

Signs of a Thriving Youth Ministry

Our goal is not to simply survive another week, but to impact eternity. Thriving youth ministries are the results of thriving youth.

I Samuel 17:38-40

- David took off Saul's armor that didn't fit him. – we have to be careful to not lead our ministries according to individual's expectations.
- Saul didn't give David his armor to win. There's no way a boy could win in a man's suit. Saul gave him the armor to hopefully survive. He hoped David would at least make it. God has not given us a wishful hope to make it. He's given us a promised hope to make it.
- David took off the armor and picked up 5 stones from the stream. The stream represents God's presence. Psalm 42:1, *As the deer pants for water, so my soul pants for you oh God.* We must be sure to get into God's presence so that we can lead with what we need to thrive.

When you think of a thriving youth ministries, what elements come to mind?

- Large crowds
- Nice facilities
- Student ministry teams
- You fill in the blank _____

We can categorize these elements into two categories, context and content.

- Context- How we do youth ministry (programs, facilities, etc)
- Content- What we do in youth ministry (what students walk away with)

Let me ask you about your last graduating class.

- What 4 principles, concepts or lessons did they learn from your youth ministry?
- Was it intentional or just picked up?

We have a tendency to plan our environment (context) and then our content. Content must drive the context in order for our ministry to be focused and effective.

How do we gauge the effectiveness of our youth ministry? From Andy Stanley's book, *The Seven Checkpoints*, I took 5 points of content and broke it down into 5 questions. The answers to these questions will provide us with a gauge for reaching our students. I believe it would be helpful to have a list of every student in your youth ministry where you could actually check off the responses for each question. Disciplining anyone is a process. These questions can provide us with a guide as we move through the process. Some questions you will out right ask a student, others you will observe. Either way, the answers will provide you with great insight.

1. Authentic Faith

We are told that teens have a tenancy to fall away from their faith following high school. This is many times true because it is easier to change our belief than our behaviors. Rather than changing what we do, we tend to justify doing it.

Some points to remember as we introduce authentic faith to teens:

- Faith is a person, not a circumstance. Students tend to live circumstantially. They believe as long as the circumstances make sense.
- Mercy allows us to trust God. The root word for God's mercy is 'rah-kam' which is translated as "the womb." Think about what it means to be in God's mercy (the womb). We are fully depending on him. Teach students that God is fully in control.
- Grace is strength to endure whatever we face. Faith is not just believing God can, it's trusting God until he does and even beyond, if he doesn't.
- Help students distinguish between God's promise and their own expectations. What God says and what we want him to do can be two different things.

Question You Want to Ask: *What are you trusting in to get you to Heaven?*

We tend to put this question in past tense, *what have you done, or when did you ask Jesus into your heart?* But this question puts their response in a future statement. Salvation is more than a prayer we prayed or a thing we did. It is a relationship we are having with the person and God of Jesus Christ.

2. Spiritual Disciplines

The way we perceive things shapes our reality. Perspective drives behavior. Our job as youth pastor is to help students arrive at God's perspective. If so, they will be more likely to adapt their behavior to what he says.

We tend to expect too little of teens. We expect that they won't have a devotional life. We need to shift our standards. Those we lead, will always come just under the standards we set. We must expect students to develop a devotional life.

Romans 12:2- change is the result of a renewed mind. It is not the process of an eraser but a replacement. Out with the old, in with the new over a period of time.

How many student problems are the results of students not listening to God? We need to counsel students in that way. Don't just address the result (whatever their issue). Address the problem. (not spending time with God)

Our reason for not spending time in devotions is that there is a lack of urgency. Other things become urgent because of consequences. Homework= failing grade, practice= cut from the team, work= loss of job, etc. We need to help students create urgency by helping them see the consequences of not spending time with God.

Some consequences of not having a devotional life:

- A loving relationship will become routine, ritual and religion.
- God becomes limited to the church building and special occasions.
- Feel free to email any ideas or thoughts of consequences you may have.

"God allowed every great individual in the Bible to go through an extended period of solitude before they began to influence the world." Andy Stanley, Seven Checkpoints

Elements of their time alone:

- Bible- teach them how to study God's word by asking questions about what it says, why it says it, who said it and who heard it?
- Prayer- talk and listen, don't make it harder than it is.
- Journal- Write what God is saying. This provides students with a weekly spiritual growth chart.

Encourage students not to focus on what they do or how long they spend but rather what they walk always with.

Question You Want to Ask: *When and where do you spend your quick time with God?* Ask your students to identify it and encourage them to prioritize it.

3. Moral Boundaries

Purity paves the way to intimacy.

Points to remember as we teach our teens:

- God created sex therefore he knows more about it than my culture or me.
- Sex is not just physical but relational. It's not just sex, it's two becoming one (Genesis 2:24).
- Are the temporary pleasures derived from premarital sex worth the long-term complications? Help students answer this question rather than telling them the answer.
- Share the benefits of waiting till marriage and not just the dangers of not waiting.

A book to help with this topic: *Uncensored: Friendship Dating & Sex*, Jeanne Mayo

Culture's Counter Attack of Purity:

- Everybody's having sex.
 - Not true
 - Not an even an argument for or against
- You can't live without sex.
 - People have died from STDs but not from a lack of sex.
- Sex is a natural part of growing up.
 - There is nothing natural about having multiple partners
- Wouldn't be a problem if they would just wear condoms.
 - It's not just physical, it's relational and condoms don't protect that.
 - Condoms don't remove regrets
- Sex makes life better.
 - Premarital sex makes life complicated
 - Marital sex makes married life enjoyable

"Fire in the fireplace is great, fire on the carpet can burn down the house." (Andy Stanley's quote)

How far is too far? Wisdom must be applied.

Common Sense Principles:

1. The further you go, the faster you go.
 - a. There is a big step between hello and nakedness.
 - b. Desire always accelerates, it never slows down.
2. The further you go, the further you want to go.
 - a. The end of one desire leads to another.
 - b. The only way to keep sexual appetites in check is to not feed them.
3. The further you go, the harder it is to go back.
 - a. You always start where you ended. You don't go back.
4. Where you draw the line determines;
 - a. The area of your temptation.
 - b. The intensity of your temptation
 - c. The consequence of giving in to temptation.

Question You Want to Ask: *How far is too far?* (the response will apply to whatever the moral struggle is that they are facing; i.e. partying, sex, language, conversation, etc)

A follow up question specific to sex, that every student should ask: *How far do I want my future spouse to go with the person he/she is dating prior to our meeting and getting married?*

2 Timothy 2:22

4. Healthy Friendships

You will never soar like an eagle if you're hanging with a flock of turkeys. Johnny Jernigan, PennDel Youth Convention 1993

Teens greatest Influences:

1960s:

1. Parents
2. Teachers
3. Spiritual Leaders

Today:

1. Friends
2. Media
3. Parents
17. Spiritual Leaders

The Power of Influence:

- Friends have a greater influence than student's convictions.
 - At some point they will choose between their convictions and their friends.
- Friends have greater influence than parents.
 - A 15-year-old friend becomes wiser than a 37-year-old father.
 - Dysfunction of the family contributes to this.

Acceptance causes Friendships:

- Students don't choose their friends, their friends choose them. They are acceptance magnets. They associate with those who will accept them.
- This explains the split behaviors of one thing at church and another at school. They adapt to their place of acceptance.

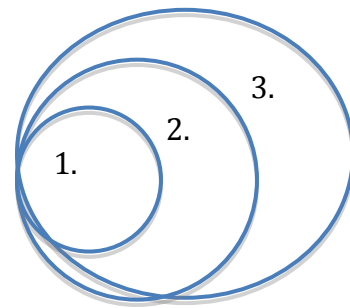
- The reason friends don't confront each other regarding destructive behaviors is because of the risk of being unaccepted.

We must create the most accepting place for our students within our youth ministries. They won't embrace our message till they are assured of our love.

- Create a hunger in your students for truth and wisdom. This will be a tool for them to establish healthy relationships. Teach truth and wisdom. The power of suggestion is even more powerful when you are suggesting truth.
- Wise friends may be a process of elimination. As a friend reveals himself or herself to be unwise, a student may need to be intentional to limit that relationship, but not disassociate all together unless drastic measures requires such.
- There is such a thing as "guilty by association."

Question You Want to Ask: *Who are your friends?*

- You can use the Concentric Circle approach
 1. Those with whom you share EVERYTHING
 2. Those with whom they share Friendship
 3. Those with whom they share the other's concerns
- Don't forget to consider friends at school and other venues.



5. Ultimate Authority

How students respond to authority will determine their influence and standing in society.

Points to remember as we teach our teens:

- Students see freedom as a lack of rules and God as the master of rules. God is about freedom, not rules. Adam and Eve had only one rule (don't eat from the tree of life). They broke 1 rule and now we have many rules.
- True freedom is living under God's authority. The older you get, the more authorities you have; unless you are in prison, then it's only the Warden.
- To have authority you must be under authority.
- Students cannot pursue intimacy with God and ignore their conflicts with authority.
- It's not a matter of what you are told to do, but who told you to do it. Too often we justify rebellion by calling the rule unreasonable.

It comes down to who is in control. If we justify and excuse rules then we are in control and that puts God on the sidelines. A student's attitude toward authority reflects their attitude toward God. To get things right with God, students must get things right with Mom & Dad.

Question You Want to Ask: *How is your relationship with Mom & Dad?*

Conclusion: The next time you are evaluating the health of your youth ministry, consider asking these questions about each student in your youth ministry.

1. What are you putting your faith in to get to Heaven?

2. When and where do you spend your quiet time with God?
3. How far is too far?
4. Who are your friends?
5. How is your relationship with Mom & Dad?

If you are unsure of the answers your students may give, then these questions may give you direction for the content you need to address in your youth ministry. Let's be intentional in making disciples and not just creating a place for them to come. Let's give them something to leave with.

Any questions or added comments, please pass along to youthalive@penndelyouth.com

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