

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Youth Ministry Academy

*Created by Nazarene Youth International (NYI) and
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SESSION 20

Youth Ministry Craft:
Legacy of Long-Term Ministry

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Youth Ministry Craft: Legacy of Long-Term Ministry

SESSION OVERVIEW

Entering Ministry

Evaluating Long-Term Ministry

Personal Considerations

Professional Factors

Spiritual Life

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- 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

Youth ministry requires more than ministering to young people; we must also minister with youth, by cultivating their leadership abilities. This session helps you to develop a sense of some of the practical aspects of empowering youth for ministry.

ENTERING MINISTRY



NOTES

Just point 'em and go. “My first ski trip was in college. The university catalog listed it as physical education. My thoughts? 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 that read: Easy Black Diamond. Now that’s an interesting oxymoron. Everyone takes off and I’m sort of lost. As one friend pushes off, he looks back and yells, “Just point ‘em and go.” I have to tell you, it wasn’t that great of a ski run.

That experience sort of describes many of us in youth ministry, right? Chances are many of us looked at the need, heard God’s call, and just pointed ‘em and went. For good or bad we lasted in ministry. A lot of us have probably 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?
- Maybe I should get a real job.

Usually these thoughts occur in the middle of the night at a junior high retreat . . . scrunched up in our sleeping bag . . . shaving cream flowing out of one ear and toilet paper wrapped tightly around our entire body.

According to many surveys, most people hate their job. They don’t look forward to going to work; instead they’re bored and weary of it. Does God really care whether I’m happy in my ministry or not? Should I stay in youth ministry for the long haul or hang it up? Does God really have time to listen to me about youth work? Maybe the big question is this: Does God really care whether I’m happy in my ministry or not? Should I stay in for the long term? The answer is an unqualified, “Yes!”

EVALUATING LONG-TERM MINISTRY



NOTES

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

- Why do I do what I do?
- Was I called by God to this task or by someone else? Maybe by myself?
- Do I take good care of myself?
- Am I too busy? Tired? Worn out? Approaching burnout? The 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.”
- Am I at a point where I don’t know if I can or should go further than I’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 frantic schedule, yet it’s in busy lives that self-evaluation is most important.

PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS



NOTES

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

Take 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.

Understand youth culture. One really has to work at understanding youth. As you age, you move further beyond adolescence and 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.

Establish relationships within the church. It is easy to sense isolation from your peers. After all, who in your adult small group has ever climbed to the roof of a gas station with 50 people for a picture except when they were in a fraternity in college? 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 input from others.

Possess 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? Do you keep tacking things on to an already busy schedule? Do you 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.

NOTES

Maintain energy and freshness. How well are you taking care of yourself? Are you exercising? Eating well? Sleeping too little or too much? Getting away from your ministry to gain insight and to find room to breathe is important. Step outside your denominational fences. Your friends in other denominations or para-church ministries may do things differently than you do. Find out what and why and adapt if needed. Enrich yourself through varied experiences. When your life is the church and a certain group of people, you lose depth and dimension in your life. Keep yourself balanced.

Continue your education and career goals. We remain life-long learners and need ongoing development. Consider seminars outside of youth ministry, child development classes, taking ordination classes, and signing up for theological education like Nazarene Theological 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.

Establish 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.

Take care of your family. We must constantly relearn how to be a better spouse. Take care of your marriage. Your marriage is God's representation of wholeness to the world. Treat it as such. You need to make a conscious effort to give more time to your family rather than ministry. Len Kagler, in *The Youth Ministry Survival Guide*, reminds us we need to focus on our emotional connection with our spouse if we want our marriage to thrive and grow. This connection proves essential to preventing divorce.

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 our family? How do we youth pastor our own children? We must lose our parent eye and treat our children the same as we treat others. Too often youth workers put the church and youth group ahead of their spouse, children, and extended family. The wounding that occurs when this happens can be irreparable. Don't let it happen in your family and ministry.

PROFESSIONAL FACTORS

NOTES

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 can help assist you as you deal with church and staff relationships.

Respect the senior pastor. Seek the pastor's counsel. Work on communication with pastor and staff. Humility is important especially if you are older or have been at your church longer than your senior pastor. He or she might feel intimidated. In fact, members of the church might relate to you more than the senior pastor. Help the church recognize pastoral authority. The senior pastor must be understood as the congregational leader, while you must find other ways to express leadership where appropriate.

Problems could arise when the pastor sees himself or herself as leading the youth ministry in spite of you being the designated youth worker. However, you must 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, what you value, and what you want to accomplish. 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 play video games or 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.

Strive for organization. Being organized remains a critical component of effective ministry. Keep on top of your schedule. It may be 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, and 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. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Learn how to say "no" with respect and conviction. Simply adding more to your schedule doesn't make you a better youth pastor. In fact, saying "no" to things will probably make you a better youth pastor.

Do the right thing by people. Be attentive and caring to those around you. You need to remember and respond appropriately to:

- birthdays, anniversaries, key dates.
- appointments.
- special events.
- correspondence, thank-you cards, etc.

Form a leadership team. This is the surest hedge against a messiah complex. The more valuable ministry is, the more it has to be a shared ministry. Simply stop doing ministry alone. That is a recipe for disaster in so many ways.

Practice 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 pastor. 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 have only pennies to work with, when you show wisdom and integrity you'll probably be trusted with more. Never handle cash.

**NOTES**

Ask parents in the youth ministry to collect, count, and submit any cash given to the ministry. Appoint a treasurer on the youth council to handle the financial transactions. Be careful about spending your own money on ministry.

Understand as a paid youth worker you're never going to make a lot of money so: save, save, save, and invest for retirement. When you accept a new assignment be realistic. Check the facts of the financial arrangements as well as the job description. It might be best to have all arrangements in writing and ask the church treasurer to sign or initial it.

Do ministry carefully. Don't take unnecessary risks just to be the fun person in the group. Don't give into bad choices and foolish actions. We often come close to real disaster and yet live to tell about it by God's grace. Don't risk the welfare of youth who might mimic our actions with deadly consequences. Youth ministers need to be the adult in all situations. Don't succumb to the temptation of being liked for the sake of temporary thrills that could cost someone his or her life. Think safety, make appropriate plans, and carry notarized permission slips with you at all times.

SPIRITUAL LIFE


NOTES

Ultimately your inner spiritual life is the strength of your life and ministry. As previous sessions 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.

Remain transparent. It is important to remain transparent and accountable with youth, parents, youth sponsors, and pastoral staff. The greatest defense against burnout is a group with whom you can be honest, share, confide, celebrate, and cry. Become accountable for successes and failures both professionally and personally. Give people permission to be honest and 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. Above all remain honest before God and others about your 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 (could be one or several days). We hear God speak more clearly when the noise around us diminishes. Plan at least one time a year to retreat in silence, solitude, meditation, and God's Word.
- Evaluate your life and ministry by spiritual not secular or consumerist standards. More, bigger, and best is not the standard of success in the Church. True success in ministry is faithfulness to God and Scripture.

Take a moment to write a specific discipline will begin tomorrow in your spiritual relationship with God. Make this a covenant between you and God.

Consider your calling. The call of God is difficult to explain but impossible to ignore. We find ourselves facing a consistent awareness inviting us to make a difference. Our experience of the call often comes without words. Deep within us a voice surfaces through our passion for youth, a sense of fulfillment working with them, and a yearning to do more. Saying "yes" to this call gives us a new sense of belonging and being at home in our ministry. Whether in professional



ministry or just serving as a dedicated worker in a local church, our calling gives us a sense of direction, a means for personal evaluation, professional development, and 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 a source and a guide as we engage youth for the sake of God's kingdom. Welcome to the journey.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Complete the following self evaluation by answering the following questions:
 - Why do I do what I do?
 - Was I called by God to this task or by someone else? Maybe by myself?
 - Do I take good care of myself?
 - Am I too busy? Tired? Worn out? Approaching burnout? The 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."
 - Am I at a point where I don't know if I can or should go further than I've gone right now?
2. Develop a personal 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 (could be one or several days). We hear God speak more clearly when the noise around us diminishes. Plan at least one time a year to retreat in silence, solitude, meditation, and God's Word.
 - Evaluate your life and ministry by spiritual not secular or consumerist standards. More, bigger, and best is not the standard of success in the Church. True success in ministry is faithfulness to God and Scripture.

EXAM



NOTES

1. Most youth ministers and leaders enter ministry after extensive education and training for the job.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. It is critical to ask yourself the hard questions in life and ministry; questions might include _____:
 - A. Why do I do what I do?
 - B. Was I called by God to this task or by someone else?
 - C. Do I take good care of myself?
 - D. Am I too busy? Tired? Worn out? Approaching burnout?
 - E. all of the above
3. When preparing for long-term ministry we must include a serious look at our personal lives and close relationships.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. When preparing for long-term ministry some areas to evaluate and consider include _____:
 - A. practicing self care (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual).
 - B. choosing accountability partners (people who identify with our purpose and ministry to support us and to serve as close friends).
 - C. continuing your education and career goals.
 - D. all of the above.
5. As you age, you move further beyond adolescence, it becomes easier to stay in touch with the youth culture.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Too often youth workers put the church and youth group ahead of their spouse, children, and extended family.
 - A. True
 - B. False



7. Which of the following (professional) guidelines can help you as you deal with church and staff relationships?
 - A. respect the senior pastor.
 - B. act in a professional manner.
 - C. be a team player with other staff people.
 - D. strive for organization.
 - E. all of the above.

8. It is a wise practice for youth ministers to take full responsibility for finances by personally by collecting, counting, and submitting any cash given to the ministry.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Too often youth leaders take unnecessary risks with young people.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. You need to maintain a close relationship with God, because ultimately your inner spiritual life is the strength of your life and ministry.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. 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?
2. What are the reasons people don't last in youth ministry for the long term?
3. What are some obstacles that keep us from consistent self-evaluation of our ministry?
4. 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?
5. How is your spiritual 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?
6. How do you see your call lived out each day when working with youth?