

ZONDERVAN

Purpose Driven™ Youth Ministry
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Introduction

Imagine a sports dynasty for a minute—pick your favorite. Its success can't be attributed to one component; several factors combine to produce success. A true dynasty is stronger than its one great player. It must also have supportive key players, a motivating head coach, experienced assistant coaches, a position in the free agency market, a risk-taking owner, a productive front office, and a strong farm system (or luck with the draft). Average sports fans don't consider all of these factors when they watch their favorite team play. Instead, they focus on the team's best player and falsely assume that the team's success is due to that great player.

Unfortunately, many in the church view youth ministry with that same mentality. They look for the one great player (youth worker) who can save the franchise (the youth ministry) and develop a winning team (volunteers) that will attract the fans (students). Once a great player is identified (either hired clergy or volunteer layperson), the owners (church board, selection committee, senior pastor) settle into other pressing affairs within the organization (church). This type of scenario usually results in a suicide mission for the “star” player. He or she charges in with enthusiasm and practices (works) endless hours trying to achieve success (lots of students and programs) to please the owners. But to please everyone the player has to run (often knowing not where) so hard and so fast for so long that he or she eventually tires and becomes injured (burns out) and has to be replaced (quits or is fired). At this point the owners get involved and look for another great player to bring the team out of the dumps. The cycle starts all over with no foundation to build on because the last great player felt the burden to win by her- or himself.

The Nine Components of a Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry

Perseverance	9
Knowing how to stay focused, remain fresh—and stay alive!	
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Knowing how to bring others on board to help fulfill the purposes	
Parents	7
Teaming up with the family for a stronger youth ministry	
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Identifying the beliefs and styles that will help support the purposes	
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Programs	4
Creating programs to fulfill the purposes and reach the potential audiences	
Potential Audience	3
Identifying your students and their receptivity to your purposes	
Purpose	2
Knowing why your ministry exists, writing it out, and putting leadership behind it	
Power of God	1
Helping passionate leaders with pure hearts to rely on God	

My goal for this book is to coach you through a plan to build a healthy youth ministry that isn't dependent on one great youth worker and won't be destroyed when that person leaves the church. I hope that you will use my experiences and observations and my conversations with hundreds of youth workers to infuse your youth ministry with knowledge that will help to make it healthy. Where there is health, there is eventual growth.

A healthy youth ministry is a purpose-driven youth ministry (PDYM). But having a purpose-driven youth ministry does not simply mean that you have a purpose behind everything you do. It means that you pursue and reflect the purposes that were commanded by Jesus and manifested in the early church: the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. You'll recognize the five purposes as

1. evangelism
2. worship
3. fellowship
4. discipleship
5. ministry

A purpose-driven youth ministry will have programs and structures that reflect these purposes. In the chapters that follow, nine essential components are used to develop a blueprint for building a healthy youth ministry. The five eternal purposes form the central component around which the others are constructed. These nine components, which all start with *p* for easy retention, are

1. power of God
2. purpose
3. potential audience
4. programs
5. process
6. planned values
7. parents
8. participating leaders
9. perseverance

If you follow the blueprint, you will discover a holistic strategy that works. PDYM is not a cookie-cutter approach that promotes “do it my way because it’s the only way.” The PDYM model is *a* model; it is not *the* model. There are many ways to do youth ministry, and good youth workers look at other effective models to stimulate their thinking and learn from them how to be more competent ministers. If you are embarrassed to learn from another person or ministry, you have a pride problem (Prov. 13:10). God honors the motives of the humble and teachable but is pained by the hearts of the proud.

Purpose-driven youth ministry is not derived from a way youth ministry *was* done or *should be* done, but from how it *is being* done. I’m in the trenches every day as a youth worker, trying to strengthen these nine components in my church. For almost twenty years I’ve been living with the weighty responsibility of developing a youth ministry that equips students rather than a youth ministry that coordinates events. I don’t want to direct programs; I want to disciple students. Throughout these years I have experienced a wide array of successes and failures in my attempts to build a healthy youth ministry. This book is part of an ongoing journey to honor God through my commitment to both church and students.

This book is for leaders of youth ministries with only a few students as well as those with hundreds. And it is geared for volunteers just starting out as well as for seminary-trained veterans with twenty years of youth ministry experience. How can this be possible? It is possible because the nine components rely on your ability to take the transferable principles and apply them to your youth ministry context. Your leadership style, education, and practical experience will become important as you interpret the principles and determine how to use them to strengthen your ministry. Don’t try to do this alone! Read this book with a team who is committed to pursuing a spiritually healthy ministry. Then use the questions, “Making It Personal”, at the end of each chapter to spur each other on to new levels of personal and group growth.

Here is a brief overview of the nine components.

Component 1

THE POWER OF GOD

working through passionate leaders with pure hearts

Healthy youth ministry begins when we take seriously the power of God for our own spiritual lives. A direct connection exists between a leader's spiritual vitality and a healthy youth ministry. Today's youth ministry training often overemphasizes *how to do the work of God* and neglects *how to be a person of God*.

Component 2

PURPOSE

**discovering why your ministry exists and following it up
with communication and leadership**

Too often youth ministry consists of the get-in-there-and-get-some-programs-going mentality. This section stresses the importance of designing a blueprint for your youth ministry based on the five New Testament purposes that a healthy church maintains.

Discovery of the purposes is just the beginning. Real health begins with your ability to communicate the purposes, and it continues as you learn how to put leadership behind them so that people will have an exciting direction and an image of growth.

Component 3

POTENTIAL AUDIENCE

identifying which students are the target for the purposes

It is not uncommon for a youth ministry to establish programs for students who don't exist or to create programs without regard for students who are at all different commitment levels. This section will explain how to identify the differences in your students' spiritual commitments so that your programs will be more effective in fulfilling the five New Testament purposes.

Component 4
PROGRAMS
deciding what programs will reach your potential audience
and help fulfill God's purposes

Programs are a means of reaching students at different levels and fulfilling the five purposes of the church. The equation for putting a program together should be as follows:

$$\text{Purpose} + \text{Potential Audience} = \text{Program}$$

This detailed section will help you focus on building healthy order or purposes, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and worship into your youth ministry and into students' lives.

Component 5
PROCESS
displaying your programs so you can help students
move toward spiritual maturity

Process enables students to see where they are in your ministry's spiritual growth plan. A process may be diagrammed as a funnel, a baseball diamond, a pyramid, or anything else that acts as a framework for the purposes and programs.

Component 6
PLANNED VALUES
defining what values will strengthen your ministry
and enhance your purposes

All people have values, attitudes, styles, and beliefs that influence their lives. A healthy youth ministry identifies its key values and uses them to strengthen its ministry. By the time you finish reading about this component, you will be aware that

- purposes reveal *why* your ministry exists;
- potential audience defines *who* you plan to target;

- programs outline *how* you attempt to reach your target and fulfill a purpose;
- process communicates *where* you want students to go for spiritual growth;
- planned values show *what* is important to your ministry; and,
- the power of God determines *when* growth is going to happen.

At this point the book shifts emphasis from programming to people. The next three components focus on parents, volunteers, and you.

Component 7
PARENTS
teaming up with the family
for a stronger youth ministry and church

Youth ministry cannot be healthy if it is isolated from the family. Careful attention to strategy is needed to maximize the valuable role parents play as partners in helping their kids reach their spiritual potential. While neither students nor parents inherently want total integration, there are some deliberate ways to build a family-friendly youth ministry.

Component 8
PARTICIPATING LEADERS
finding volunteers and developing them
into ministers who fulfill the purposes

Healthy youth ministry is built on the strong leadership of adult volunteers who express their passion by caring and taking time from their busy lives to build relationships with students and help them grow in their faith. Health begins to emerge when adult leaders move from chaperoning events to becoming leaders.

Component 9

PERSEVERANCE

**learning how to survive the overwhelming responsibilities,
discipline problems, and the adventure of change**

Youth ministry is tough, as evidenced by the high degree of youth worker turnover. This section focuses on managing time, dealing with problem students, contending with church politics, and making wise changes before these issues lead to burnout. These survival chapters have grown out of years of experience and are rich in passion to help you *run to win* the race of youth ministry.

Warning: While reading this book, you may at times feel overwhelmed by the extensive amount of material to be absorbed and applied. Following the tips listed here will alleviate your anxiety:

1. Look for the transferable principle behind every idea. You may read a specific idea and say, “I can’t do that!” You can, however, transfer the general principle into your youth ministry setting.

2. Recognize that your time, help, and resources will be different than mine. Your ability to transfer principles will vary depending on your available *time*, your ability to get *help*, and the strength of your *resources*.

3. PDYM is a team approach. I minister with a team of people, and we share our joys and frustrations. The principles and the leadership may originate with me as the point person, but the application is a team process.

4. Don’t compare your youth ministry to ours or anyone else’s. Comparing isn’t productive—you’ll either feel bad (“We’re worse”) or arrogant (“We’re better”). You will always lose when you compare what you know about yourself with what you don’t know about me. You can’t see all of the mistakes I’ve made that helped me to discover what I know today. Take note: Other ministries always look better from a distance.

5. Don’t feel guilty about the things you’re not doing. You will see many ideas and principles in this book that I wasn’t act-

ing on twenty years ago or even five years ago. As you process this material, take what will work and adapt it to your setting.

6. A healthy youth ministry will take time to build. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither will be your youth ministry. Be patient, realistic, and strategic about which principles are assigned top priority. It may take two years to begin seeing the health you desire. Take your time, build wisely, rely on God's wisdom, and don't be afraid to get help from others.

7. Developing a purpose-driven youth ministry will challenge you. The principles in this book may not be easy for you to immediately grasp and implement. You may need to mark certain sections and discuss them with other youth leaders. The more you revisit a chapter and think through the principles, the better you will understand and apply them.

Although there are several youth ministry books available, I am not aware of any that are as comprehensive and as practical as this one. Many of the outstanding youth ministry books I've read are rich in theory but fall short in practice; many provide a few pieces of the puzzle but leave the rest for readers to figure out on their own. You will find this book both philosophical and practical. It is intended to leave you with transferable principles that can be applied to any youth group regardless of size, denomination, facilities, resources, or existing leadership.

Blessings,
Doug Fields

COMPONENT ONE

**THE POWER
OF GOD**

ONE

Healthy Youth Ministries Have Spiritually Healthy Leaders

My friend Ted read this first chapter and said, “Doug, you can’t start your book this way; there aren’t enough program ideas.” My friend Lissa, on the other hand, read the same chapter and said, “Powerful beginning! Every youth worker should be required to read this material before ever starting youth ministry.” Why the difference in responses?

Ted is twenty-two years old and just starting out in youth ministry. He believes a hyped-up, flashy youth ministry with slick logos, fancy calendars, big programs, and creative ideas paves the route to a healthy youth ministry.

Lissa is a forty-two-year-old, experienced youth worker who once walked in Ted’s shoes. She understands the seduction of an enticing youth ministry idea. For several years she placed hype above health in her leadership. Youth ministry ideas were more important than intimacy with God. Programs out-prioritized prayer. She allowed her heart to become hard and later described herself as a spiritual liar rather than a spiritual leader.

Lissa is not alone. I also walked down that path. I, too, was always looking for creative ideas and fancy programs to make my

youth ministry flashy. I've since learned, as has Lissa, that a healthy youth ministry doesn't begin with ideas, but with spiritual leaders.

When a church (or youth ministry point person) primarily values hype, there is little need for spiritual leadership. A non-Christian could become a "successful" youth worker at that kind of church by increasing activities, launching new ideas, and boosting attendance. With a little investigation, you probably wouldn't find any measurable difference between this type of youth ministry and a local non-Christian service club. Both use hype to attract.

This first chapter challenges you (and your church and youth ministry team) to develop a youth ministry in which the leaders rely on God's power. This is the essential and foundational ingredient for building a spiritual legacy of long-term health. In the long run, health is more attractive than hype.

My Journey from Hype to Health

I started youth ministry in 1979 as a volunteer for the junior high ministry at my home church. I loved it! Although I had no idea what I was doing, I knew God was using me and my energy to connect with students and care for them. Within my first year the junior high director left our church and I became the point person by default. (I was the only other volunteer!) One year later I still didn't know what I was doing, but I was sure busy doing it. I had our junior high group participating in everything I could find. If a flyer came to our church promoting an activity for junior high students, we went. I'd get a sample curriculum from a conference I attended and use it for Sunday school as soon as I returned. I was too busy and having too much fun to recognize or admit that I really had no idea how to build a healthy youth ministry or even that I was supposed to build anything. The ministry was nothing more than adolescent baby-sitting with some occasional Bible study. But since the students were entertained and attendance was up, everyone seemed to think we were a healthy youth ministry.

After being a volunteer for two years, I was offered a paid youth ministry position in 1981 as an intern with an established

youth ministry professional. I was thrilled to get paid to do what I loved. I jumped at the opportunity and continued to do more youth ministry while I finished college and seminary. My life never slowed down. In addition to heavy school loads, I coached school teams for better access to the local campus. I planned camps, spoke to any group that would listen, and went to every youth ministry training available. My life was youth ministry, and I had become an expert at going, doing, and achieving.

In 1985 my youth ministry mentor handed me the leadership of what was considered to be a successful youth ministry. While I was thrilled, I was also driven by the need to prove I could “be the man.” This pushed me to do more and to look for the bigger and better in everything I did (hype). I was out of the house almost every night of the week. While all of the activities and excitement assured that no one questioned my work ethic, I questioned everything. In the midst of all that was happening, I couldn’t shake the emptiness of all I was doing. I was distant from the Lord and my heart was slowly hardening. No one knew of my weakening disciplines because everything looked good on the outside. I could “talk the game” as it related to my spirituality. I had become the poster child for Proverbs 26:23: “Smooth words may hide a wicked heart, just as a pretty glaze covers a common clay pot” (NLT).

As my inner life was hardening, my outer world of youth ministry was beginning to show cracks. Three main problems haunted me and left me continually frustrated: I couldn’t create attractive programs like those of other churches, I wasn’t sure that I was the right person for youth ministry, and I could never do enough to please everyone.

I was too arrogant to think these problems would get the best of me and too insecure to ask for help. But within a year of my new pastoral reign, God used these looming problems to soften my heart and teach me what I desperately needed to know if I was going to continue in the ministry. I wish I could have learned these lessons from a book, but to be honest, I don’t think I would have slowed down long enough to learn from others even if they had written about it.

Instead, I was driven to an authentic dependence on the power of God to change my life and impact my youth ministry.

Problem 1: I Couldn't Create Attractive Programs Like Those of Other Churches

In my continual search for new ideas, the ultimate catch became the program that would please parents, bring students out in droves, and help students grow spiritually. I needed a powerhouse program that would move us from the minors to the majors. Not knowing any better, I studied the big league youth ministries and hoped that what they were doing would provide my answer. I tried to implement their programs into my youth ministry setting, but I didn't understand that there were too many variables to be copied and taken into my youth ministry context.

I was too immature to look for transferable principles that might help. Instead, I wanted an instant program to bring quick success. What I learned was that copying someone else's program always led to failure. Some program ideas worked for a while, but they didn't have the same strength in my setting that they had in the other churches.

**Copying someone else's program
always led to failure.**

I thought that if youth ministry was about designing programs and I couldn't get programs to work, then maybe I shouldn't do youth ministry. I was depending on other ministries to provide my answers instead of depending on God to show me his plan for a healthy ministry. I was always comparing myself to other youth workers who made incredible programming appear so simple. My inability to create superb programs was fueled by my comparisons, and my self-doubt skyrocketed. I became convinced that I didn't have the knowledge and skills to do youth ministry well.

Problem 2: Perhaps I Wasn't the Right Person for Youth Ministry

During my first years in youth ministry, I remember standing in front of junior high students and basking in their looks of anticipation. I was young, fun, energetic, and well-liked. Their faces said, "This is going to be good." But only a few years later, when things weren't going as well, I saw a different look—one that said, "This better be good." Because I lacked knowledge and skills, I thought the students didn't like me anymore. Their enthusiasm waned, attendance dropped, volunteers found other church ministries to which they could devote their time, and our programs changed every time I spied on another youth ministry. Parents as well as church elders questioned what was happening, and I accepted all the problems as my fault. I constantly looked over my shoulder to see if other people were thinking what I was thinking—that maybe I wasn't the right person for youth ministry despite my having the necessary goods.

Even though I worked exhausting hours, the job wasn't getting done the way everyone seemed to want. Previously unspoken expectations surfaced, and they fueled my workaholic personality to fix everything, even though I couldn't specifically identify the problems. My desire for doing ministry had long moved from pleasing God to appeasing people. I wanted to be liked by everyone, and that desire moved me to my third major problem.

Problem 3: I Could Never Do Enough to Please Everyone

The critical breaking moment came in the wake of an attempt to boost sagging attendance numbers. I organized an evangelistic camp with the requirement that the only way students could attend was if they brought an unchurched friend. To my amazement, our students responded to the challenge. The power of God moved that weekend, and the majority of the unchurched students returned from camp with a new and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. It was the greatest camp I had ever experienced.

On the Monday following camp, I went into the church office eager to share the news with the church staff and hear the praise reports that I anticipated had been coming in all morning. As I approached the church office, my insecurity and pride mixed to create a fantasy in which I envisioned the staff awaiting my arrival and lining the entrance for congratulations and a chorus of “How Great Thou Art.”

My fantasy bubble popped when the church administrator immediately asked, “Did you know our megaphone was busted this weekend and the church vans weren’t returned to their proper parking spots?” I didn’t know how to respond. I was speechless (which was a small miracle). This wasn’t the greeting I had expected. In my state of shock, I stuttered something about reparking the vans and buying a new megaphone. Then I hung my head and walked to my office. As I sat at my desk, I thought, “Does resignation have one *s* or two?” Just then I received a phone call from a student’s mother. I assumed that she was calling to thank me for her son’s life-changing weekend. Instead, she said, “Doug, I have some problems with your leadership at camp this weekend.” She went on to explain that the only story she had heard from her son was how the boys were lying around in their underwear one night passing gas on lit matches and laughing at the appearance of flames. She continued to chastise me for how irresponsible and dangerous that was—saying the boys could actually explode. (All I could think of was what a great video that would make!) I guess she thought it was one of our planned events as opposed to a random act of teenage silliness. Either way, I became the object of her anger.

I had been in the office for ten minutes, and already I had had two negative conversations regarding one of my best weekends of ministry. I left the office immediately. As I drove home, I couldn’t contain my emotions and began to weep (not the watery-eye cry, but the body-convulsing cry). I thought about all of the time, energy, and emotion that had gone into the weekend. I mentally replayed the intense conversations, the numerous tough leadership decisions, and the faces of the many students who had become

excited about Christ. In tears, I arrogantly concluded that after all of the work I had done this treatment was undeserved.

It was at this point, sitting in my car on the side of the road, that I felt the supernatural presence of God. I wish I could say there was an audible instruction; there wasn't. But I felt God impress on my heart as I had never experienced before. I sensed God saying, "Doug, you'll never be able to do enough to please everyone. Focus on me. Rest in me. Abide in me. When your heart is turned toward me, we can work together and do some good things." That was it. That was the moment that revolutionized my ministry! My three youth ministry problems were solved by this one soul-shaking experience. The answer was not in programs or in feeling liked or in pleasing everyone. The answer was in becoming the right person for youth ministry. I had left God out of the equation and had been doing youth ministry, using my own power. My heart had become hard, and I was spending all my time *doing* the work of God without *being* a man of God.

I was spending all my time doing the work
of God without being a person of God.

Not only did God work in the lives of students through that camp, but he also used it to do his work in me. My focus and dependence had been foolishly centered on my own ability to perform (*to do*). Now I understood that if I stayed dependent and focused on God, he would empower me *to be* his servant and thus accomplish his purposes in my ministry.

How Does One Become a Youth Worker Who Depends on God?

Many youth workers I talk to can relate to feeling inadequate about their gifts, their call into youth ministry, and their performance as leaders. Hope for these struggles can be found by

focusing on God and his Word. The solution to my three problems changed my life and ministry, and drives me to increase my dependence on God's power and to develop my abilities as a spiritual leader.

Answer 1: Recognize God's Power Through Personal Humility

When my pride pushed me to create extravagant programs, God taught me humility. Through my broken-heart experience, I realized that, ultimately, programs don't work—God works. God doesn't need a program in order to work. He doesn't even need me. This realization brought humility when I finally admitted my very small part in God's work. When good things happen I need to recognize that they happen because of God's power and not my own.

God doesn't need a program in order to work. He doesn't even need me.

If you are someone who soaks up credit for success, humility may be a foreign quality. When you take credit for success, it is easy to lose sight of God's power. I never plan to take credit for God's work, but I have often found myself making a subtle shift in thought from the youth ministry being God's work to it being a result of my skills and efforts. I hate to admit it, but there have been many times when I've patted myself on the back when God deserved the credit. Sadly, I haven't taken the blame when things were going bad. Almost without exception, when things were rough I pleaded for God to strengthen "his" work.

When lives are changed, when attendance increases, when good things happen, we need to recognize God's power and give praise and credit to him. Paul shared this advice in 1 Corinthians 1:31: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." You and I have

nothing to do with the actual transformation of an earthly life to an eternal life—that is God’s work. We may point students in the right direction, and we may even have the privilege of being God’s spokespersons, but in no way should we ever take credit away from God. If we brag, we need to brag about God. It is truly humbling to think about the awesome privilege and responsibility of being used by God.

Answer 2: Submit Your Abilities to God and Allow His Power to Work Through Who You Are

When feeling inadequate as a youth minister and questioning my call, I have had to practice submission. I regularly submit to God all that I am and all that I have to offer because I don’t have the knowledge, the natural energy, and the ability to relate to teenagers like I did twenty years ago. Every week when I’m with teenagers I’m reminded that I’m not young anymore (I’m the age of their parents).

Do you ever feel like a boring adult? I do! Students may ask for a ride home from church, and I say, “Sure, but do you mind sitting in my child’s car seat?” You see, I have diapers and bottles all over the place, and that’s not cool. Once they are in my car, they hit my preset radio stations thinking they are going to find a music station. Not in my car! I listen to news (about as wild as I get is talk radio). I try to be relevant by listening to some of their music. Every so often I turn on MTV until I get a headache from all the camera gyrations. I don’t know the latest bands, and when students play their music for me, I don’t like it (mostly because I can’t understand the words).

In addition to feeling irrelevant, I have less energy than I once did. I hate overnights! I can’t always be on the go. I have to honestly admit that I don’t have the same set of abilities I had a decade ago. I’m also learning that’s not all bad.

By submitting my abilities to God’s power, I can rest in the same truth that the apostle Paul communicated about his weakness when God told him in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” Paul’s

response was, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

This submission keeps me from depression. I admit that I can’t keep up with teenage culture and that I’m not as hip anymore. When I submit my life and my abilities to God for the work of youth ministry, I can rest on the promise that God’s power is available to me, “for to be sure, [Jesus Christ] was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve [others]” (2 Cor. 13:4).

Allow your abilities to be ignited by the divine power that is revealed in a believer’s life. Rejoice that your presence and your words give the power of God another opportunity to be communicated to students whom God loves. Remember what Paul said about his lack of verbal skills in 1 Corinthians 2:4–5: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” When I think about the truth of God working through my weaknesses, it thrills my soul and keeps me going.

Rejoice that your presence and your words give the power of God another opportunity to be communicated to students whom God loves.

Answer 3: Focus on Being a Person of God Before Doing the Work of God

Instead of trying to please others, I have learned to live my life for an audience of One. Doing God’s work isn’t as important as being God’s person. Since I tend to be a people-pleaser, I need a continual reminder that God is more concerned about my spiritual health than about my youth ministry hype.

In the church, *doing* can become an illusion that requires more attention than our *being*. Jesus has a warning for people who

are more concerned about doing than being: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ ” (Matt. 7:21–23).

Can you envision standing before God and listing all the things you’ve done? “God, I spoke for you; I put on retreats for you; I volunteered for several years; I even did lock-ins for you. Do you want me to continue with my list? I made great videos; I read *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry* for you; I even loved the senior pastor’s kids. And I did it all for you!” I am not suggesting that you question your salvation, but I am encouraging you to think through your doing by laughing at how ludicrous any such list would be in the eyes of God.

The following sentence is worth the price of this book if you can apply it to your life: “You can never do enough.” This time insert your name in the blank and imagine me as a friend telling you this face to face. “I want you to know an important truth that will save you a lot of pain, heartache, and time if you can understand it: _____, you can never do enough. There is always more to be done. Youth ministry never stops! Don’t allow doing the work of God to come at the expense of being God’s person.”

Strengthen your youth ministry by placing a higher priority on being than doing. I’ve seen spiritual integrity play such an important role in youth ministry that I can honestly say that I would rather have one godly volunteer than ten skilled volunteers who don’t rely on God. I make this no secret. Adults in our ministry understand that I value their spiritual maturity much more than their ministry. Don’t get me wrong—I want volunteers doing ministry, but not at the expense of their spiritual growth. The power of God working in the lives of leaders is the foundation of a healthy youth ministry.

“Olley, Olley Oxen, Free, Free, Free”

Too many youth workers are knowingly or unknowingly trapped in a futile game of ministry hide and seek. They do ministry by hiding behind a hyped-up program, desperately seeking for the next idea to pump up their ministry. If this describes you, my prayer is that you hear the voice of God calling out “Olley, olley oxen, free, free, free.” God is compassionately calling us back home where we are free to be safe and secure in our relationship with him. It is here that we can put first things first by developing our own spiritual lives and focusing on growing in Christ.

Proverbs 5:21–23 reminds us that no matter how much we do for God or how busy we are in youth ministry, we can’t fool God about our inner life: “For a man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.”

The students in your youth ministry don’t need your clever ideas and great programming skills. They need a living model—a man or woman of God who is passionate about his or her faith. Your passion will be contagious. Students will want what you have. Your faith will help you develop a strong foundation for a healthy youth ministry.

Jesus communicated this same principle to his followers when he said in Luke 6:47–49, “I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Youth ministry is tough! It is filled with different types of storms, and God’s power is all you have to help you combat the downpours. No youth ministry idea or program can compete with

God's power working in and through you as he gives you a passion for students and you give him a pure heart. When you seek God you will see supernatural elements within your youth ministry that no flashy idea could ever produce. By relying on God and trusting in his power, you leave room for him to do his work. Pray that God will bring on the miracles as you read this book.

No youth ministry idea or program can compete with God's power working in and through you as he gives you a passion for students and you give him a pure heart.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

For You to Digest

Whether you are a volunteer youth worker, an intern, a paid staff member, or a college student being called by God into youth ministry, remember that your church's youth ministry won't be healthy if your life isn't rooted in God and reliant on his power. Your spiritual walk is a vital part of your youth ministry's health equation.

Jesus made it clear that we bear fruit when we are connected to him (John 15:5). The apostle Paul understood spiritual growth, and he challenged his readers to evaluate their faith to ensure that they weren't just "going through the motions" (see 2 Cor. 13:5).

If you test yourself and find that you need help in your spiritual life, I encourage you to do whatever it takes to strengthen your godly foundation. The following actions have always helped me:

1. Admit your struggles to yourself.
2. Ask God for the power to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7 NASB).
3. Ask God for the courage to confess these struggles to a friend who cares deeply about you and who can help you.
4. Work with this friend on a spiritual restoration plan.

To Discuss

Your youth ministry will take a step toward health if you are willing to enter into dialogue about the material you are reading. Good leaders are avid learners, and they aren't afraid of discussion, even when it causes vulnerability. The questions at the end of each chapter serve as triggers to get your youth ministry team talking.

1. Do you have a youth ministry environment where spiritual growth is valued?
2. Do your students sense that the youth ministry leaders are men and women of God?
3. What role does prayer play in your ministry?
4. As a team, are you honestly concerned with students' spiritual health or the exhilaration from the hype of great programs?
5. How can you encourage spirituality among your leadership?
6. What will you do if you see a leader showing signs of a hard heart?
7. Where is God's power evident in your ministry?