane.co.uk. The best is yet to come!