



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 20

Youth Ministry  
Craft - The Legacy of  
Long-Term Ministry

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## Lesson Twenty: Youth Ministry Craft—The Legacy of Long-Term Ministry

### Introduction

#### Session Overview

- Entering Ministry
- Evaluating Long Term Ministry
- Personal Considerations
- Professional Factors
- The Spiritual Life

#### Learner Objectives

At the end of this session you should:

- Determine the key issues of youth ministry to facilitate a long-term legacy in students, families and church communities.
- Assess your personal and spiritual bases for youth leadership.
- Assess the implications of professional ministry.

#### Introduction

It takes more than enthusiasm to work with youth. In fact, there are many facets to a well-balanced youth ministry. In this lesson, we will explore how to work with youth over the “long haul” to create effective change in youth, their families and the church.

### Lesson Body

#### Entering Ministry

*Just Point and Go:* My first ski trip was in college. It was listed as Physical Education. My thought? It looked like a lot of fun for academic credit. My first time on the slopes I stood on top of the hill and looked at the sign in front of me: “easy black diamond.” Now that’s an interesting oxymoron. Black diamonds are the most difficult level of ski slope on a mountain. Everyone takes off, I’m sort of lost. Waiting for help, one friend pushes off, looks back and says, “Just point your skis and go.” I have to tell you, it wasn’t that great of a ski run.

That experience sort of describes us in youth ministry—right? Chances are many of us looked at the need, heard God’s call and just “pointed and went.” For good or bad we lasted in ministry. A lot of us have probably woken up in the middle of the night and thought,

“What in the world am I doing?”

“Am I too old for this?”

“Will I ever NOT feel tired?”

“What am I going to do with the rest of my life?”

Should I stay in youth ministry for the long haul or hang it up? Within the broader scheme of things: wars and rumors of wars, the AIDS pandemic, spoiled sports stars, ruined sports stars? Does God really have time to worry about me and youth work? Maybe the big question is this: Is it worth staying in youth ministry for the long term?

An unqualified “YES!” So how do we best position ourselves to last in youth ministry?

### **Evaluating Long-Term Ministry**

It is critical to ask yourself the hard questions in life and ministry. Often youth workers do not prioritize this type of honest self-evaluation. Some questions we must ask ourselves are:

- Why do you do what you do?
- Were you called by God to your tasks or by someone else? Yourself?
- Do you take good care of yourself?
- Are you too busy? Tired? Worn out?
- Approaching Burnout? First sign of burnout is finding yourself scanning the employment ads in the newspaper and thinking when you see the many help wanted ads, “You know that wouldn’t be so bad.”
- Are you at a point where you don’t know if you could or should go further than you’ve gone right now?

C.S. Lewis once stated: “The most progressive person is the one that turns back soonest when they are lost.” Too often, self-evaluation gets elbowed aside in the crunch of a frenetic schedule, yet it’s in busy lives that self-evaluation is most important.

### **Personal Considerations**

Preparing for long-term ministry includes a serious look at our personal lives and close relationships. A personal awareness, of our own self-awareness, church relationships, and family relationships help determine the quality of our ministry. There are a number of areas to consider:

*Taking Care of Yourself*— Often, long-term ministry begins with self-care. Success doesn’t necessarily mean charging ahead, it may mean down-shifting to find a place where our gifts are being used and to recover our passion. For instance: A great youth worker is flexible and adaptable in many areas of their life while remaining fixed to the Cornerstone of their salvation.

*Understanding Youth Culture*— One really has to work at it. Why? Because as you age, you move further beyond adolescence. Then it’s easy to lose touch with the culture. How do you stay in touch with adolescent culture? Primarily through incarnational, relationally oriented ministry that keeps you in touch with youth and their social context.

*Establishing Relationships within the Church*—It is an easy thing to sense isolation from your peers. After all, are many of your friends playing crazy games or trying to keep up with teenagers on a weekly basis? Often, we need people who identify with our purpose and ministry to support us and to serve as close friends during difficult times. In addition, managing conflict

remains the key to long-term youth ministry. Face conflict and do not ignore it. Conflict is teaching you about a potential “blind-spot” you may have or teaching you to be empathetic to others point of view. Open yourself to others’ input and point of view.

*Possessing a Correct Focus*— Often your personal attitude determines how circumstances influence your life. Maybe you don’t do everything in youth ministry anymore. In fact, the more you do, the less other people tend to do. The problem stems from the law of diminishing returns, working harder and harder and accomplishing less and less. Be flexible enough to change your focus on what is important to the ministry. Will you be able to stay with your commitment, or will it stress you out? Will other commitments grow and consume your free time? Can you be objective and maintain focus, or do you keep tacking things on or succumb to the tyranny of the urgent? Can you stay student focused? Too many times youth ministry becomes more about the adults than the students. Resist that temptation.

*Maintaining Energy and Freshness*— How well are you taking care of yourself? Are you exercising? Eating well? Sleeping too little or too much? Get away from your ministry to gain insight, to gain “room to breathe.” Step outside your denominational fences. Your friends in other denominations or para-church ministries will do things differently than you do. Find out why and adapt, if needed. Enrich yourself through varied experiences. When your entire life is the church and a certain group of people, you lose depth and dimension in your life. Keep yourself balanced.

*Continuing your Education and Career Goals in Ministry*— We remain life-long learners and need ongoing development. Consider seminars outside of youth ministry, child development classes, taking ordination classes, signing up for theology classes at a Nazarene seminary. Talk to a counselor or educator who specializes in adolescence and explore youth through their eyes. It can be amazing to hear what a high school teacher or counselor hears every day.

*Establishing an Inner rather than an External Source of Direction*— When you are driven by those around you (expectations, criticism, dominant opinions, etc.) and not what you know to be Christian, Spirit-filled, Bible-centered and kingdom-motivated, you will lose your focus and your way in ministry.

*Taking Care of Your Family*— Whether you’re married or single maintaining connections with family will require an intentional effort. If you are single, continue to reach out to parents or siblings. If you are married, work on becoming a better spouse. If you have children find ways to invest in them consistently. The family unit is God’s representation of wholeness to the world. Treat it as such. You need to decide to give more time to your family rather than ministry.

When a life is out of balance, a ministry is out of balance. How can we say we love others when we ignore or marginalize those closest to us—our family? How do we youth pastor our own children? Carefully. We must lose our “parent eye” and treat our children the same as others. Too often youth workers put the church and youth group ahead of their spouse, children and extended family. The wounds that occur when this happens can be irreparable. Don’t let it happen in your family and ministry.

## **Professional Factors**

While personal factors influence our long-term ministry, professional factors prove equally important. You may not be a professional youth pastor, or even aspire to be one. Nevertheless, these guidelines may help you regardless of your leadership role and will definitely assist you if you enter professional youth ministry where you deal with church and staff relationships.

*Respect the Senior Pastor*— Show humility and seek the Pastor’s counsel. Work on communication with pastor and staff. What if you are older or have been at your church longer than your senior pastor? He or she could be intimidated. In fact, members of the church might relate to you more than the Senior Pastor. Seek to help the church recognize pastoral authority. Remember, the Senior Pastor must be understood as a real congregational leader, while you must find alternative ways to express leadership where appropriate.

This could cause problems when the Pastor sees himself or herself as leading the youth ministry in spite of you being the designated youth worker. However, give the position the honor due the position. Be humble in the relationship; don’t surrender to pettiness, disillusion and back-biting. Prove your integrity and credibility by your actions and reactions to those around you. Learn to discipline your responses and reactions to youth, their parents, church members and the Pastor. Let people know how you want to work and what you value, as well as, what you want to accomplish. And get that information from them as well. In any relationship, take the high road, be a Kingdom builder.

*Be a team player with other staff people*— Lend support to the entire church team. A youth ministry that exists only for its own benefit is a shallow and unproductive ministry. Act professionally, think of how you’re perceived in the congregation:

- Are you always goofy, funny?
- Are you often dressed inappropriately?
- Are you always late or leaving early?
- Do you appear distracted during staff meetings?

The more you perform in a professional manner, the more credibility you’ll bring to your ministry throughout the church and community.

*Organization*— Being organized remains a critical component of effective ministry. Keep on top of your schedule. It’s difficult to be organized in ministry and private life, but it’s crucial. Take a moment and write down the condition of the following areas: Computer, files, library, desk. Would you be embarrassed if someone you respected walked into your office right now? Learn to manage clutter and interruptions professionally.

Learn to prioritize your schedule and not have your schedule prioritize your life. A chronically disorganized person is less able to perceive a downward trend. The mark of a good ministry strategy is that it specifically defines what we’re not going to do as well as what we’re going to do. Matthew 6:33, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Learn how to say “no” with respect and conviction. Simply adding more to your schedule doesn’t make you a better youth worker. In fact, saying “no” to things will probably make you a better youth worker.

*Do the “right thing” by people*— Be attentive and caring to those around you. You need to remember and respond appropriately to key events:

- Birthdays, anniversaries, key dates
- Appointments
- Special events
- Are you up-to-date on thank you notes, correspondence?

*Form a Leadership Team*— This is the surest hedge against developing the “Messiah complex,” where you feel like you are responsible for doing everything and in turn saving everyone. The more valuable ministry is, the more it has to be a shared ministry. Simply stop doing ministry by yourself. That is a recipe for disaster in so many ways.

*Stewardship*— We need to learn to take care of personal and ministry finances as well as caring for people in our ministry. This task remains an essential aspect in the life of a youth worker. Someone who lacks integrity in finances and structure will not be respected enough to be listened to about God’s plan for a young person’s life.

Keep personal and ministry finances separate. You need to model good personal stewardship while avoiding any appearance of misusing funds directed for youth ministry. Often temptation surfaces when money becomes accessible. Take care to maintain good records and have other church members available to hold you accountable.

Develop your yearly budget carefully. Ask a business person in your congregation to look it over. Even if you don’t have much money to work with, when you show wisdom and integrity you’ll probably be trusted with more. Never handle cash. Ask parents in the youth ministry to collect, count, and submit any cash given to the ministry. Appoint a treasurer if you don’t have one on the youth council, to handle the financial transactions. In addition, be wise about spending your own money on ministry.

*Do Ministry Carefully*— Don’t take unnecessary risks just to be the “fun” person in the group. Jack Crabtree notes the real problem of giving into bad choices and foolish actions. We often come close to real disaster and yet live to tell about it by God’s grace. Nevertheless, we risk the welfare of youth who might mimic our actions with deadly consequences. Youth workers need to be the adult in all situations and not succumb to being liked for the sake of temporary thrills that could cost someone his or her life. Think safety and make appropriate plans at all times.

## **Spiritual Life**

Ultimately your inner spiritual life is the strength of your life and ministry. As previous lessons have noted, you need to maintain a close relationship with God.

*Stay in God’s Word*— The Bible remains a crucial resource for ongoing growth. Even John Wesley, the spiritual “grandfather” of our tradition, considered himself “A man of one book.” We would do well to heed God’s direction through scripture.

*Transparency*— We also need to remain transparent and accountable with youth, parents, youth sponsors, and pastoral staff. The greatest defense against burnout is a group of people that you can be honest with, share, confide, celebrate and cry with. Become accountable for successes and failures, professionally and personally. Give people permission to be honest, to point out blind spots in your life and attitudes. Burnout is most easily seen by others, so be open to what counsel they offer—it could save your ministry. In all, we must remain honest before God and others about our spiritual state.

*Rule of Devotional Life*— Remember to establish a personal plan, a rule of devotional life that guides your spiritual walk:

- Develop a plan to read and study the Bible. Prioritize a time alone with God every day.
- Consider taking personal retreats that could be one or several days. We hear God speak more clearly when the noise around us diminishes. So, plan at least one time a year to retreat in silence, solitude, meditation and scripture.
- Evaluate your life and ministry by spirituality and not by a secular, consumerist basis (success/growth). “More, bigger, best” is not the standard of success in the church. True success in ministry is faithfulness to God and scripture.

Take a minute and write down one very specific thing that you will begin tomorrow in your spiritual relationship with God. Make this a covenant between you and God. How did we do with our list? Is there something else that we need to help each other learn?

*Calling*— The call of God is difficult to explain but impossible to ignore. We find ourselves facing a consistent awareness inviting us into make a difference. Our experience of the call often comes without words but rests deep within us where a voice surfaces through our passion for youth, a sense of fulfillment working with them, a yearning to do more. Saying “yes” to this call makes us feel a new sense of belonging, of being “at home” in our ministry. Whether in professional ministry or serving as a dedicated worker in a local church, our calling gives us a sense of direction, a means for personal evaluation, professional development, spiritual growth toward a central purpose of serving God. The calling may begin with youth and lead to other areas of ministry in the future... or it may continue with young people for a lifetime. Regardless, God serves both as source and guide as we engage youth for the sake of the Kingdom of God, welcome to the journey.

## Application

Complete the following Self Evaluation:

- Why do you do what you do?
- Were you called by God to your tasks or by someone else? Or yourself?
- Do you take good care of yourself?
- Are you too busy? Tired? Worn out?
- Approaching Burnout? First sign of burnout is finding yourself scanning the employment ads in the newspaper and thinking when you see the many help wanted ads, “You know, that wouldn’t be so bad.”
- Are you at a point where you don’t know if you could or should go further than you’ve gone right now?

Develop a Rule of Devotional Life for the next two years.

- Develop a plan to read and study the Bible. Prioritize a time alone with God every day.
- Consider taking personal retreats that could be one or several days. We hear God speak more clearly when the noise around us diminishes. So, plan at least one time a year to retreat in silence, solitude, meditation and scripture.
- Evaluate your life and ministry by spirituality and not by a secular, consumerist basis (success/growth). “More, bigger, best” is not the standard of success in the church. True success in ministry is faithfulness to God and scripture.

## Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

*List the reasons many people would give for wanting to be in youth ministry. Based on the list you have developed, which one is the most compelling to you? Which reason seems most ridiculous to you?*

*What are the reasons people don’t last in youth ministry for the long term?*

*What are some obstacles that keep us from consistent self-evaluation of our ministry?*

*What are some issues or categories that require regular evaluation? Why does it help to know in advance, areas that we should be evaluating on a regular basis?*

*How can you begin to accomplish a Rule of Devotional Life? What have you tried that has worked for you? Are you still doing it? Why? What hasn’t worked? Can you identify why not? Is there someone who you can partner with who will hold you accountable?*

*How do you see your call lived out each day when working with youth?*



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