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# The faith journey in H3

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE FAITH JOURNEY IN H3

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
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## ABSTRACT

Today's student ministries are seeing seventy to ninety percent of their teenagers walk away from a connection to the church and their journey of faith. Trends show that students are no longer seeing Christianity and the church as an important part of their lives. Cultural challenges, a crisis in the Church and questions about Christianity are symptoms that highlight the needs students face along their faith journey. Research discovered the extent of these disconnections and the multiple layers of issues creating a complex problem that leads to the departures. Many purposed solutions offer potential assistance for students. However, they do not meet the greater needs of the students in their faith journey. Increasing youth workers educational opportunities, more faith development curriculum, a programmatic approach to student ministries, and the Orange Movement may help, but will not increase relational connectivity to Christ and others that students need. This project employs the H3 movement of faith development from Mark 12:30-31 consisting of growing head, heart, and hand connections to God, surrounded by a foundation of relational connections. This biblical foundation claims that faith development for students must be focused on a full engagement of the whole person. In a series of podcasts to inform, encourage, challenge, and train youth workers, this project peels back the layers to refocus ministries towards helping students become life-long Christ followers.

## SECTION ONE

### THE PROBLEM

Most student ministries in the United States are not helping students grow in their faith resulting in students not only leaving the church, but also disconnecting with their faith connection with Christ. Student ministries have not fulfilled the challenge Jesus gave us found in Matthew 28:19-20. He said to “Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about the mass exodus of students from churches in the United States. A 2009 *Time Magazine* article and a 2010 *Lifeway* Research project reported, “61% of churched high school students graduate and never go back! Even worse: 78% to 88% of those in youth programs today will leave church, most to never return.”<sup>2</sup>

In the typical church, 3 out of every 5 teens will be unchurched in the next 10 to 12 years. At your next youth meeting look around. Chances are most of those teenagers will disengage from church attendance by age 30. In fact, participation in church steadily declines following high school graduation, bottoming out during a person’s late 20s.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV).

<sup>2</sup> Matt Marino, "What Is So Uncool About Cool Churches," *The Gospel Side* (blog), <http://thegospelside.com/2012/09/23/whats-so-uncool-about-cool-churches/> (accessed September 23, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> David Kinnaman, "The Mosaic Generation: The Mystifying New World Of Youth Culture," *Enrichment Journal* (January, 2006).

A survey conducted by Lifeway Research found that seven in ten Protestants ages 18 to 30 — both evangelical and mainline — who went to church regularly in high school said they quit attending by age 23. And 34% of those said they had not returned, even sporadically, by age 30. That means about one in four Protestant young people have left the church.<sup>4</sup>

Of those who leave the church, only eleven percent of those did so during the college years. Almost ninety percent of them were lost in middle and high school. By the time they got to college they were already gone!...Most people assumed that elementary and middle school is a fairly neutral environment where children toe the line and follow in the footsteps of their parents spirituality. Not so.<sup>5</sup>

An America's Research Group survey conducted in 2009 found that 95 percent of twenty- to twenty-nine-year-old evangelicals attended church regularly during their elementary and middle school years, but only 55 percent attended during high school. By the time they reached college, only 11 percent were still attending church.<sup>6</sup>

Reggie McNeal, Missional Leadership Specialist for Leadership Network

reframes the issue. "The rate of disconnection indicates a dilemma far more serious than mere youthful rebellion...The farther you go down the generational food chain, the lower the percentage each succeeding generation reports going to church...It's more than numbers."<sup>7</sup>

These are frightening statistics in relation to church attendance, but it is more than attendance that should be of concern. While numbers can be an indicator, either good or bad, the greater concern is the lack of growth in a student's faith journey of discipleship. A groundbreaking study titled *The National Study of Youth and Religion of 2005* can be

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<sup>4</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Young Adults Aren't Sticking With Church," *USA Today*, August 6, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone*. (United States of America: Master Books, 2009), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Reggie Joiner, Church Bomar, and Abbie Smith, *The Slow Fad* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 23.

<sup>7</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-bass, 2003), 2.



found in Christian Smith's book *Soul Searching*. One of his findings indicated that religion is a significant presence in the lives of many U.S. teens.<sup>8</sup> However, the presence of a religious connection is not creating life change. It simply becomes something a student does, have always done, and what they have watched their parents do. It is not focused on a personal faith journey of discipleship, but on repetitive actions that have been observed. It becomes what they do, not who they are. Two of Smith's findings indicate that students are not looking for new way of expressing their faith journey, but willing to follow in their parent's footsteps of their religious activity.<sup>9</sup> Parents are still the most important influence within the student's faith journey, but students must understand faith is more than religious activity. Smith also discovered that students could not articulate what they believed, what their beliefs mean, and how their beliefs get lived out over a lifetime, therefore indicating a student's spiritual understanding and concern are generally very weak.<sup>10</sup> Again students have learned how to mimic what they have observed, but their faith actions have no basis or foundation. Students have not seen their faith grow, but continue the actions found in their surroundings. It becomes environmental Christianity not something the student found in a personal faith journey. Once they have removed themselves from a Christ focused environment, generally post high school, their actions mean little to them anymore. Their time with Christ was simply something to do, a community to be involved with, or actions that seem to keep the peace with mom and dad.

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<sup>8</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 260.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 262-263.

Other studies also indicate this decline in faith growth. In the book, *Quitting Church*, it is reported that since 2006 “only four percent of America’s teens will end up as Bible-believing Christians, compared to thirty-five percent of the baby boomers and sixty-five percent of their World War II-era grandparents.”<sup>11</sup> A study published in 2009 discovered that the “Nones,” individuals with no religious connection, were more numerous among young Americans. Twenty-two percent of eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds claimed no religious connection, up eleven percent since 1990. It was also found that 73 percent of “Nones” came from religious homes, and 66 percent were considered “deconverts.”<sup>12</sup> Another study found that eighty-three percent of Millennials in 2007 said they never doubted God’s existence with that number dropping to sixty-eight percent by 2012.<sup>13</sup> A new poll of 52,000 people worldwide...found that the portion of Americans who call themselves “atheists” jumped from 1 to 5 percent, and Americans who call themselves “religious” fell from 73 percent in 2005 to just 60 percent today.<sup>14</sup>

These studies show an ever-increasing issue in the lack of faith growth of our students within our churches and youth ministries. This has created a disagreement of what is happening with our students. In a report written by Harvard professor Robert Putnam and Notre Dame professor David Campbell states that young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of five to six times greater than previous

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<sup>11</sup> Julia Duin, *Quitting Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 37.

<sup>12</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Locations 1956-1961.

<sup>13</sup> Tyler, "The Bad News About The Lack Of Faith Among Millennials," *Man of Depravity* (blog), manofdepravity.com (accessed June 27, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Justin Rocket Silverman, "OMG More Atheists!," *The Daily*, August 14, 2012.

generations.<sup>15</sup> Others state that while students are leaving the church they are not leaving the faith. Ken Ham and Britt Beemer wrote in their book *Already Gone*, indicate that those who have left the church, only half have left the faith.<sup>16</sup> For Ham and Beemer, this is not a faith issue but a church issue. While it has been widely speculated that there is a consumer mentality even within the church world, there is more to this issue. Students are disconnecting from the environment of their faith journey, and even disconnecting from activities that encourage faith growth. Disconnecting from faith environments and activities has an influence on their faith journey over time.

Along with Smith's findings, others have given even more evidence of why students are leaving the church with a direct connection to the issue of a lack of faith growth and development. The Barna Research group conducted a study that resulted in a book titled *You Lost Me*. The findings gave several reasons why students are leaving the church, and where student ministries are not helping students grow in their faith. One reason states that teens' and twentysomethings' experience of Christianity is shallow<sup>17</sup> indicating that something was missing from their experience. While the student may not understand what was missing, the experience was still falling short of what they hoped for or imagined. Others reasons indicated that the church was unwilling to go deeper in thought coming across as overprotective, antagonistic to science, simplistic and

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<sup>15</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Location 2165-2167.

<sup>16</sup> Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone* (United State Of America: Master Books, 2009), 118.

<sup>17</sup> David Kinnaman, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church," The Barna Group, September 28, 2011, [barna.org/teens-next-gen-article/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church](http://barna.org/teens-next-gen-article/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church) (accessed September 29, 2011).

judgmental towards sex and sexuality, and unfriendly to those who doubt.<sup>18</sup> Several of these reasons indicate a desire by the student to be challenged, to understand more than surface information, and to add depth to the time in student ministries. Terrance Crawford on YouthMinistry.com adds that students are looking for a challenge indicated by a student's statement to him, "I don't want (or need) to be entertained at youth group. I want to be challenged."<sup>19</sup> A multi-year study conducted by Alexander and Helen Astin, retired UCLA professors, worked to discover how the college experience influences spiritual development. They found a significant growth among college students nationwide in the desire to engage in a spiritual quest, to be more caring, and to develop an ecumenical worldview.<sup>20</sup> In the March 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*, a letter to the editor stated; today's church dropout is not interested in a "weakened local church. Instead we are seeking...a return to a faith that is authentic, relevant, and applicable."<sup>21</sup>

This trend cannot continue. The church and student ministries have not fulfilled the responsibility of making disciples. If this trend continues the church will no longer exist. Researchers involved in church health and church planting claim that more churches are closing faster than opening. "Almost three times as many churches in

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Terrance Crawford, "5 Reasons Why Teens Stop Showing Up," Simply Youth Ministry, [youthministry.com/articles/culture/5-reasons-why-teens-stop-showing-up](http://youthministry.com/articles/culture/5-reasons-why-teens-stop-showing-up) (accessed May 31, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Mary Beth Marklein, "More College Students Seeking Spiritual Answers," *USA Today*, December 20, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Julia Duin, *Quitting Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 19-20.

America are closing (3,750) as are opening (1,300) each year.”<sup>22</sup> Lyle Schaller, author and church consultant, predicts that 100,000 to 150,000 congregations will dissolve in the first half of the twenty-first century – an average of five to eight each day.<sup>23</sup> If this continues, we will be one generation away from the evaporation of the church, as we know it.<sup>24</sup>

We build big groups and count “decisions for Christ,” but the Great Commission is not to get kids to make decisions for Jesus but to make disciples for Him. We all want to make Christians for life, not just for high school. We have invested heavily in youth ministry with our lives specifically in order engage youth in the church. Why do we have such a low return on our investment?<sup>25</sup>

This is the problem. Those in ministry, student ministry, and parents are watching students willfully choose to walk away from the gathering of Christians known as the church and ultimately walking away from the life transforming faith in Jesus. Mike Yaconelli, a pioneer in youth ministry, wrote: “Youth ministry as an experiment has failed...All I want to do is recapture what we used to live and breathe – we hold kids’ hands, we listen to their stories, we take them seriously and somewhere along the way we bring them to Jesus. That’s it. That’s youth ministry.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Arn, "A Response To Dr. Rainer," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 6, (1995): 74.

<sup>23</sup> Lyle Schaller, *Tattered Trust: Is There Hope for Youth Denomination* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 26.

<sup>24</sup> Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone* (United States Of America: Master Books, 2009), 25.

<sup>25</sup> Matt Marino, "What Is So Uncool About Cool Churches," *The Gospel Side* (blog), [www.thegospelside.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/wats-so-uncool-about-cool-church/](http://www.thegospelside.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/wats-so-uncool-about-cool-church/) (accessed September 23, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Chap Clark and Kara Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 70.

While much of this departure from the church and a connection to God is a choice by the students, parents and those in leadership of ministries have to take some responsibility. What is being done to help students grow in a life transforming, authentic, and relevant faith? Have parents abdicated their responsibility of helping their students grow spiritually to the youth pastor and or church? Has the church and student ministries fallen into the trap of doing ministry as ministry has always been done? Has the church and student ministries grown cold to the increased work that it takes with students today? “Spiritual growth is more difficult even for the more deeply committed students...what we call discipleship doesn’t seem to be working like it used to.”<sup>27</sup> Student ministries cannot keep doing the same thing and hoping for a new outcome.

This complex problem has many layers and cannot be solved with a change of attendance at a new church or student ministry or even a change in the mode of operation within the church or student ministry. This complex problem needs to be looked at from a wide perspective and then focused down to manageable changes to help our students with their personal faith journey. While there are many reason given as to why students are leaving the church and or their faith journey, symptoms of the problem can be found in cultural changes, issues with Christianity, and issues with the organized church.

### The Symptoms found in Cultural Changes

Adolescence is a time period of life where change comes fast and is found within the balance of leaving childhood and entering adulthood. It is a time when an adolescent is entrenched in life changes as well as educational endeavors. Students begin to engage

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

changes psychosocial, independent search for identity and separating from the known into the unknown of life's journey.<sup>28</sup> The beginning of this time period of life is mutually understood at the beginning of puberty. However the end of adolescence is in question. Some developmental psychologists have suggested the adolescent time period that at one time was thought to end at high school, now continues is the age of 26. With this extended period, a student will battle through many issues creating longings; longings to belong, to be taken seriously, to matter, for a safe place, to be uniquely me, and to be wanted.<sup>29</sup> These longings show some of the turmoil that students go through during this time of their life. The discovery of identity and acceptance are primary within these longings, causing an external search for the inner turmoil. This external search has widened as culture has changed.

Students today connect digitally; making it difficult to reach them and causing them to be more distant while connected. While the digital world can offer influences, it cannot create life-changing connections. The ability to attract a student to an event or ministry program is gone. Church and student ministries budgets do not have enough margins to compete for the attention of students. "At the very moment adolescents need community and connection to work out their identities and help develop social cues they are becoming increasingly isolated."<sup>30</sup> The invention of the TGIF (Twitter, Google, iPhone, and Facebook) relationship has become a growing form of relational

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<sup>28</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 19.

<sup>29</sup> Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 167.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Kerns, "Wired But Dis-connected: Helping Kids Establish Genuine Relationships In A Networked World," *Youth Worker*, [www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-ministry/11637727/](http://www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-ministry/11637727/). (accessed September 15, 2010).

development.<sup>31</sup> Many have friends and followers of people they have never met. While the TGIF relationship has the great potential to start a movement or even revival, it allows students to disconnect from face to face and or life on life connections needed for their faith journey. Information disseminated in 140 characters is a tool that can and should be used, but walking a journey of faith with a student will need “Witness”<sup>32</sup> in the relationship. Some are describing this issue of digital connectedness as an issue of FOMO or Fear of Missing Out.<sup>33</sup> Students desire to be connected because of all that is going on around them. So they are wired together digitally, but are they really connected?

Unfortunately, a divide has been created between students and the adults. Students need adult relationships for their faith journey. With the invention of the cell phone in 1973, media devices are competing for the attention of students who are accustomed to this expression of relationship based on information sharing.<sup>34</sup> However, adults - primarily parents but also some youth workers - are not comfortable with new technology and it’s delivery system of information as students understand relationship. This divide is made up of a psychographic<sup>35</sup> divide rather than a chronological scale with two groups involved. There are Gutenbergers (those who are immigrants to this culture)

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<sup>31</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 398.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Burns. "Relational Youth Ministry" (Trainer of Trainers Conference, San Juan Capistrano, CA, March, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Kara Powell, "What's FOMO? How Is It Impacting You And Every Young Person You Know?," *Fuller Youth Institute E-Journal* (2012, August 28).

<sup>34</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 1111.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, Kindle Location 464.



and Googlers (those who are natives to this culture).<sup>36</sup> Even with these two groups and the digital divide, relationships with and for students is critical. Gutenbergers grew up in a world that was integrated, taught by people they knew, and grew up in a relationally stable environment living in the same community most of their lives. Googlers live in a fast paced world that is filled with impersonal media devices used for relational development and information advancement.<sup>37</sup> So a digital community creates a faith journey with multiple 140-character messages and by those a Googler may never see or touch. The digital connection does create a community for the Googler, but the relational depth is lacking, and we all were created for relationships.

The digitally based, multi-opinionated community has helped create a form of religious thought known as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Smith and Denton, through the National Study of Youth and Religion formulated the code that makes up Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>38</sup>

This creed has several implications. First, it creates a moralistic view of living a good life is being a moral person, and therefore, a person that others like.<sup>39</sup> When a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 170.

<sup>37</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 73.

<sup>38</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-163.

student already is struggling with identity, now an even greater challenge comes as they desire to be liked by others. Secondly, feeling good is the therapeutic nature of this movement.<sup>40</sup> The student is again faced with the challenge that all things must make them feel good or they are bad. If the experience of feeling good is short lived, they will strive to find more of the feel good experiences, even to the point of violating their moral values. Finally, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism acknowledges God, but does not see Him as personally connected or involved in an individual's life.<sup>41</sup> This continues to create distance between the student and God even when an adult talks about a personal relationship with Him. With relationships are crumbling around them and being understood from a digital perspective, how can a personal relationship with God mean much or even exist?

Another issue within culture is the battle within families. The concept of family has changed dramatically and may continue to change. Family is not longer seen as people related by birth, marriage, or adoption. It can have a variety of definitions using the concept of commitment.<sup>42</sup> Yet the concept of commitment has no basis of understanding when commitments are only held to when they create good feelings. Once bad or uncomfortable feelings enter into a commitment, a separating of the individuals within the commitment is possible and even probable. So when the parents of the family do not show high commitment to God or the church and activities that indicate

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>42</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 21.

connection and growth in their own faith journey,<sup>43</sup> students question why they should live something they do not see in their parents. This is especially critical when it comes to the father of the family. The involvement if the male parent not only by their actions of commitment to God and the church, but also in relationship with the student, is an indicator of the commitment of the family.<sup>44</sup> Without parents or other adults living as a positive example for the students and are engaged in the students life, students feel abandoned and are forced to figure out their life and faith on their own.<sup>45</sup>

Students are also overwhelmed with all that they need to accomplish, with high levels of expectations, but are under challenged. This is a paradox for our students.

On the one hand, 94% of college students say the top word to describe their life is “overwhelmed.” About half say they are so overwhelmed it is almost difficult to function, and nearly one in ten have considered suicide in the last year. At the same time, we see volumes of reports that lead me to believe they are under-challenged. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reports that not only does a large percentage of students cheat on tests, but so do the teachers who lead them. Once the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal broke last year, the AJC uncovered 196 school districts who also cheat. Sadly, investigations on the whole ordeal has been extremely lax; schools and students want to minimize and gloss over the flaw... The problem is a paradox: Kids today are both overwhelmed and under-challenged. They’re busier than ever, but not with meaningful activities that prepare them for life.<sup>46</sup>

Are we setting our students up to fail? Are we challenging them with so many opportunities and yet never giving them a life transformational challenge?

### Symptoms with the Church

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<sup>43</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Ruth A. Tucker, *Walking Away From the Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>45</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 34.

<sup>46</sup> Tim Elmore "Students Are Overwhelmed But Under Challenged," [www.timelmore@growingleaders.com](http://www.timelmore@growingleaders.com) (accessed October 1, 2012).

The church is the primary delivery system of information for an individual's faith journey. However, students are seeing issues with the church and it is hindering student's growth on their faith journey. As stated earlier, the church is in decline. Churches are closing faster than new church plants are opening. In England, the decline of the church is followed by the decline of faith growth among those connected to the church.<sup>47</sup> This is a trend that will also cross the Atlantic. There are many people who are desperate to find spiritual food from their church, "But there's very little substance out there of substance...All these thirsty people and no watering hole."<sup>48</sup> There is a search for what Christ followers need to continue their faith journey. Author and Religious Editor of the Washington Times, Julia Duin, reported about a conversation with a national evangelistic campus Christian ministry asking if he saw faith growth in his circles. "I just don't see signs of revival at all...In fact just the opposite. I see a lot of shadow evangelicals who are tossed to and fro by the culture...It's fellowship not evangelism, that is most (Campus Ministry) groups' reason for existence which is sad."<sup>49</sup>

The church is not any better. The church has become so consumed with filling their seats that they have not delivered the challenging truth of Christ.

The tragedy of our time is that countless preachers, teachers, even healers are giving dozens of sermons, lectures, and messages, relegating Jesus to little more than a footnote or a flourish to some other subject. At best, He gets honorable mention. What is lacking is a groundbreaking revelation of Christ that boggles the mind and enraptures the heart...What will change the course of Christianity, putting it back on course?...What will create a spiritual revolution in the world today? What one things will satisfy the heart of God and cause us to love Him with an undying passion, making "our hearts burn within us" when we read the

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<sup>47</sup> Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone* (United State Of America: Master Books, 2009), 11.

<sup>48</sup> Julia Duin, *Quitting Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 17.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 18.

Scriptures? It's not the doctrine of the person of Jesus. It's an inward revelation of Christ to our hearts by the Holy Spirit – a progressive unveiling of the person who stands behind the sacred page and is the occupation of all things.<sup>50</sup>

Student ministries are adding to this problem. Student ministries become a place for free food, video gaming, with loud music but little spiritual engagement.<sup>51</sup> If this is what they have for growing in their faith journey, they will continue to leave the church and end any pursuit of faith. “As we fired up the fun in youth ministry, we watered down the gospel. Many have adopted that mentality, but it's only succeeded in making the gospel boring.”<sup>52</sup>

The delivery of information to help students learn, grow, and develop in their faith journey has also created an issue. The Sunday program mentality of youth ministries has increased in attractational creativity, but has not understood the cultural changes for students. A sermon driven by propositional arguments that are not speaking to the individual are making students even more resistant to the life-changing message of Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

Additionally, most churchgoers do not understand what Christianity is all about, pick and choose their approach to their faith, and their behavior or outer expressions of life are worse than those who do not attend church.<sup>54</sup> Many can sit in church services,

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<sup>50</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 17-19.

<sup>51</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Locations 1721-1725.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 1726-1727.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, Kindle Location 391.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (United States Of America: Group Publishing, 2001), 34.

religious gatherings, surrounded by people who look and in many cases act alike and still not advance in their faith journey. There is such a desire for knowledge and experience, but it has no core foundation, no heart for the Christ follower. It is simply to check off a to do list of information development. Therefore, fulfilling a duty and a craving for something different to experience, but both fad along the journey. New information is offered and new experiences of something that seems bigger and better enters the follower's path. There is no dedication to Christ, seeking His knowledge, and experiencing all that He offers. It simply remains something to be done every week at the same time with little or no change.

Student ministries and churches are concerned with taking care of the students that are in their church. Parents desire to see their kids grow and rely on the church and student ministries to get that accomplished. They want them to be taken care of and doing all the things that will draw the students in to the church. However students that are under challenged will also have a lack of initiative and perseverance.<sup>55</sup> Many student ministries are creating ministry activities that have little challenge, gives the students all the answers, and usually tries to take care of the student rather than having them work out their salvation.<sup>56</sup> This leads to a formula and or equation driven movement because it seems to be measureable.<sup>57</sup> Relationships are hard and messy. With an under challenged, overwhelmed student body and churches that want to take care of their

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<sup>55</sup> "YM Essentials: 5 Signs We're Doing A Crummy Job At Discipleship," YouthMinistry 360, October 4, 2012 October 4, 2012, [www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship](http://www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship).

<sup>56</sup> Philippians 2:12 (NIV).

<sup>57</sup> "YM Essentials: 5 Signs We're Doing A Crummy Job At Discipleship," YouthMinistry 360, October 4, 2012 October 4, 2012, [www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship](http://www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship).

students, student ministries are not helping students with a relational connection with God along their faith journey.

### Symptoms of Questioning Christianity

The issues that students have with the church are also directed towards Christianity. If the place that houses those who claim to be Christ followers is not teaching or representing Christ well, how can Christianity matter? This skepticism is becoming apparent. In a study from the Barna Group that was reported in the book *UnChristian*, showed that 16- to 29-year-olds have a greater degree of criticism toward Christianity than previous generations due to a growing sense of disengagement and disillusionment.<sup>58</sup> The disillusionment comes from Christians being viewed as a poor representation of Christ. They see a Christian holding onto the claims of Christ for an opportunity to gain power or prestige. They are rejecting Christianity not on the basis of the claims of Christ, but because Christians are making these claims while living as if they are not true.<sup>59</sup> Ministry then gets even more difficult. Pastors indicate “ministry is more difficult than ever before because people are increasingly hostile and negative toward Christianity.”<sup>60</sup> Christianity within the youth culture has become benign. Many students regularly attend church services, student ministry gatherings, big student ministry conventions, and annual mission trips, but religious information they have

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<sup>58</sup> George Barna, "A New Generation Expresses Its Skepticism And Frustration With Christianity," *The Barna Group (blog)*, [www.barnagroup.com](http://www.barnagroup.com) (accessed September 24, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 75.

<sup>60</sup> George Barna, "A New Generation Expresses Its Skepticism And Frustration With Christianity," *The Barna Group (blog)*, [www.barnagroup.com](http://www.barnagroup.com) (accessed September 24, 2007).

internalized is not shaping their lives and futures.<sup>61</sup> The movement of Christians without foundation creates the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as explained previously causing a watered down imposter faith.<sup>62</sup> Barna research asked 16-29 year olds to identify their impressions of Christianity, one of the common themes was "Christianity is changed from what it used to be" and "Christianity in today's society no longer looks like Jesus."<sup>63</sup>

Christianity is also seen as being too difficult and therefore it goes untried. Students see Christianity with too high a moral standard, and do not wish to live a compromised moral life.<sup>64</sup> Trying to live by a Christian standard while following sinful desires creates a moral dilemma that they are not willing to confront. Therefore they walk away from their Christian commitments that were made in the confines of a safe and somewhat sterile environment of student ministries, churches, and families. This battle is called cognitive dissonance by psychologist, explains opposing behaviors and beliefs causes mental distress and emotional hurt. "We seek to resolve the tension by dropping or modifying one of those contradictory beliefs or behaviors. Once we do, our psyche's harmony is restored."<sup>65</sup> Christianity is found to be difficult and students walk away. Many sermons are delivered with a central theme that anyone can "be a successful

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<sup>61</sup> Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, *Awakening Youth Discipleship* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 4.

<sup>62</sup> "Author: More Teens Becoming "fake" Christians," CNN, August 27, 2010 August 27, 2010, [edition.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/08/27/almostchristian](http://edition.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/08/27/almostchristian).

<sup>63</sup> George Barna, "A New Generation Expresses Its Skepticism And Frustration With Christianity," *The Barna Group* (blog), accessed September 24, 2007, [www.barnagroup.com](http://www.barnagroup.com).

<sup>64</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Locations 205-211.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



Christian if you just try hard enough.”<sup>66</sup> Spend thirty minutes a day reading the scriptures and praying, giving your tithe, and serving somewhere within the church are the themes often heard. If you are struggling, do more and try harder to grow more becomes a chant that has little meaning. After many cycles of trying harder and failing more, a student gives up and simply says; I can’t do it. Due to what students see as inconsistent living between faith statements and Christ follower’s actions, Christianity is not seen as valid.

Too much of today’s pop Christianity sounds like bad Buddhism or pseudo Islam. Christianity is not a vague, amorphous, ethereal religion; nor is it a prescribed set of ritual practices, whether they be liturgical or litigious, religious or political. You can try to get rid of flesh and blood and make Christianity into a religion of excarnation, but you will fail.<sup>67</sup>

Arguments about Christianity being too political, judgmental, programmed, and linear; cause students to see Christianity as an organization, not a relationship. They hear conversations within the church about attendance, the building, and budgets. They see and sometimes hear from youth workers about the political environment within the churches staffing structure. Many times student ministries get the left over rooms and are made to adjust their use of rooms and schedule for the older adults or the children’s ministry. They are told to be careful with sound levels and avoid messy games that could ruin the carpet. These words and actions create a mentality that the church is not for them so they do not fit the church, and therefore they do not fit Christianity.

### The Needs of Students and Discipleship

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<sup>66</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 123.

<sup>67</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 661.

Students are looking for something. They are increasingly looking for something that matters, is sustainable, and a greater adventure than what they are seeing today. They are looking for a relationship with someone bigger and greater than what they see around them. They are looking for a relationship with transcendence, knowing the mystical and the divine, surpassing all that is normal to someone or something that fills their God-shaped vacuum.<sup>68</sup> While the increase in individuals that consider themselves not affiliated to a religious movement continues to grow, David Kinnaman from the Barna Group describes many of them as Nomads or Exiles. Nomads have walked away from the church, but still consider themselves Christian. Exiles are those still invested in their faith journey, but are confused between the church and the culture.<sup>69</sup> There is still a desire to believe in and experience something or someone that is recognized as a God that matters. They are also desperate for significance, meaning and purpose.<sup>70</sup> They want to know that they are doing something and living a life that has meaning. They want to move beyond a life as usual mentality to a life that has a cause to live for where they can be fully engaged. They are also looking for community, connecting with other people in meaningful connected relationships.<sup>71</sup> A connected relationship is defined as a relationship that offers love and acceptance, creates a comfort level infused with honesty, and declares that people are becoming not that they have

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (United States Of America: Group Publishing, 2001), 43.

<sup>69</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 61-62, 66.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (United States Of America: Group Publishing, 2001), 44.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

arrived.<sup>72</sup> The needs of our students are not being met in a discipling relationship with parents or other caring adults. This is why students are leaving the church and their relational connection to God.

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Ross, ed., *Transforming Student Ministry* (Nashville: Life Way Press, 2005), 69-71.

## SECTION TWO

### OTHER POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

This section will consider other possible solutions to the ministry problem. Other possible solutions considered are increasing the education of youth workers in our colleges and universities, the increase of spiritual development information and curriculum, the programmatic approach to student ministries, and the Orange movement establishing a need for students to be more connected to their parents within spiritual development or faith journey activities.

#### Increased Youth Worker Education

A simple Google search of student ministry degrees brings over three million results. Student ministry education in colleges and universities can be traced back to the mid 1970's<sup>1</sup> and it has grown ever since. In the 1990's there was a heightened seriousness and support for student ministries as a profession.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in the 2000's there has been a marked increase in the undergraduate and graduate educational opportunities for student ministers.<sup>3</sup> With the increase of college majors also brought an

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<sup>1</sup>Mark W. Cannister, "A Brief History of AYME," Association of Youth Ministry Educators, [www.aymeducators.org/?page=AYMEHistory](http://www.aymeducators.org/?page=AYMEHistory) (accessed August 12, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff, *Timeless Youth Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, eds., *Starting Right* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 84.

increase in the number of professors as well as increasing the prominence of a student ministry degree from universities. The graduating classes of these universities continue to increase. The question then comes are student ministry majors simply a marketing ploy or can colleges effectively equip students to minister among students?<sup>4</sup> It can be clearly understood that the number of graduates with student ministry degrees are far more than student ministry positions within the churches in the United States.

Another question develops regarding the educational outcomes of the college graduates. They more than likely have received a good theological and Biblical education, but will it be practical in reaching the students of today? Unfortunately, in the church culture, student ministries has been seen as something that the church has simply because they have students. It is not seen a viable and needed ministry to a subculture of the community. Combining this simplistic view of student ministries in some churches with the more educated youth worker and the possibility of conflict or high turnover rates can be expected. The educational pursuits of youth workers are needed with an ever-changing youth culture. However, with the rise in educated youth workers and the mass exodus of students from churches and the faith, there continues to be a problem.

#### Increase of Spiritual Development Curriculum

The need for spiritual development creates a need for quality curriculum. With a walk through most Christian bookstores or a web search, it is well seen that there is no shortage for curriculum. The amount of curriculum can be overwhelming. Student ministry curriculum and how-to books are becoming a significant industry in the United

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<sup>4</sup> David Livermore, "The Youth Ministry Education Debate: Irrelevant Theorists vs. Mindless Practitioners," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 1, no. 1 (2002, Fall): 89.

States. This market with high energy, visible, and large budget programs promise great student ministry in a box.<sup>5</sup> Which one is best, who wrote it, how much is it, how easy is it to deliver; are just a few of the questions that a youth worker considers as they decide on a curriculum. Curriculum is also written for a volunteer led ministry.<sup>6</sup> With many volunteers caring for a family, working a full time job, and more than likely fulfilling many volunteer responsibilities within the church, time to create high quality curriculum is not their primary concern, finding one is. Many professional youth workers also do not take the time to create a systematic learning curriculum for their specific students. They too will turn to the curriculum of higher visible, higher quality, large budget programs to allow them more time for other issues or more time off.

The marketing by publishers is to sell the product, and selling the product to as many student ministries, volunteer led ministries or professional youth workers as possible. This leads to another issue with spiritual development curriculum; it is written with a big target in mind. It does not narrow in on specific groups of students with their specific needs. The needs of students are vast and different based on their history, family, and atmosphere in which they live. When a youth worker needs to discover a curriculum, they need to find one that fits the needs of many students. This is a difficult task. While curriculum is needed to give direction towards an end goal of educating and informing a student, it is not personal for each student. Curriculum is used to assist the youth worker and educate the student, however, it may miss the mark for a portion of the

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<sup>5</sup> Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, *Awakening Youth Discipleship* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 3.

<sup>6</sup> This information comes from conversations with Group Publishing, Youth Specialties, and Wesley Press editors. These conversations were in regards to a request that I write some curriculum and this was a parameter given to me.

students with in the ministry. We have grown accustomed to using written resources to attract large numbers of students, to get them to make a profession of faith.<sup>7</sup> Looking for the latest and greatest student ministry book and follow the ten simple steps to improve your student ministries found in the curriculums, will not create an atmosphere for spiritual development.<sup>8</sup>

### The Programmatic Approach to Student Ministry

As student ministries continue to grow and the atmosphere surrounding the ministry becomes more professional, a structured or programmed approach to student ministry is developed. There becomes a creation of the “Its about Sunday Stupid mantra.”<sup>9</sup> Sunday mantra includes a well-practiced worship band, Intelligent lighting effects, and high quality production much like a live television performance. Ministries strive to be relevant, but relevance is not related to the bells and whistles that fill student ministry rooms across the United States.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, many church budgets reflect this mentality where more money is spent on what happens on Sunday morning than any other time of the week. The Sunday mantra works its way throughout the rest of the week with the creation of a step-by-step structure. The need for a structure in youth ministry is needed so there is a focused approach. If not, the youth ministry will go in

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<sup>7</sup> Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, *Awakening Youth Discipleship* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Chap Clark and Kara Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Thom Schultz, "Its About Sunday Stupid," *Holy Soup* (blog), <http://holysoup.com/2012/07/18/its-about-sunday-stupid> (accessed July 18, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Bret L. Allen, *Shift!* (Sacramento: Toolzone 4 Leaders, 2005), 33-34.

multiple directions and may never assist the student on their faith journey. However, the creation of a programmatic only approach will not allow for the variety of students within the ministry and by its very nature, does not allow for a truly relational element in the ministry. The assumption of a program only approach takes a pool of students with different learning styles, needs, and or questions, moves them through a series of events and or curriculums, and expects the same outcomes. This mindset creates a simple arithmetic formula of A (student) + B (events) + C (curriculum) = Disciple. Duffy Robbins, long time youth worker and student ministries professor indicates; the scriptures do not give a step-by-step, systematic approach to spiritual growth and development.<sup>11</sup> The inability to realize the variables of the student's life creates a potential problem for the outcome. These variables might consist of family structure, family history, life experiences both positive and negative, relationships, as well as opportunities for service, expression of opinion, and a challenge to learn, grow and develop. There is a need for structure, but if we are to help most students in their faith journey, it will take more than "if you build it they will come"<sup>12</sup> mentality. A program only approach creates an Attractional, Propositional, and Colonial<sup>13</sup> ministry. Ministries that work to attract for the sake of attendance do not create or even earn the opportunity to speak into the lives of those they have been charged to serve.

Additionally, our program only structures have not taken into account the extension of adolescence. Adolescence is a transitional phase of life where they are part

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<sup>11</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 387.

<sup>12</sup> *Field Of Dreams*, directed by Phil Alden Robinson (Dyersville, IA: Universal Pictures Studio, 1989), DVD.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 18.



student and part adult.<sup>14</sup> Developmental psychologist John Santrock calls adolescence the period of life between childhood and adulthood lasting from roughly 10-13 years of age and ending between 18-22. Defining when adolescence ends is a difficult task as it begins with biology and ends in culture.<sup>15</sup> Other noted researchers have indicated that adolescents could extend to the later half of students twenties. Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith describes this new extended phase in life. “The transition from the teenage years to fully achieved adulthood has stretched out into an extended stage that is often amorphous, unstructured, and convoluted, lasting upward of twelve or more years.”<sup>16</sup> Most student ministries do not extend past the high school graduation. Students leave their high school and their church. There is a mistaken assumption that students will spend their four years of college growing their faith, starting a career, beginning a family and return to church as a complete adult.<sup>17</sup> When the program only ministry ends, the assumption is that all students are prepared for anything that comes their way especially within their spiritual development.

### The Orange Movement

The Orange Movement is to establish a partnership between the church and parents for the greater spiritual development of children and students. The premise of the Orange Movement is that two combined influences make a greater impact than just two

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<sup>14</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Locations 2165-2167.

<sup>17</sup> Reggie Joiner, Church Bomar, and Abbie Smith, *The Slow Fad* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 25.

influences.<sup>18</sup> The key word is combined. Creating a greater partnership between the church and parents is always a positive. However, many have used this movement at the expense of the students and the ministry to students. One of the resulting issues found in the National Study of Youth and Religion that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.<sup>19</sup> If a parent is not growing in their faith journey then by following their lead, the student will not be growing either. Add to this issue, many churches are then combining students with adults in ministry opportunities. By the time adolescents enter high school, nearly every one has been subjected to a decade or more of adult-driven and adult-controlled programs, systems, and institutions that are primarily concerned with adult's agendas, needs, and dreams.<sup>20</sup> Many adults have stated that they know what it is like to be a teenager because they were one a student that made bad choices but turned out all right.

However, the youth culture has changed. Jim Burns has made this statement many times; "I was sixteen once, but I have never walked in their (this generation of students) shoes."<sup>21</sup> The birth of the youth sub-culture began in the 1950's and became a driving force in the 1960's. Entertainment companies and the clothing industry began to focus their attention on this new sub-culture that was gaining prominence.<sup>22</sup> Within the 1960's, students began to see assassinations of beloved world leaders, nuclear

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<sup>18</sup> Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange* (United States Of America: David C Cook, 2009), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Smith, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 261.

<sup>20</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 46.

<sup>21</sup> Jim Burns. "Trainer Of Trainers" (training of Youth Workers, San Clemente, CA, October 1, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 21.

proliferation, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, civil rights issues and unrest all created questions and issues for this generation of students and for their parents and grandparents to answer the questions that were raised. Add to these questions were the issues of the 1970's including Watergate, economic confusion, hostage taking in Iran, the continuous expression of free love and in contrast the Vietnam War, and the mysterious illness now known as AIDS. This culture began to ask questions of their elders and churches and they could not give adequate answers. Adults went from being a part of a relatively stable and cohesive community intent on caring for its young to a free-for-all, independent, and fragmented people seeking their own pleasure and survival.<sup>23</sup> The students of the 1970's and early 1980's are now the parents of our students. Looking at today's culture of students, it appears to be healthy, most having even more than they need, and the opportunity to accomplish more than previous generations. Yet, students need adults to become adults who are available, care for, and do not have a hidden or self-centered agenda.<sup>24</sup>

Today, students face many challenges that have only been advanced by an emerging culture that does not accept the wisdom of church leadership and in many cases their parents. Research completed for the book *UnChristian* found many young adults outside of Christianity have little trust in the Christian faith and those who are Christ followers. Many feel rejected by Christians and so they reject Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Continually creating feelings of being disconnected not just from the institution or the gathering of

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<sup>23</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 22.

<sup>24</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 42.

<sup>25</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 11.

Christ followers, but of the individual followers and therefore the one they represent. Students begin to recoil from the church and Christ followers because of the pain they feel from not being accepted for who they are, and not being able to express themselves.<sup>26</sup> If there is no connection between a student and the gathering of Christ followers, other than their parents, there cannot be a sense of belonging to the church or to Christ followers. Without a connection there is no way for the church as an organization and as Christ followers to understand the plight of the students. When the students realize they are not heard or understood, the church becomes a place where they do not belong. A continual search for spiritual satisfaction will grow and become more intense.<sup>27</sup>

Christ followers should come alongside student ministries, youth workers and parents to help students grow and mature in Christ for a lifetime, not just in a phase of life found through the end of their high school years. For this to happen, Christ followers cannot hope this happen while keeping a distance. It will only happen as Christ followers pass on the experience of a lifelong journey with Christ that engages the head, heart, hands, and soul.

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<sup>26</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Locations 539-541.

<sup>27</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 25.

## SECTION THREE

### THESIS

This project claims that discipleship of students must focus on Mark 12:30-31 while providing an effective solution to the ministry problem. Specifically, this project claims that a discipleship process based on head, heart, and hand growth surrounded by a renewed relational connection will refocus students towards a life long transformational process, and reverse the trend of students walking away from a connection with God.

#### Definition of Disciple

Discipleship is described as the process in which one becomes a disciple of another. The word disciple defined in Greek is *mathetes* meaning learner, pupil, follower or apprentice.<sup>1</sup> From Latin, disciple is derived from the verb form *discere*, meaning to learn.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the Greek and Latin, indicate a disciple and therefore discipleship is a process beyond a one-time understanding or learning opportunity, and more of a movement of growth over an extended period of time. Within the thesis of this project, it is an understanding that disciple and the discipleship process is one who is a follower of

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<sup>1</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 12.

Jesus, who is with Jesus, who is learning from Jesus<sup>3</sup> and passing on this passion for Jesus to others.

A deeper definition of disciple can be found throughout the Bible with this project concentrating on the words of Christ regarding a disciple. In Matthew 5-7, Jesus preached what is known as the Sermon on the Mount describing characteristics of a Christ follower. He describes these followers as gentle, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaker, salt of the earth, and light of the world.<sup>4</sup> Jesus also used the term “my disciple” giving a description of what is a true follower and learner. Found in Luke 14:25-33, Jesus challenges those following Him that were not serious about being a disciple. He challenged them that to be a disciple of Jesus a person must love Christ above all other relationships, follow Him even in suffering and death, and surrender everything to Him.<sup>5</sup> In John 8:31-32, disciples are to hold to His teachings allowing them to know the truth and be set free.<sup>6</sup> John 13:34-35, Jesus teaches that a true disciple models the same kind of love that has been shown to them.<sup>7</sup> In John 15, Jesus challenged disciples to be connected to Him by abiding, bearing fruit and keeping his commands.<sup>8</sup> This indicates that a disciple will be known their actions.<sup>9</sup> A disciple is then

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<sup>3</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 291.

<sup>4</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 16.

recognized by a willingness to know and follow the teachings Christ gave, to love Him above anyone else, to live by actions that honor Him, and surrender everything to Him. “Unfortunately, the twenty-first century church has many followers of Christ... We dabble in Christianity. That is not what Jesus had in mind when He called us to be His disciples.”<sup>10</sup> Dallas Willard indicates that it is generally acknowledged that one can be a professing Christian and a church member in good standing without being a disciple.<sup>11</sup> A painful truth as the church bears witness to the ministry problem previously described. In many aspects students are following their parents, and in some cases church leaders, in following propositions that hold no meaning, passions that have no depth, actions that are for personal gain, and surrender to self not to something greater.

#### Foundation of Discipleship

Discipleship, for it to be a growing faith journey that is effective, must be developed in an understanding of being Missional, Relational, and Incarnational.<sup>12</sup> For student ministries to be missional it must be sure all that is done points to Christ. As stated in the problem, many are working to attract students, but the attraction becomes to an event or one church over another. The mission must be focused on Christ, not a program, an event, or an address.

If a youth ministry begins with this mission in place, to be relational is a logical movement. The relational foundation is the key within the faith journey. Without a

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<sup>10</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 291.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 18.

relational connection as the primary foundation, nothing within the faith journey will have meaning. John Burke, pastor of Gateway church sums it up this way,

We chase something we think will bring us life. In our fast paced society we talk fast, drive fast, think fast, eat fast, but have you ever thought about why you speed through life – going around in circles on the giant ball of dirt? Most of us spend our lives trying to get what we think we want, but often when we get it, we ask, Now What?...I've come to believe that our deepest longings only find fulfillment through relationships – with God and with other people. Without those relationships our pursuits and goals and dreams and achievements are like a train going around in circles – what's the point?<sup>13</sup>

The focus will not be on what is done, but on the individuals. The ministry and ministry staff must strive for greater and deeper connections creating a Be-With mentality. “If I am Jesus’ disciple that means I am with Him to learn from Him how to be like Him...The being-with by watching and by hearing, is an absolute necessity.”<sup>14</sup> “You don’t know something by being detached and distant, but only by being in relationship with it, by having personal knowledge of it and being taken in by it. You have to enter into ‘intercourse’ with the subject.”<sup>15</sup> Relational ministry is a term that has been used in student ministry almost since it’s beginning, and it is still critical today. Cognitive psychologists teach that significant relationships become the “blankies” students’ carry with them from the familiar into the unfamiliar world as a late adolescent and beyond.<sup>16</sup> Relationships with students cannot be reduced to a commodity that can be

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<sup>13</sup> John Burke, *Soul Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 10.

<sup>14</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 276.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 802.

<sup>16</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 27.



bought sold, traded,<sup>17</sup> or created simply for cultural leverage<sup>18</sup> to bring in a bigger crowd of students. In student ministries, relationships should create belonging not for a cause or a padded number on a report.<sup>19</sup> It should be real<sup>20</sup> with a focus on the student. Discipling a student cannot be done at a distance. Historically, student ministries have worked hard to impress students, but that is accomplished at a distance. Even impression or attractional ideas are getting more difficult because budgets and creativity cannot give enough wow for the student. For a ministry to make an impression on a student, ministry leaders must get up close with those they serve. Acts 16 gives the understanding that Paul did not see Timothy as an object of mission to be won over or as a student to fulfill responsibilities Paul did not want to do.<sup>21</sup> Paul viewed Timothy as a friend and cared for his transformation, not for future work, but for Timothy's connection and growth with God. It is about life investment that does not end at high school graduation.

Incarnational movements are to understand the actions of Jesus.

“Jesus did not come halfway to earth, not did He pretend to be a man. He became flesh and blood, lived among us (John 1:14), and walked the highways and alleys of first-century Palestine (Matthew 4:23). He was, emphatically, God with us (Matthew 1:23), and He was physically present to human senses (I John 1:1-3).”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Steve Saccone, *Relational Intelligence* (United States Of America: Jossey-bass, 2009), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 77-78.

<sup>19</sup> Reggie Joiner, Church Bomar, and Abbie Smith, *The Slow Fad* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 41.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 202-203.

<sup>21</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Doug Stevens, *Called To Care* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 21.

Just as Jesus stepped out of Heaven and into our lives by giving us an example of how to live, student ministry leaders must be intentionally incarnational with the students they serve. Student ministry leaders must get off the platform, and get connected to the lives of students. There must be a changing of the mindset from attractional events and propositional truth to an incarnational focus that becomes personal and not a mass appeal. The Missional, Relational, Incarnational movement of ministry becomes a viral movement. It becomes contagious and simple enough to pass on to succeeding generations. Paul gives example of this in 2 Timothy 2:2 reminding Timothy of the things he was taught and now to pass them along.<sup>23</sup> Creating this foundation, a discipling ministry to students can begin to take place focused on Christ, in relationship, for service to the Kingdom of God.

### Guiding Principles for Guiding Student Christ Followers

Working with students today, youthworkers must approach the challenge of the faith journey with a different perspective. No longer can there be a fill-in-the-blank, linear, arithmetic equation approach to discipleship. Student ministries must understand how to challenge students.

It all begins with relationship. Students have made relationship a life mission.<sup>24</sup> Youth workers need to understand this and work to earn the right to have a relationship with the students they serve. They will never see growth in the student if they speak of God as if they were giving directions to a location. Creating social interactions allows a

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<sup>23</sup> Neil Cole, *Search and Rescue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 116.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 306.

student to work out the information they are attaining, and process it through the relational lens. It must come out of a relationship with God into a relationship with the students.

Second, student ministries must offer the incentive of “why” before the “what” of being a Christ follower.<sup>25</sup> Speaking to students must reach into their passions based on a relational connection with God versus a theological argument about Him. While a youthworker still needs to challenge and teach to the intellect of the student, the opening will be found through an emotional connection. Students will listen to a youthworker if they sense the youthworker genuinely cares for them. Students are engaged in a passion pursuit of a cause and a desire to have a life that has meaning. Transformation will not be found in gaining more information, but connecting emotions and passions to the information gained.

Third, youth workers need to create tension, struggles, even conflict and allowance to disagree so that a student can begin to understand why they believe what they believe.<sup>26</sup> These moments challenge the student to think through their thoughts and belief statements. It gives the student a picture that the youthworker trusts them with their development of knowledge and the ability to understand greater truth. It will also not be a simple question and answer process. The student must be challenged to work through difficult thoughts and even doubts.

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<sup>25</sup> Tim Elmore, "Communicating With The Next Generation," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation) (accessed August 30, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Finally, youthworkers need to create this search for greater truth of God by connecting the unfamiliar to the familiar through active involvement.<sup>27</sup> Challenging the students to move beyond the intellectual development to the active learning will cause the student to practice what they are learning. Practicing what has been learned intellectually attaches the truth to action making it more real and attainable to the students.

### Guiding Principles of Discipleship

Building on the foundation of Missional, Relational, and Incarnational, a healthy youth ministry discipleship focus must have some guiding principles. The first principle states that our growth along our faith journey is up to God.<sup>28</sup> Many Christ followers assume that growth happens due to human strategies or the amount of work a follower puts into their journey. One enters into a connection relationship with God based on grace not by anything the individual can accomplish. In I Corinthians 3:7-9, Paul gives a picture of garden and God as the gardener. It is only the gardener that can cause growth.<sup>29</sup> This is the step of regeneration where God acting alone gives the Christ follower life when death is deserved.<sup>30</sup>

The second principle comes alongside the first. While spiritual growth and development is up to God, the Christ follower's discipline and efforts are critical for

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 387.

growth on the journey.<sup>31</sup> Understanding that God is the provider of growth, but as Philippians 2:12-13 challenges the Christ follower to “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”<sup>32</sup> Here the Christ follower must take the responsibility to work in cooperation with God’s purposes.<sup>33</sup>

The third principle is spiritual growth and development happens in the baby steps and may be hard to see at first.<sup>34</sup> Jesus in Matthew 13:31-32 tells of the great things that can come from a small mustard seed. A great tree can come from a small seed. It is the journey of little steps that allows a Christ follower to see growth, but only over longer periods of time. “Small is big if God is in it, so Paul encourages the church to do little large... Small, simple inputs can have massive consequences.”<sup>35</sup>

Fourth, Spiritual growth and development must connect to every aspect of the Christ followers life.<sup>36</sup> In today’s culture, many compartmentalize life not allowing one part of their life to affect another. Spiritual growth and development will begin with an inside change and grow touching all of the Christ followers life. Luke 2:52 gives an

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<sup>31</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV).

<sup>33</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 387.

<sup>34</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 982 and 987.

<sup>36</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 10.

example of how Jesus grew intellectually, physically, socially and spiritually. Every aspect of the Christ follower's life must be fully engaged in the process of growth.

Next, spiritual growth and development along the journey occurs best in community.<sup>37</sup> The family is the best possible place for a student, as a Christ follower, to experience growth. Having another person close enough to experience life changes and challenges together creates a greater opportunity for a Christ follower to be held accountable and assisted in their faith journey. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 gives us a clear challenge by Moses to the leaders of each family to be an example of a Christ follower and teach their children God's truth.

Finally, most growth happens within the great battles and challenges of life.<sup>38</sup> When life seems to be on a smooth path, the Christ follower tends to rely upon themselves and what they need each day. When the battles and challenges of life arrive, the Christ follower turns to and relies on Christ. At these moments the Christ follower is more attuned to listen and respond to God's leading. It is here where growth happens. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, Paul encourages the perseverance and faith of the people of Thessalonica as they endured persecution and trials. Persecution and trails usually produce fear, and this helps the Christ follower produce faith. "Fear awakens us to danger, but creativity inspires us to climb out of ruts to embrace life. Those who don't face the future with fear and trembling have something missing from their faith. Or said another way: their faith is so listless that even appropriate fear can't arouse it."<sup>39</sup> It is

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 764.

after these moments that growth and development along the faith journey become apparent.

### Process of Discipleship

A healthy journey of faith cannot be found in a compartmentalized, fill in the blank, programmatic, or  $A+B+C=Disciple$  equation. It is found in a life fully engaged in following Christ. It is found in Deuteronomy 6, Matthew 22, and Mark 12. It has been titled the Great Commandment. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”<sup>40</sup> This process has been described in many ways; Missional – Head, Relational – Heart, Incarnational – Hand,<sup>41</sup> “Trinitarian logic of thinking, loving, and doing;”<sup>42</sup> Character, Community, Commission;<sup>43</sup> and Orthodoxy – Faithful thinking, Orthopraxy - Faithful practice of the Christian life,<sup>44</sup> and Orthopathy – Faithful and compassionate feeling. For the purpose of this project, this process is titled H3 with respect given to the no longer produced third generation Hummer vehicle. This process cannot be understood as a linear process where one action builds upon another. Rather it is a collection of all the experiences found in the atmospheres of our head, heart, and hand knowledge. If these atmospheres are understood as interconnected circles, where they intersect represents the soul, the fourth

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<sup>40</sup> Mark 12:30 (NIV).

<sup>41</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Klaus Issler and Ronald Habermas, *How We Learn* (Eugene: Wipf And Stock Publishers, 1994), 173.

<sup>44</sup> Chris Folmsbee, *A New Kind of Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 51.

part of this process from in the Mark 12 passage. Returning to the guiding principles, the three atmospheres are where the Christ follower's discipline and efforts are engaged. The intersection, the soul, indicates that growth is up to God, and infiltrates all aspects of the Christ follower's life. As the Christ follower lives in the efforts of growing within their H3, their soul, where God truly supplies the growth, becomes the sweet spot of growth. The H3 process becomes that partnership of growth found in the relationship not of a teacher and learner or leader and follower, but one that is just a little farther along the journey than the other. While each atmosphere has a distinct purpose, each must work and connect with the others to create the fertile soil for growth that can only come from God.

### Head

Historically, student ministry discipleship was seen as collecting intellectual knowledge of God. Fill the blanks, Bible bowl, Scripture memorization games were all used to collect knowledge of God. Unfortunately, this became more of an exercise of learning about God rather than learning from God. Learning about God also allowed the growth of the movement known as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as discussed in the ministry problem. Bible study became more of a surface level study that can only be done with a group and personal study was and is rarely done. There has been no desire to dive deeply within God's word to gain greater knowledge that only He can give. Learning from God allows the Christ follower to learn to live their life as Christ would live their life if He were living their life.<sup>45</sup> When a Christ follower begins to desire

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<sup>45</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 283.



greater knowledge from God, they begin to put His truths together formulating a greater knowledge beyond propositional thinking. Learning about God can be an acquisition of knowledge and possibly storing that information for a later day. It can also be an understanding of responses or if ...then propositions. However, learning from God becomes more of a constructed knowledge. The Christ follower discovers, builds on, and discovers even greater truth than the surface level allows because of the many truths of God.<sup>46</sup> At this point the Christ follower is no longer a passive sponge receiving information, but one actively building greater knowledge of God,<sup>47</sup> while moving beyond the information gathering to creating meaning of something greater.<sup>48</sup> So the Bible and propositional truth gathering is not the destination; it's a compass that points to Jesus.<sup>49</sup> Those who work with students need to move beyond the learning about God to learning from God. James Fowler, developmental psychologist, encourages the use of critique, questioning, reflection, and evaluation for a young adult to discover greater faith development.<sup>50</sup> A greater engagement of the scripture and how Jesus lived, responded to people, and handled the situations of life is critical for a student to desire and learn from God. They are ready to move beyond the quick Sunday school answers to wrestling with the difficult issues of truth development. Student ministries that continue to use quick and easy, it is all in the box curriculums will continue to see students walk away from the

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<sup>46</sup> James Wilhoit and John M. Dettoni, eds., *Nurture that is Christian* (Grand Rapids: BridgePoint Books, 1995), 8-9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>48</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 15.

<sup>49</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 138.

<sup>50</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 405.

faith because it has no challenge and cannot stand up to the criticism of culture. Youth workers must refocus their teaching and challenge to look to Jesus' life and how He lived. Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola said it well in their book *Jesus Manifesto*; "The world likes Jesus; they just don't like the church. But increasingly, the church likes the church, yet it doesn't like Jesus...When we dethrone Jesus Christ from His rightful place, we tarnish the face of Christianity and redefine it out of existence."<sup>51</sup>

### Heart

The heart of a Christ follower's faith journey focuses on passions, compassions, worship, and meaningful experiences. If youthworkers refocus the view of the head and challenge the Christ follower to dig deeper into the scripture, the heart will follow. If the Christ follower reads the scripture not just for information gathering, they open themselves to being emotionally moved and connected to God. Dennis P. Hollinger, in his book *Head, Heart, and Hands*, expressed the need for a heart connection in a Christ followers spiritual development.

Our heart – the deep, inner core of who we are – evokes both joy and apprehension within us. It does so because we recognize that the within the heart are inner resources for coping with the challenges of life, but also patterns of affections, feelings, desires, and inner thoughts that we alone know and hope to keep that way. The heart is both friend and foe...Without attention to the heart, we have no hope of a vibrant dynamic relationship with Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Worship becomes the expression of the heart. This is not in regards to a church services or gatherings or even a genre of music, but a true worship of God that comes

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<sup>51</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), xvi.

<sup>52</sup> Dennis P. Hollinger, *Head, Heart & Hands* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 73.

from the depths of the individual. Individuals can gather information about God without passionately seeking Him. Genuine worship is to the audience of one. As a Christ follower expresses worship, the individual focuses attention to God, giving Him honor, and expressing to Him just how good He has been and will continue to be. This expression does not need to be in a church building, or even a gathering of other Christ followers. It is a moment for the individual and God that can be expressed publically or privately. Either expression will warm the heart or the core of the Christ follower.

Another focus of the heart in spiritual development is the building of community. True community is life-on-life, whole life eating together, sharing journeys, working through difficulties, wrestling with praxis (theology in practice), accountability, safety, openness, serving side by side, cultivating shared passion and holy discontent, mutuality, and host of variables.<sup>53</sup> One of the key factors for the growth of a student is the development of identity and identity is discovered within community. Sociologists consider a student's sense of belonging to a Christian community, more important than church attendance, as an indicator of life long spiritual transformation.<sup>54</sup> True and healthy community occurs when an individual has a sense of belonging publically, socially, and personally. Public community and belonging occurs with a shared experience.<sup>55</sup> Creating opportunities for students to have a shared experience, such as a service project or mission trip, gives them something to talk about and share a common

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<sup>53</sup> Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry 3.0* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 73.

<sup>54</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 41.

story. Social community or belonging is the snapshots or small talk moments of life.<sup>56</sup> These moments are short lived, but allow an individual to learn more about others. Personal community or belonging is where an individual shares private experiences, feelings, and thoughts.<sup>57</sup> This is the moment of risk for a student. Can they share personal information with this individual and will they still accept me? While this is difficult, it is critical for the development of the individual and their identity. This reaches the point of refrigerator rights.<sup>58</sup> Refrigerator rights are when someone has earned the right to go to the refrigerator, open it up to look for food without asking for permission. It is at that point that a sense of belonging or community has become evident with the individuals involved.

With the two aspects of the heart, worship and community, the student that engages their heart will have journeyed farther in their faith. This journey into spiritual development is not a journey that is to be taken alone. With the heart engaged with God in worship and with others in community, the potential for growth is exponential.

### Hand

The third atmosphere for the growth process is that of the hand. This is the easiest to understand because it is the one that is visible to all. However, it can be the one that is most deceitful to the individual and to others within their community. The hands are about action and doing. They are taking the learning from God that has passionately

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Will Miller, (Taken from a speech given at the Willow Creek Small Groups Conference, Chicago, IL October 27, 2008).

challenged the individual and moves them to action. This truth challenges the student to put their spiritual development into action; therefore their faith becomes a verb.<sup>59</sup> In James 1:22 it is understood that we are not to just read the word but do what it says, and in James 2:17 faith without works is dead, so the faith journey must be demonstrated in real life.<sup>60</sup> The hands become the basis in the foundation of being incarnational. It is living a life representing Jesus, out loud – in word or action, all the time. This is where we become the *imago Dei* (Image of God) by participating in the *missio Dei* (Mission of God).<sup>61</sup> Additionally, mission or the activity of faith helps give a realness of understanding regarding the teachings given the student. Mission connects to the message and should do so through the heart. The call to serve is given to all and even more clear in Matthew 9:38 Jesus calling for the disciples to pray for more workers for the harvest and Matthew 28:19 to go and make disciples. The student is to take what they have been given in the head and heart and pass it on to others where words and action complement each other.

Another aspect of the hand in spiritual development is be involved in the experiential opportunities of discovering God. Leonard Sweet in his book titled *Post Modern Pilgrims*; he used an acrostic that gives authority to the aspect of the hand in spiritual development. E.P.I.C. stands for Experiential, Participatory, Image Driven, and Connected.<sup>62</sup> In this same book, Marilyn Carlson Nelson, the chair, president and CEO of Carlson Companies was quoted as saying; “Anyone who views a sale as a transaction

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<sup>59</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (United States Of America: Harper Collins Publishers, 1981), 16.

<sup>60</sup> Dennis P. Hollinger, *Head, Heart & Hands* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 107.

<sup>61</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 24.

<sup>62</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Post Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), VII.

is going to be toast sown the line. Selling is not about peddling a product. It's about wrapping that product in a service – and about selling both the product and the service as an experience.”<sup>63</sup> Students are in the middle of an experience culture, and they want life laced with experience even within their education.<sup>64</sup> Students will then find their spiritual development through experiences that the student ministry and youthworkers help to create. Mark Driscoll, founding pastor of Mars Hill church in Seattle, indicates that people pursue three types of experiences. Observation Experiences is where an individual seeks out a performance to watch. Participation experiences require minimal effort without full engagement. Immersion experiences are where the individual helps create the experience.<sup>65</sup> “For today’s teenagers, experience is what they trust. And if we’re really honest, this is how we all live.”<sup>66</sup> This type of involvement is one of the best ways to find meaning, purpose and identity in life and build true relationships that are otherwise so hard to find.<sup>67</sup> Youth workers need to create opportunities for students to experience God through immersion as they help create the experience.

### The Soul – The Sweet Spot of Growth

As a youthworker walks with a student helping them connect the atmospheres of their live, head, heart, and hands, a challenge must be given to the soul. In many cases this would be thought of as simply a conversion experience. However, it is more of a

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 72-73.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry 3.0* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 104.

<sup>67</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 240.

surrender experience. When a challenge is given to a student to surrender their life, their school year, even their day, they begin to own their faith. It becomes personal for them. It is not just a lesson learned, a phase to go through, or a mission trip to prepare for and then forget two weeks after the trip. It is when they pick up their cross daily and follow Jesus.<sup>68</sup> It is not that they live anymore, but rather Christ living in and through them.<sup>69</sup> This is a big challenge to a student. They are a time where they are getting ready to take control of a vehicle at age 16 and life somewhat on their own as they enter college. It is here where this challenge of integrating their head, heart and hands creates the fertile soul of growth in their soul.

### The H3 Journey

In many ways are churches and student ministries have become walled castles. Pastors and youth workers spent great amounts of time protecting the walls and those who camp out inside. They work hard to make the castle attractive. When one enters the castle, they given well prepared, polished information. The attendees are kept at a distance because they bring with them a messiness that few what to know about or touch. The H3 Journey of head (learning from Jesus), heart (worship and community) and hand (serving and experience) growth creating the fertile soul for soul growth (surrender, the sweet spot of growth) is not for the walled castle makers.

The future demands our hands. As the body of Christ, the church exists to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. St. Peter the apostle was the disciple entrusted with the church, and the future desperately needs a thriving, vital, hands-on church. The future demands our head. The head of the body is Christ,

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<sup>68</sup> Luke 9:23 (NIV).

<sup>69</sup> Galatians 2:20 (New Century Version).

and the mind of Christ is imperative for right now, the teenage years of the twenty-first century. Paul the apostle is the one most helpful for our understanding of what is the mind of Christ (See 1 Corinthians 2:16). The future demands our heart. Mary and John symbolize the heart of the gospel. We need the example and inspiration of Mary, whose let-it-be heart trusted the impossibility of a virgin birth and who, as the mother of Jesus, pondered the mystery (See Luke 1:29). And John, whose writings best portray the beating heart of the gospel and the pulsating mystery of faith.<sup>70</sup>

It is for those who look to the destination but are also willing to be on the journey with others.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 831-838.

<sup>71</sup> Leonard Sweet, 11. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 18.



## SECTION FOUR

### THE PROJECT

The project substantiating the claim is a series of podcast with the purpose of informing, encouraging and training youthworkers to refocus themselves and their student ministries development of Christ followers along a faith journey. This project directs youthworkers to engage the head, heart, and hands of the student towards Christ surrounded by the foundation of relationship.

The series of podcasts are divided into six sections. The first section consists of two podcasts dealing with the problem of students walking away from the church and a commitment to God. Evidence of this problem is found in research completed by several organizations showing the departure from church attendance and the growth of the category of the Nones or no religious affiliation. They will also describe the problem not as a simple problem with a simple answer, but a multi-layered issue deserving the attention of the church, youthworkers, and parents. The second section consists of three podcasts focusing on cultural changes that must be understood in order to help students on their faith journey. Section three has three podcasts. This section looks at the crisis the church is facing, how it is trying to respond, and why it is not helping students towards learning, growing, and developing in their faith journey. The fourth section shares information regarding the battles students have with Christianity and has two podcasts. Students see Christianity as another approach to life that has a religious focus,

but not something that engages all aspects of their lives. The fifth section unveils what student's need for their faith journey. It also includes a definition of discipleship students grasp and the guiding principles of growth on the faith journey. The final section of podcasts will present the H3 model of the faith journey. In this section, listeners will understand how all of the above information pulls together to form an understanding how churches, youthworkers, and parents can help students develop a life-long faith journey.

Essentially, the project creates a redeveloped thinking and purpose for student ministries to assist students in their journey of being a life-long Christ follower. This recreated view of the faith journey can be used in churches and ministries of any size and directed by full time paid youthworkers through to volunteers that feel poorly equipped but love students. The series of podcast are more functional for the audience this information needs to help than other artifacts that could be used. Each podcast can be used separately, with each section, or the whole series for personal use or training for the student ministry team.

## SECTION FIVE

### PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

#### Goals

- Create an understanding of the crisis that exists regarding students leaving the church and their faith.
- Communicate how the change in culture is adding to the crisis
- Communicate how current methods within most churches are not as effective as needed to face the crisis.
- Create an understanding of the questions students have regarding Christianity.
- Communicate the foundational needs to be met of a faith journey for students.
- Catalyze a ministry focus that concentrates on the H3 faith journey.

#### Audience

The audience of the podcast series will range from parents, volunteer student ministry leaders, full time youthworkers, and church leaders. Many currently see the crisis within the student culture of churches and student ministries. Many want to critically look at the current mode of ministry operation and discover how to improve or change their ministries to better assist students in their faith journey. The primary listeners will be those who are willing to learn, desire to see change, and are passionately reaching students in the name of Christ.

## Projected Scope

The projected scope of this project is to create a series of twenty podcasts that will inform, encourage, and assist parents, youth workers, and church leaders to help students with their faith journey.

## Content

### Section One: We are in the middle of a Crisis

1. From A Slow Fade To A Mass Exodus
2. Loosing Students From The Faith – The Rise Of The Nones

### Section 2: We aren't in Kansas anymore

3. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
4. I Want To Be Known
5. Dysfunction becoming the Norm

### Section 3: The Church in the Crisis

6. You Can't Entertain Me Enough
7. Is there Anything Different
8. Am I a focus or an afterthought?

### Section 4: Is Christianity Real?

9. Does Christianity Matter
10. Too Hard So Why Try

### Section 5: The Foundation of the Faith Journey

11. Defining The Faith Journey

12. Growth Is Up To God, But My Efforts Towards Growth Are Critical

13. Baby Steps with Full Engagement of All of Me

14. E.P.I.C. MRI

15. Create Tension, Struggles, Even Conflicts

#### Section 7: The H3 Challenge

16. H3 Explained

17. Head

18. Heart

19. Hand

20. Put It All Together

#### Budget

The project will be used in connection with the National Network of Youth Ministries. I serve as the Great Lakes Regional Coordinator and we will be using these podcasts to further discussion, serve the youthworkers we currently serve, and continue to advance student ministry. Since there is already an infrastructure to use this project the cost to implement this project is minimal. We will be designing a subscription opportunity for youthworkers to receive a weekly podcast and enable a chat room for discussion on our web site ([www.youthworkers.net](http://www.youthworkers.net)). Our intent is to begin this subscription in September 2013.

## Standards of Publication

The National Network of Youth Ministries has developed the Web Site and will be hosting the podcasts and discussion boards.

### Action Plan

10-19-12 Submit Written statement for review

10-19/1-14-13 Complete scripts for podcasts

6-1-13 Begin recording podcasts

9-9-13 Post podcasts on web site

### Work Space

I will do most of my recording from my office, recording at East 91st Street Christian Church, and web development with the National Network of Youth Ministries.

### Key Support

Jama Davis will serve as my editor. Jama is my wife and a professor at Liberty University.

Alon Banks will serve as my web consultant. Alon is the Director of Partnerships and IT consultant for the National Network of Youth Ministries.

Anthony Lusby and Rhett Owens will serve as podcast producers. Anthony and Rhett serve as sound and video techs at East 91st Street Christian Church.

### Back Up Plan

If there are problems with recording at East 91st Street Christian Church, I will work with Mike Canny from Park Chapel Christian Church. Mike serves as Media Minister. If there are problems with web design, I will Marc Dittmer. Marc is the Creative Director at the Indianapolis Children's Museum.

## SECTION SIX

### POSTSCRIPT

#### Summary

The H3 movement, the topic chosen for my track 2 dissertation project, has been developing in me since 2003. During the completion of a Masters of Arts degree in Educational Ministries from Huntington University, the process of gaining head, heart, and hand knowledge was introduced. I began to see how gaining knowledge in these atmospheres of our lives is important in our faith journey. As a youthworker, for the past twenty-eight years, I have seen students walk away from the church and their “first love”<sup>1</sup> with Christ. This has been a painful experience for me. Many times I have felt that I was setting students up for failure if they did not have all that they needed for their journey. When I started this program, several research projects were published. Finally I had empirical evidence of what was happening with students and their faith. Through my reading, researching, and learning opportunities with George Fox, this issue has become the primary focus of what I see needs to be discussed and worked on to raise the level of excellence in youth ministry. With my employment with the National Network of Youth Ministries, I travel all over the states of Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Kentucky with two responsibilities: 1) support and encourage youth workers, and 2) advancing student ministries. Both of these responsibilities have a direct impact from the work I

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 2:4 (NIV).



have done. I am watching students walk away from student ministries and churches, complaining that they are not getting anything from what is being taught and have little to no relationship with an adult that will guide them along their journey. I also see parents with fear in their eyes regarding their children, and what will happen to them when they move on to college or a career. I travel this journey with them as my kids are college students and I too have prayed and asked God if I have done all that I could have done for them. I listen to students state that Christianity is weak, unattainable, and unnecessary for their lives. All this breaks my heart. The opportunities at George Fox have taught me to understand cultural movements, Biblical battles within Christianity, and how ministry needs to reshape the eternal message of Christ to the culture today and in the future. This has not just been an academic pursuit, but a passion and in many ways a clarification of the call God has given me. We must do all we can to help students discover and experience God's love. We must do all we can to help students on their faith journey. We must do all we can to raise the level of excellence in our student ministries. This is not just a matter of having bigger churches or student ministries. This is about students being life long Christ followers.

I am grateful for the educational opportunity and challenge of the dissertation process. Much of what I have learned in the past has gone to help me as a local church youthworker and improve the ministry and churches I have served. The dissertation project I am completing will allow for a platform to help others and benefit their ministries.

### Efficacy of the Project Methodology

I chose the approach of creating a series of podcast for several reasons. One, there is an abundance of information that has been gathered on the subject of students leaving the church and questioning the Christian faith. The development of a series of podcasts allows the listeners to hear and learn from research where I have gained great insight from several prominent authors and researchers. Two, the podcasts narrow the focus of information making the information attainable and not overwhelming for a parent, youthworker (part-time or full-time), or church leader to assimilate. Three, capitalizing on a cultural trend of having quick access to information in a digital format has a greater tendency to be used, responded to, and shared. The podcasts can be used personally in a group or shared across the Internet to better evaluate current ministries and development of a renewed focus of ministry.

### Gains

Youthworkers and churches do and must have a discipleship component to their ministries, but it may be happening more by accident than by design. A simple, Biblical, Jesus example is what is needed. As stated in the Other Proposed Solutions, there are many attempts to improve student ministry excellence. Jim Burns said often that the success of student ministry is not found at the end of a youth meeting, or High School graduation, but at the end of a lifetime.”<sup>2</sup> A renewed understanding of what student ministry is all about must and will be gained.

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Burns. "Relational Youth Ministry" (trainer of Trainers Conference, San Juan Capistrano, CA, March 1, 1995).

For me the gains are in the people I have met within my cohort, professors, and administrators of George Fox. It is evident that all care about one another, but more importantly they care about being a Christ follower. Some of the highlights of my experience were found in the discussions away from the instructional setting and have continued online or by phone since. I also am grateful for the challenge to not accept the obvious, but to go deeper into the research to discover greater truths. I did not always appreciate the number of books to read or even the content until we had a discussion online or in one of our classroom settings. The experience of learning and connecting has been a great part of my journey.

### Lessons Learned

I have had a great time of learning through the process of classes, research and writing. Within the classes I was taught to be more investigative than accept a surface level understanding. I was also challenged to be more accepting of others opinions of research and of our readings. I grew up in a very conservative and controlled environment. Exposure to thoughts other than what was given to me was not allowed. While I never accepted that approach, this pursuit gave me more confidence not only in others thoughts, but also in my own.

While researching my topic I learned more about myself including my passions, and a greater understanding of the purpose God has for me. The more I read about my topic the more I wanted to read. Within the time of starting the program and coming to the end of it, I have experienced two job loses, experienced the lose of both my in-laws whom I was very close to, and watched my children go off to college. In each of these

situations I sensed God refining me and refining my ministry. The message of my research and project is of such great concern to me that it has become not a ministry to be accomplished, but a passion that burns in my heart. In Indiana we have 779 high schools and junior highs with 494,000 students in them. At present, we only have approximately 40% of these schools with a campus ministry.<sup>3</sup> The youth ministry world within Indiana is difficult. Denominations are seeing fewer and fewer churches with student ministry staff positions. Volunteer led student ministries are becoming the mode of ministry operation, but they are desperately seeking more help that is easy to be understood and implemented. With this mentality many church leaders are buy the student ministry in a box style of training for youthworkers that many times is overwhelming, so a turnover of youthworkers is a constant. Therefore, this isn't a 'should do' movement for me, but 'have to' movement. I have to share what I have learned and desire to continue to learn.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

I would challenge many of the researchers to keep asking the same questions of new and emerging generations of students. Within the twenty-eight years I have been connected to student ministries, things change. The only constant is the need for healthy relationships. This need has increased over these years, but it is the only issue that has remained such a high need. Unfortunately, many youthworkers have grown up in a culture that needed healthy relationship and never got it themselves so they do not know how to pass it on to those they serve.

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<sup>3</sup> This information comes from reporting from Indiana Schools Information Board, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Young Life, Cru, Youth For Christ and Youth Alive. With the multiple sources of information, these are the statistics I am working from to focus our ministry.

Additional research needs to be in the area of relational development in a digitally driven world. Leonard Sweet has given us a great beginning with these thoughts, but more needs to be done. This should include research in communication among friends, defining friendship in a digitally influenced world, connectivity levels in the digital world versus face-to-face encounters, depth of relational connectivity and it's effect on the children of those that received the relationships are a few ideas.

I would also encourage more research into Scripture Engagement. Taylor University is in the second year of this research discovering engagement strategies that help a student in their faith journey. This research will be helpful to add to what I have discovered.

#### Potential Pursuits

While I am never satisfied with level of perfection of my project, more research could and should be done in the best practices of faith journey development. I refined, advanced and developed a process for an individual's faith journey, but more can be done. I did not look deeply into the more theoretical research of faith development, but concentrated on more of the practical approach that can be used and transferred from student ministry to student ministry.

With the completion of this dissertation project, I am interested in being certified as a Life Coach to help youthworkers pursue greater satisfaction in their ministry and better outcomes from their ministries. I am also interested in seeing how the information I have discovered could translate into helping students take on responsibilities and or leadership roles within their sphere of influence today and in the future.

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## APPENDIX A

### ARTIFACT

#### THE FAITH JOURNEY IN H3

##### PODCAST 1

##### **FROM A SLOW FADE TO A MASS EXODUS**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to articulate how vast the problem is of students disconnecting from the church after high school graduation.

Welcome to the first in a series of podcasts titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In this first podcast I will describe the problem of the Slow Fade that is turning into a Mass Exodus and analyze some of the symptoms of this problem.

Let's just look at what the research is saying.

David Kinnaman, researcher and author, in 2006 found that in the typical church, 3 out of every 5 teens will be unchurched in the next 10 to 12 years. At your next youth meeting look around. Chances are most of those teenagers will disengage from church attendance by age 30. In fact, participation in church steadily declines following high school graduation, bottoming out during a person's late 20s.<sup>174</sup>

In 2007, Lifeway Research found that seven in ten Protestants ages 18 to 30 — both evangelical and mainline — who went to church regularly in high school said they quit attending by age 23. And 34% of those said they had not returned, even sporadically, by age 30. That means about one in four Protestant students have left the church.<sup>175</sup>

In 2009, an America's Research Group survey found that 95 percent of twenty- to twenty-nine-year-old evangelicals attended church regularly during their elementary and middle school years, but only 55 percent attended during high school. Now catch this; by the time they reached college, only 11 percent were still attending church.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> David Kinnaman, "The Mosaic Generation: The Mystifying New World Of Youth Culture," *Enrichment Journal* (January, 2006).

<sup>175</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Young Adults Aren't Sticking With Church," *USA Today*, August 6, 2007.

<sup>176</sup> Reggie Joiner, Church Bomar, and Addie Smith, *The Slow Fade* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 23.

In 2010, Lifeway Research reported 61% of churched high school students graduate and never go back to the church. Even worse: 78% to 88% of those in youth programs today will leave church, most to never return.<sup>177</sup>

If this trend continues the church as we know it will no longer exist. In many ways we are already seeing how this problem is affecting the organizational church world.

For many years there was a decline in the number of churches in the United States. In 1995, Charles Arn, a researcher and author involved in church health and church planting claimed that more churches were closing faster than opening. He stated that 3,750 churches closed per year while only 1,300 were opening.<sup>178</sup> In 1996, Lyle Schaller, author and church consultant, predicted that 100,000 to 150,000 congregations will dissolve in the first half of the twenty-first century – an average of five to eight each day.<sup>179</sup> In 2010, Lifeway Research reported that church planters open 4,000 churches however 3,500 are still closing every year.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Matt Marino, "What Is So Uncool About Cool Churches," *The Gospel Side* (blog), [www.thegospelside.wordpress.com/2012/09/23](http://www.thegospelside.wordpress.com/2012/09/23) (accessed September 23, 2012).

<sup>178</sup> Charles Arn, "A Response To Dr. Rainer," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* (1995, January 01): 74.

<sup>179</sup> Lyle Schaller, *Tattered Trust: Is There Hope for Your Denomination* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 26.

<sup>180</sup> "Total US Church No Longer In Decline, Researchers Say," *The Christian Post*, [www.Christianpost.com](http://www.Christianpost.com) (accessed May 13, 2010).

This is good news. It is only good news because this is the first time in the last several years that we have seen more open than close, but is it sustainable? If 70%-80% are walking away from the church never to return, this trend will not continue.

Let's go a little deeper. According to Ken Ham and Britt Beemer in their book *Already Gone*, of those who leave the church, only eleven percent of those did so during the college years. Almost ninety percent of them were lost in middle and high school. By the time they got to college they were already gone!<sup>181</sup> We are seeing this slow fade early that turns into the mass exodus of students and parents leaving the environment that is to nurture in them a sense of their faith journey, but they are leaving before the big part of the journey begins. This is not just a student ministries issue or a children's ministry issue; it is a church issue.

In the March 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*, a letter to the editor stated; today's church dropout is not interested in a "weakened local church. Instead we are seeking...a return to a faith that is authentic, relevant, and applicable."<sup>182</sup>

Many see this disconnection as a right of passage or what is normal among students. Reggie McNeal, Missional Leadership Specialist for Leadership Network said it well in 2003 and I think is just as important today. "The rate of disconnection indicates a dilemma far more serious than mere youthful rebellion...The farther you go down the

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<sup>181</sup> Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone* (USA: Master Books, 2009), 31.

<sup>182</sup> Julia Quinn, *Quitting Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 19-20.

generational food chain, the lower the percentage each succeeding generation reports going to church...It's more than numbers."<sup>183</sup>

The church has reframed itself into a fantastic production department for Christianity. We do need to put our best foot forward every week, but have we become more consumed with the A-B-C's of church – Attendance – Buildings – and Cash? Is the Sunday attendance the height of the faith journey? We all know the answer is no, but we act like the answer is yes. Alan Hirsch tweeted that “The church is meant to be a permanent revolution, not one that came and went, leaving a codified religion in its wake.”<sup>184</sup>

We have created the Sunday program mentality where most churchgoers don't understand what Christianity is all about. With the consumer mentality we offer the pick and choose approach to faith. There is such a desire for knowledge and experience, but it has no core foundation, no heart for the Christ follower. It is simply to check off a “to do” list of information development and program attendance that fulfills a duty and a craving for something different to experience, but both fade along the journey. New information is offered and new experiences of something that seems bigger and better enters the follower's path. There is no dedication to Christ, seeking His knowledge, and experiencing all that He offers. It simply remains something to be done every week at the same time with little or nothing changing.

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<sup>183</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 2.

<sup>184</sup> Alan Hirsch's Twitter Page, @alanhirsch (accessed October 14, 2012).

Youth ministries and churches are concerned with taking care of the students that are in their church. Parents desire to see their kids grow and rely on the church and youth ministries to get that accomplished. They want them to be taken care of and doing all the things that will draw the students in to the church and youth ministry. However students are stating they are under challenged and have a lack of initiative and perseverance.<sup>185</sup> Many youth ministries are creating ministry activities that have little challenge, gives the students all the answers, and usually tries to take care of the student rather than having them work out their salvation (Philippians 2:12 (NIV)). This leads to a formula and or equation driven movement because it seems to be measureable.

We have also worked to raise the level of professionalism of our church leadership, but at what cost? Don't get me wrong, we as church leaders and youth workers need to work at a high level of professionalism, but have we professionalized Christianity? Youth ministry has become a profession that demands seriousness.<sup>186</sup> Youth workers are becoming more educated with a marked increase in the undergraduate and graduate opportunities,<sup>187</sup> followed by an increase in the number of professors needed that have

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<sup>185</sup> Andy Blanks, "YM Essentials: 5 Signs We're Doing A Crummy Job At Discipleship," *Youth Ministry 360* (blog), [www.youthministry360.com/blog](http://www.youthministry360.com/blog) (accessed October 4, 2012).

<sup>186</sup> Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff, *Timeless Youth Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 49.

<sup>187</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, eds., *Starting Right* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 84.



had real life experience. The question then comes are youth ministry majors simply a marketing ploy or can colleges effectively equip students to minister among youth?<sup>188</sup>

It can be clearly understood that the number of graduates with youth ministry degrees are far more educated than the generations of youth workers before them. They have been given a chance to gain a fantastic theological and Biblical education, but will it be practical in reaching the students of today? Add to this the dark reality that there are far more youth ministry graduates than youth ministry positions within the United States. In reality the number of youth ministry positions in local churches is dwindling. I have had several conversations with denominational and para-church leaders that are seeing churches and organizations cutting the youth ministry positions because of budget issues. Unfortunately, in the church culture, youth ministry has been seen as something that the church has simply because they have students. It is often not seen a viable and needed ministry to a subculture of the community. Combining this simplistic view of youth ministry in some churches with the more educated youth worker and the possibility of conflict or high turnover rates can be expected. The educational pursuits of youth workers are needed with an ever-changing youth culture. However, with the rise in educated youth workers and the mass exodus of students from churches and the faith, there continues to be a problem.

The issues students have with the church are also directed towards Christianity. If the place that houses those who claim to be Christ followers is not teaching or representing

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<sup>188</sup> David Livermore, "The Youth Ministry Education Debate: Irrelevant Theorists Vs. Mindless Practitioners," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 1, (2002, Fall): 89.

Christ well, how can Christianity matter? This skepticism is becoming apparent. In a study from the Barna Group that was reported in the book *UnChristian*, showed that 16- to 29-year-olds have a greater degree of criticism toward Christianity than previous generations due to a growing sense of disengagement and disillusionment.<sup>189</sup> The disillusionment comes from Christians being viewed as a poor representation of Christ. They see a Christian holding onto the claims of Christ for an opportunity to gain power or prestige. They are rejecting Christianity not on the basis of the claims of Christ, but as Walt Mueller puts it because Christians are making these claims while living as if they are not true.<sup>190</sup> Ministry then gets even more difficult. Pastors indicated in the Barna research previously mentioned “ministry is more difficult than ever before because people are increasingly hostile and negative toward Christianity.”<sup>191</sup> According to the authors of *Awakening Youth Discipleship*, Christianity within the youth culture has become harmless and domesticated. Students are putting in the time at church services, youth ministries, youth conventions, and mission trips, but the information they have been offered is not changing who they are.<sup>192</sup> The movement of Christians without

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<sup>189</sup> George Barna, "A New Generation Expresses Its Skepticism And Frustration With Christianity," The Barna Group, [www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity) (accessed September 24, 2007).

<sup>190</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 75.

<sup>191</sup> George Barna, "A New Generation Expresses Its Skepticism And Frustration With Christianity," The Barna Group, [www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity) (accessed September 24, 2007).

<sup>192</sup> Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, *Awakening Youth Discipleship* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 3.

foundation creates what Kendra Creasy Dean called in her book *Almost Christian*, the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism causing a watered down imposter faith.<sup>193</sup>

This issue is more than numbers, but the numbers are an indicator. They indicate that our students are not growing on their faith journey. We might see little steps of faith, but the generation as a whole is not growing on a life-long journey of faith.

In the next podcast we will look at the statistics that take us beyond church attendance to a world that is more and more disconnected from God.

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<sup>193</sup> John Blake, "Author: More Teens Becoming "fake" Christians," CNN, [edition.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/08/27/almostchristian](http://edition.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/08/27/almostchristian) (accessed August 27, 2010).

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## PODCAST 2

### **LOSING FAITH OR CREATING A NEW ONE**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to analyze why there is a rise of religious non-affiliated, also known as the “Nones.”

Welcome to the second podcasts in the series “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the first podcast I described the problem of the Slow Fade that is turning into a Mass Exodus of students leaving their commitment to church attendance and shared some of the symptoms of why they are leaving and not coming back.

In this podcast, I will guide you through the research from Pew Research, the Barna Group, The National Study of Youth and Religion of 2005, and other studies that show why there is a rise in those who declare themselves as religiously non-affiliated or also called the “Nones.”

In October 2012, Pew Research released its latest research findings on how people declare themselves and their religious affiliation. They define the religiously unaffiliated as atheist, agnostic, and those who have no connection with a religious thought or organization.<sup>194</sup> The report indicates that the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow. In the last five years, the “Nones” have increased from 15.3% to 19.6% of all adults in the United States. This includes more than 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics and 33 million people who say they have no particular religious affiliation.<sup>195</sup>

It is fairly obvious based on the information shared in the last podcast that Americans describe their religious affiliation in relation to their involvement and attendance at religious organizations and gatherings. To give some perspective to the growth of the “Nones,” in 2007 60% of those surveyed said they seldom or never attend religious services, but still indicated they were connected to a religious tradition. In 2012, that

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<sup>194</sup> Greg Smith, "None Of The Above: Who Are They?," interview by Bob Abernethy, *Religion And Ethics Newsweekly*, PBS (October 12, 2012).

<sup>195</sup> Luis Lugo (editor) "Nones" On The Rise," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012, [www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx) (accessed December 16, 2012).

number dropped to 50%.<sup>196</sup> So lack of attendance indicates they are pulling away for their religious affiliation.

However, the 46 million unaffiliated adults indicate they are religious or spiritual in some way. Two-thirds of them say they believe in God, more than a third classify themselves as “spiritual” but not “religious,” and one-in-five (21%) say they pray every day. They also think that churches and other religious institutions benefit society by strengthening the community bonds and helping the poor.<sup>197</sup> They just don’t want the organized religion for themselves.

While there may be a few exceptions, the “Nones” say they are *not* looking for a religion that would be right for them, declare they are not actively seeking to find a church or other religious group. Overwhelmingly, they think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics.<sup>198</sup>

Here is the issue for us to consider. Pew Research states that one important factor behind the growth of the religiously unaffiliated is generational replacement, the gradual replacing of older generations by newer ones. Among the youngest Millennials (those ages 18-22, who were minors in 2007 and could not be interviewed), 34% declare

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid

<sup>198</sup> Ibid



themselves as part of the “Nones,” compared to 5% in their great grandparent’s generation and 9% of their grandparent’s generation.<sup>199</sup>

A study published in 2009 discovered that 73% of the “Nones” came from religious homes, and 66% were considered “deconverts” or ones that were de-converted from Christianity.<sup>200</sup>

A 2010 report written by Harvard professor Robert Putnam and Notre Dame professor David Campbell states that young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of five to six times greater than previous generations.<sup>201</sup>

A multi-year study conducted by Alexander and Helen Astin, retired UCLA professors, worked to discover how the college experience influences spiritual development. They found a significant growth among college students nationwide in the desire to engage in a spiritual quest, to be more caring, and to develop an ecumenical worldview.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Locations 1956-1961.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Mary Beth Marklein, "More College Students Seeking Spiritual Answers," *USA Today*, December 20, 2007.

Why is this movement happening? One theory comes from Pew Research stating that there is Social Disengagement happening with students. Social Disengagement is where there is a tendency to live more separate lives and engage in fewer community building activities.<sup>203</sup> The rise of social media allowing for an “alone in a crowd” mentality and activities could be an indicator. Ken Ham and Britt Beemer wrote in their book *Already Gone*, of those who have left the church, only half have left the faith.<sup>204</sup> For Ham and Beemer, this is not a faith issue but a church issue. In the March 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*, a letter to the editor stated; today’s church dropout is not interested in a “weakened local church. Instead we are seeking...a return to a faith that is authentic, relevant, and applicable.”<sup>205</sup>

In 2005 Christian Smith released his book *Soul Searching* that came from the National Study of Youth and Religion research project. This truly was a groundbreaking project that gives us much to think about in regards to what students see as an authentic, relevant, applicable faith.

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<sup>203</sup> Luis Lugo (editor) "Nones" On The Rise," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012, [www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx) (accessed December 16, 2012).

<sup>204</sup> Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone* (United State Of America: Master Books, 2009), 118.

<sup>205</sup> Julia Duin, *Quitting Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 19-20.

One of his findings indicated that religion is a significant presence in the lives of many U.S. teens,<sup>206</sup> but the presence of a religious connection is not creating life change. It simply becomes something students do, have always done, and what they have watched their parents do. It is not focused on a personal faith journey, but on repetitive actions that have been observed. It becomes what they do, not who they are. Additionally, Smith indicates that students are not looking for new way of expressing their faith journey, but willing to follow in their parent's footsteps of their religious activity.<sup>207</sup> It is a great realization that parents are still the most important influence within the student's faith journey, but students must understand faith is more than religious activity. So if students are not growing on a faith journey, but following the actions of their parents, the question comes are our churches challenging adults with their faith journey?

Smith also discovered that students could not articulate what they believed, what their beliefs mean, and how their beliefs get lived out over a lifetime.<sup>208</sup> Again students have learned the actions and how to mimic what they have observed, but their faith actions have no basis or foundation. Students have not seen their faith grow, but continue the actions found in their surroundings. It becomes environmental Christianity not something the student found but what they have observed and therefore do until they don't see it anymore. Once they have removed themselves from a Christ focused environment, generally post high school, the perceived spiritual actions mean little to

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<sup>206</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 260.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 6.

them anymore. Their time with Christ was simply something to do, a community to be involved with, or actions that seemed to keep the peace with mom and dad.

Additionally, The Barna Research group conducted a study that resulted in a book titled *You Lost Me*, and where they discovered and formulated several reasons why students are leaving the church, and where youth ministries are not helping student grow in their faith.

**Reason #1 – Churches seem overprotective.<sup>209</sup>**

Students have an unlimited access to ideas and a mass consumption of popular culture. Christian students express a desire for their faith journey to connect Christ to the world they live in, but church ministries feel confining, boring due to a fear of trying new things and a failure to show real risk free faith. They also indicate that anything outside the church walls or traditions are not good for the student. Again, most students have the opportunity to experience so much within the culture that church leadership questions due to inexperience or fear of something different.

**Reason #2 – Teens' and twentysomethings' experience of Christianity is shallow.<sup>210</sup>**

Students are asking the question of relevance. Why does faith matter to my life today or tomorrow? They begin to question if the Bible really has truth in it or if it is simply a collection of stories. I have had students ask me why they should even read the Bible. I don't have any statistical information to back this up, but over my years, students are

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<sup>209</sup> George Barna, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church," The Barna Group, [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org) (accessed September 28, 2011).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

reading deeper more challenging books. I have watched the students I have worked with in the last few years, reading C.S. Lewis for fun while my students from twenty years ago didn't read it until they had to for a college class. Today's students want an intellectual depth that we are not giving them.

**Reason #3 – Churches come across as antagonistic to science.<sup>211</sup>**

Many students are challenged to improve their education and learning possibilities. They are challenged everyday at school with scientific models where you have to see it, touch it, smell it, hear it, taste it and even feel it. Then they come to the church and challenged to live by faith, to believe in something that they cannot see, touch, smell, hear, or taste. The worship movement and music is such a positive with students because it gives them the opportunity to feel. This tension creates the ongoing problem. In many ways today's students are better educated than many adults of the church. So the questions students ask, many adults can't answer. The question of relevancy rears its ugly head again.

**Reason #4 – Young Christians' church experiences related to sexuality are often the simplistic, judgmental.<sup>212</sup>**

Students have all sorts of access to material and it is as close as their smartphone. With a culture that is hyper-sexed they can find digital pornography and HD movies by cable, computer, tablet or phone. They have discussed the issues of sex, sexuality, homosexuality, and gender identification throughout high school either in the classroom

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

or by social media. The church continues to show restraint regarding teaching or discussing many of these issues. The concern is age appropriate material and discussions. We need to realize these discussions are already in process in junior high and in some cases even younger. The church needs to continue to teach about the appropriate understanding of sex and sexuality, but we cannot be afraid of it. The church rewards sexual purity and shows great disgust for the sexually active. They hear discussions and lessons about grace, until students are literally caught with their pants down.

**Reason #5 – They wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity.<sup>213</sup>**

Students are bombarded with the concept of tolerance and acceptance. With the rash of school shootings and the attention given to bullying, they have heard over and over about being tolerant of those who are different. They are challenged to be accepting of those who look, act, and even talk differently to show that everyone has worth. All this until they get to church. They hear adults joking about the church down the street. They hear adults sharing their concerns about others, challenge it as gossip, and get reprimanded for speaking out of turn. To them, the most exclusive clubs in town are churches. Our walls are so high that we can't even get into a network outside our denomination or encourage students to attend a state university or private school that is outside our church movements.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

**Reason #6 – The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.<sup>214</sup>**

Doubt has been described to me as a Christian’s worst nightmare. We have been taught what we are to know and believe and to doubt it will bring dire consequences. When we fail to allow a student to doubt, we don’t allow them to express what they are thinking and feeling deep inside them. We teach them by default to accept the teaching to get along, until you are gone. It is at that point that all we have taught them is gone. They will no longer have any confidence in what we are telling them. For a student to doubt allows them to investigate an unknown; isn’t that the beginning of their faith journey?

Again I ask the question; why is this happening? Why are students leaving their connection to the church and more importantly their connection to a faith journey that is focused on Christ? Many look at these reports and see that students are leaving an organized religious view of spirituality and creating their own spiritual journey.

I agree with the speculation that there is a consumer mentality regarding churches and church attendance. But this issue of the rise of the “Nones” seems to go deeper than a search for something different because many state they are not even looking for anything spiritual. In Hebrews, Paul makes it clear that Jesus was the same yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>215</sup>

Has the church and student ministries grown cold to the increased work that it takes with students today? Chap Clark and Kara Powell wrote in their book *Deep Ministry in a*

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Hebrews 13:8 (NIV).

*Shallow World*, “Spiritual growth is more difficult even for the more deeply committed students...what we call discipleship doesn’t seem to be working like it used to.”<sup>216</sup>

Youth ministries cannot keep doing the same thing and hoping for a new outcome.

Terrance Crawford on YouthMinistry.com adds that students are looking for a challenge indicated by a student’s statement to him, “I don't want (or need) to be entertained at youth group. I want to be challenged.”<sup>217</sup>

Mike Yaconelli, a pioneer in youth ministry, wrote: “Youth ministry as an experiment has failed...All I want to do is recapture what we used to live and breathe – we hold kids’ hands, we listen to their stories, we take them seriously and somewhere along the way we bring them to Jesus. That’s it. That’s youth ministry.”<sup>218</sup>

Are we bringing kids to Jesus? With the rise of the “Nones” I am not sure we are!

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<sup>216</sup> Chap Clark and Kara Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 70.

<sup>217</sup> Terrance Crawford, "5 Reasons Why Teens Stop Showing Up," Simply Youth Ministry, [www.youthministry.com/articles/culture/5-reasons-why-teens-stop-showing-up](http://www.youthministry.com/articles/culture/5-reasons-why-teens-stop-showing-up) (accessed May 31, 2011).

<sup>218</sup> Chap Clark and Kara Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 70.



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## PODCAST 3

### **MORALISTIC THERAPEUTIC DEISM**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to identify and analyze Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and how it affects the students we serve.

Welcome to the third in a series of podcasts titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In podcasts one and two, I helped you identify the problem that students are disconnecting from the church and more importantly are disconnecting from their connection to a faith journey with Christ and creating their own spiritual journey.

In this podcast I will be presenting information on Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD).

Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, through the National Study of Youth and Religion project and formulated a religious movement or journey that is becoming a prominent movement. Their team conducted more than 3,000 interviews of adolescents to discover the prevailing religious thoughts of American students. Their conclusions formulated the movement known as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). I want to help you identify MTD and the components MTD offers and give information to help you analyze how this is effecting the students we serve.

Kendra Creasy Dean describes MTD as a tacit religious outlook that is quite distinct from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or any of the world's major religions. This outlook helps people be nice, feel good and leaves God in the background. It serves as a default position for adolescent religious affiliation.<sup>219</sup> If you recall in the last podcast I described how students are disconnecting from a faith journey with Christ and some are creating their own spiritual journey. MTD is the outcome of this hybrid journey. It is a default position usually because many churches and student ministries are not engaging the student, and in many cases the adults, with an in depth study of God that engages all of who we are as people.

Smith and Denton break down the three words to help us understand this movement.

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<sup>219</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

Moralistic is about having and engaging a moralistic approach to life. It teaches that being a good and moral person gives you a good life filled with happiness.<sup>220</sup> So being nice, treating people with kindness, being respectful and responsible guarantees you a good life.

Therapeutic is the concept that having a good life allows us to feel good, to feel secure, to live at peace with all that is around us. It is about being able to resolve life's problems and getting along with others.<sup>221</sup> The therapy of this thought creates a life of harmony and comfort without hurt or pain.

The Deism component creates a belief in a god that exists, created the world, created and defined our moral order, but is not personally involved in each person's life.<sup>222</sup> This god is seen as a distant god that set up this world and handles some of the big issues of the world.

MTD, according to Smith and Denton, therefore creates several components that fulfill the definitions of the three words. They also stated that the student interviewed did not speak these exact components, but they were themes that were woven throughout the interviews.

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<sup>220</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism-the New American Religion," The Christian Post, [www.Christianpost.com/news/moralistic](http://www.Christianpost.com/news/moralistic) (accessed April 18, 2005).

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>223</sup>

This creed has direct implications on student ministries that are creating real problems for youth leaders.

First, it creates a moralistic view of living a good life is being a moral person, and therefore, a person that others like.<sup>224</sup> So we have to ask the question, was Jesus always liked? We read the stories of His interactions with the Pharisees, the rumble in the temple with those buying and selling there, and we better not forget His last few days. How is it that everyone didn't like the one who is our teacher and example on how to live life? Jesus said in John 15:10 "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."<sup>225</sup> And let's remember, they persecuted Him. The other reality that no matter how much

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<sup>223</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-163.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>225</sup> John 15:10 (NIV).

talk of tolerance and acceptance is being done, students will be students and they will not like everyone. When a student already is struggling with identity, now an even greater challenge comes to be liked by others. If they are not liked by all; then where is the god that creates the happy life? While the scripture is filled with truth regarding how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves<sup>226</sup> and take care of our neighbors,<sup>227</sup> we are not always so good at it. Have you ever had a time when, playing around with the students, said something that hurt one of them? I have and it hurts to know I did that. We destroy any idea that not only is there an authentic God that is alive, real and cares about them personally, we even destroy the corrupted view of the MTD god.

The other issue is that most people see that being nice doesn't allow us to challenge one another. Accountability is not appreciated or wanted because it does not allow us to accept people for who they are. For students it comes across that we want to change them, because we do not accept them. Even Christ wants to change us. This is a very confused picture of love. God accepts us as we are, but loves us too much to let us stay the way we are.

Secondly, therapeutic nature of this movement creates the feel good mentality.<sup>228</sup> The student is again faced with the challenge that all things must make them feel good or they are bad. If the good feeling is short lived, they have experienced goodness and will strive

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<sup>226</sup> Matthew 22:39 (NIV).

<sup>227</sup> Luke 10:33-35 (NIV).

<sup>228</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

to find those experiences. Dean states; “I think God wants us to be happy—but personal self-fulfillment is not the source of genuine happiness. True joy comes from sharing our humanity with others—our delights and our suffering.”<sup>229</sup> If we are going to be as Christ wants us to be we will share our lives with others. As we share and do life together we will walk with others in the good times and the bad. We will be willing to walk through the messiness of life with others.

Students that are deep in the MTD mindset see that life is all about them that they are the center of the universe and that everything revolves around them. This sense of entitlement is dangerous self-preservation attitude. I will do whatever I need to do to take care of me. The Biblical understanding is that this life is not about me; it is about loving God and loving others.<sup>230</sup> Loving them even when they are not so lovable.

Third, MTD cannot handle the crash and burn moments of life. Let’s face it, crash and burns happen. Students get cut from a team, they fail a test, have an accident, parents divorce; the list can go on and on. What will they do and how will they handle situations when those moments of pain come their way? Religion means nothing to them if they have to experience pain. How many times have we heard, how can there be a God that allows bad things to happen? Dean states, “In times of (pain), “feeling good about

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<sup>229</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," [www.kendradean.com/371/moralistic-therapeutic-deism](http://www.kendradean.com/371/moralistic-therapeutic-deism) (accessed September 14, 2010).

<sup>230</sup> Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV).

ourselves” and being “nice” are unthinkable—and if this is all religion is for, then (pain) naturally convinces us that God is either make-believe or impotent.”<sup>231</sup>

If this is true, then there is no such thing as faith. If life is all about me, what do I need to believe in except me? Students in the MTD see God as creator and teacher, but not savior. Perhaps He put this world into being and keeps the birds flying, but I don’t have faith in Him to walk with me. They see life as on their own; if it is to be it is up to me. There is not future hope past what they can control.

Finally, MTD acknowledges God, but does not see Him as personally connected or involved in an individual’s life.<sup>232</sup> This continues to create distance between the student and God even when an adult talks about a personal relationship with Him. How can a personal relationship with God mean much or even exist when relationships are crumbling around them and they are only being understood from a digital perspective?

So what can we do to help students see and experience the Authentic God?

We need to quit assuming that they know the Gospel.

Too Many students are floating through our student ministries and churches without a clear and engaging experience with the Gospel. My definition of the Gospel is

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<sup>231</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," [www.kendradean.com/371/moralistic-therapeutic-deism](http://www.kendradean.com/371/moralistic-therapeutic-deism) (accessed September 14, 2010).

<sup>232</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.



everything of Jesus. We need to quit using the scripture as simple quotes that back up our stories. We need to be sure that in our teaching they hear more about Christ than about us. As Dr. Michael Horton puts it, we need to help our student understand more than a Christless Christianity that focuses on moralistic concerns and personal transformation rather than the theology of the cross.<sup>233</sup>

We need reset the mindset.

Dean states is reclaiming a “missional imagination”—to remind ourselves as a Christian community that we are not here for ourselves.<sup>234</sup> God doesn’t need us. He is big enough to take care of anything. But He allows us to be a part of His plan, to jump in and participate in what He is doing.

We need to challenge them with real life.

We are not going to avoid pain, hurts, and doubts. In all reality we are challenged to move into them. Serving Christ by serving others gets our hands dirty, results in our feeling the pain of others, and many times causes us to deal with our own pain. This is not only learning community but also experiencing the power and love of an Almighty God.

In later podcasts I will reframe these ideas as we continue this Faith Journey in H3.

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<sup>233</sup> Michael Horton, "What Happens When We Take Christ Out Of Christianity?," Christless Christianity, <http://www.christlesschristianity.org/images/promoflyer.pdf> (accessed January 01, 2009).

<sup>234</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," [www.kendradean.com/371/moralistic-therapeutic-deism](http://www.kendradean.com/371/moralistic-therapeutic-deism) (accessed September 14, 2010).

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## PODCAST 4

### **I WANT TO BE KNOWN**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to identify the need for relationships and how students are finding them.

Welcome to the third in a series of podcasts titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the earlier podcasts, I helped you identify the problem that students are disconnecting from the church and more importantly are disconnecting from their connection to a faith journey with Christ and creating their own spiritual journey.

Today I help you identify the high need students have for relationship and how they are trying to feed that need.

Let's face it, adolescence is a messed up time period of life. Changes come fast and furious as students are trying to leave childhood and desire to jump into adulthood. It is a time when a student is entrenched in being a student of life change as well as their educational endeavors. The only constant for a student is change. Not only are they changing physically, but also emotionally, how they process information, whom do they best relate to, and everything becomes critical that can lead to a crisis. They also begin to engage in a psychosocial, independent search for identity and separating from the known into the unknown of life's journey.<sup>235</sup>

Add to that, the disconnect that happens from the digital world they have grown up in and how youthworkers and parents are simply trying to do catch up. Unfortunately, a divide has been created between students and the adults they need in relationship for their faith journey. With the invention of the cell phone in 1973, media devices are competing for the attention of students who are accustomed to this expression of relationship based on information sharing.<sup>236</sup> However, adults - primarily parents but also some youth workers - are not comfortable with new technology and it's delivery system of information as students understand relationship. This divide is made up of a psychographic<sup>237</sup> divide rather than a chronological scale with two groups involved; the Gutenbergers (those who

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<sup>235</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 19.

<sup>236</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 1111.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, Kindle Location 464.

are immigrants to this culture) and Googlers (those who are natives to this culture).<sup>238</sup> Even with these two groups and the digital divide, relationship for students is critical. Gutenbergers grew up in a world that was integrated, taught by people they knew, and grew up in a relationally stable environment living in the same community most of their lives. Googlers live in a fast paced world that is filled with impersonal media devices used for relational development and information advancement.<sup>239</sup> So a digital community creates a faith journey with multiple 140-character messages and by those a Googler may never see or touch, not allowing any community to be thought of as relationally home.

It is as if students are more consumed about being with friends than being with their families. Chap Clark states that student's battle through many issues creating longings; longings to belong, to be taken seriously, to matter, for a safe place, to be unique, and to be wanted.<sup>240</sup> These longings show some of the turmoil that students go through during this time of their life. The discovery of identity and acceptance are primary within these longings, causing an external search to solve this inner turmoil.

A new study from the University of Washington shows how students are looking to fill their longing to belong. Katie Davis, an assistant professor in the Information School, sought to study how students use digital media to help reach developmental milestones,

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 170.

<sup>239</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 73.

<sup>240</sup> Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 167.

such as fostering a sense of belonging and sharing personal problems. But the study also raised questions about whether digital connectedness might hinder the development of an autonomous sense of self. She titles what she discovered as "Friendship 2.0."<sup>241</sup>

Students are still pursuing the basic developmental needs. Those needs are External concentrating on issues of Support, Empowerment, Boundaries, and Constructive Use of Time. They are also Internal with a focus on Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity.<sup>242</sup> If you would like more information on these Developmental Milestones you can find them through [search-institute.org](http://search-institute.org).

The difference for this generation is that they are achieving these milestones through the use of social media and digital formats. In the study Friendship 2.0, Katie Davis asked about the content of their digital conversations and analyzed 200 examples shared by the teens. Casual chatter about homework or what they did that day occurred three times more than intimate conversations about feelings or problems.<sup>243</sup>

The casual exchanges were what allowed students to stay connected with short quick informational conversations including something funny that had happened, asking

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<sup>241</sup> Katie Davis, "Friendship 2.0: Adolescents' Experiences Of Belonging And Self Disclosure Online," *Journal of Adolescents* 35, no. 6 (2012, December 1): 1527-1536.

<sup>242</sup> Kent Pekel (editor) "40 Developmental Assets For Adolescents," Search Institute, [www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18](http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18) (accessed January 01, 2007).

<sup>243</sup> Katie Davis, "Friendship 2.0: Adolescents' Experiences Of Belonging And Self Disclosure Online," *Journal of Adolescents* 35, no. 6 (2012, December 1): 1527-1536.

questions, or sharing what they were doing.<sup>244</sup> Like many of the students we serve these are not a one time statement, they are ongoing back and forth exchanges that could last throughout the day.

Sixty-eight percent of check-ins occur on Facebook, and include groups of friends commenting on photos or YouTube videos. Nearly half of the participants in the survey talked about posting photos of themselves with their friends and then tagging their friends, allowing them to discuss a shared experience and promote a sense of belonging to a circle of friends. There were also intimate exchanges usually by the girls and included how they were feeling, whether they were having a bad day or other problems where they were looking for a friend's help.<sup>245</sup>

Davis found that students, even the shy or quiet students, thought it was easier to share personal thoughts digitally than in person. Some felt typing rather than speaking their feelings gave them more control.<sup>246</sup>

Davis also stated that some participants believed that being able to connect anytime, anywhere is not just convenient, but necessary. They indicated that this allowed them to

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<sup>244</sup> Molly McElroy, "Friendship 2.0: Teens Technology Use Promotes Sense Of Belonging, Identity," [www.washington.edu/news/2012/10/22/friendship-2-0-teens-technology-use-promotes-sense-of-belonging-identity](http://www.washington.edu/news/2012/10/22/friendship-2-0-teens-technology-use-promotes-sense-of-belonging-identity) (accessed October 22, 2012).

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

stay up-to-date and to avoid feelings of isolated or being left out.<sup>247</sup> This is an important point. The FOMO or fear of missing out<sup>248</sup> on something can and does create a sense of isolation for a student. If they miss something they can feel as if they were not wanted, and if they go to the extreme, of being placed outside of that circle of friends. I am sure we have all seen a student that has felt that way. Something was done and they were not invited, something was said that becomes an inside joke that they missed and crisis begins.

So Davis adds a great question, "Adolescents are interacting with their peers constantly, and the question arises as to whether they can still develop an autonomous sense of self?"<sup>249</sup> If a student is looking to others for their sense of worth, they are going to be hurt. The study could not answer that, but let's take a good hard look at our students here. We know that students are not going on an event until they know who else is going. Students are not willing to speak, even in their small group, unless they know it is extremely safe in the room. They can certainly be in the middle of a large crowd, but feel alone if they do not have the digital connection.

The digital connection has created the TGIF (Twitter, Google, iPhone, and Facebook) relationship. This phrase was developed by Len Sweet and indicates a growing form of

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Kara Powell, "What's FOMO? How Is It Impacting You And Every Young Person You Know?," *Fuller Youth Institute E-Journal* (2012, August 28).

<sup>249</sup> Molly McElroy, "Friendship 2.0: Teens Technology Use Promotes Sense Of Belonging, Identity," [www.washington.edu/news/2012/10/22/friendship-2-0-teens-technology-use-promotes-sense-of-belonging-identity](http://www.washington.edu/news/2012/10/22/friendship-2-0-teens-technology-use-promotes-sense-of-belonging-identity) (accessed October 22, 2012).



relational development.<sup>250</sup> The TGIF relationship, as Davis point out, can be helpful in the students' developmental process, allowing them to feel as they are known to others, and even give them an outlet for their creativity. This new digital super highway with the TGIF has the great potential to start a movement that can effect social or even political change as we have seen throughout the world in the past few years. It also allows students to expand their friend base with as many people as they have time to request. This allows potentially hundreds more in their lives than their predecessors had even a decade before. They also have a tremendous opportunity to find people with similar interests and values with just a click of a button.<sup>251</sup>

With the positives come some negatives. Many can have a TGIF relationship with friends and followers they have never met. The average 12 to 15 year-old has never met 25% of their "friends" on social networking websites such as Facebook.<sup>252</sup> There is so much communication happening but is there life on life connections? Ben Kerns wrote, "All of these interactions are done in isolation, separate from human contact. Our students are having so many experiences; yet processing them in compete isolation."<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 398.

<sup>251</sup> Benjamin Kerns, "Wired But Dis-connected: Helping Kids Establish Genuine Relationships In A Networked World," Youth Worker Journal, [www.youthworker.com](http://www.youthworker.com) (accessed September 8, 2010).

<sup>252</sup> Mark Sweney, "Average Teenagers Have Never Met A Quarter of Facebook Friends," The Guardian, [www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/oct/23/teenage-girls-send-220-texts-week](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/oct/23/teenage-girls-send-220-texts-week) (accessed October 23, 2012).

<sup>253</sup> Benjamin Kerns, "Wired But Dis-connected: Helping Kids Establish Genuine Relationships In A Networked World," Youth Worker Journal, [www.youthworker.com](http://www.youthworker.com) (accessed September 8, 2010).

As youthworkers, we need to be invited into the TGIF relationship and we can be removed at any time. The ability to attract a student to an event or ministry program without the digital trail is gone. Church and youth ministry budgets do not have enough margins to compete for the attention of students. Information disseminated in 140 characters is a tool that can and should be used, but walking a journey of faith with a student will need “Witness”<sup>254</sup> in the relationship.

A student's appetite for social media isn't just a love for all things digital, but a persistent nagging feeling of loneliness and longing for belonging. After three years of research funded by the MacArthur Foundation, Danah Boyd concluded that teenagers use social media to establish “full-time intimate communities.” They provide for the always-on connections with friends. Students see technology not entertainment value or cool factor, but because of its “presence-in-absence” opportunities with friends.<sup>255</sup> Teenagers tend to use social media to strengthen the bonds of already existing offline relationships, and to add to the deeper levels of friendship and intimacy.

Let's face some reality. Our students desire to know and be known and the social media explosion allows it. We would be foolish to try to take that away from them. Facebook allows them to tell their story. Instagram let's them tell their story in pictures. Twitter allows them to express an opinion. Our responsibility is to add to the social media

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<sup>254</sup> Jim Burns. "Relational Youth Ministry" (Trainer of Trainers Conference, San Juan Capistrano, CA, March, 1995).

<sup>255</sup> Andrew Zirschky, "Teens And Social Technology: Searching For Intimacy Part 1," Center for Youth Ministry Training, [www.cymt.org/teens-and-social-technology-searching-for-intimacy-part-1](http://www.cymt.org/teens-and-social-technology-searching-for-intimacy-part-1) (accessed October 3, 2012).

explosion. We need to be on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We need to work to connect with them digitally, but we cannot stop there.

The concern I have is that youthworkers are sitting back and using the social media as their outlet for student ministry. They are experiencing more face time with their computer than they are with their students. We do need to use social media, but it needs to be a tool in the toolbox, not the box itself. If students are this hungry for relationships, then why aren't we speaking into them. Why aren't we taking the time to go where they are at the school, ball games, and concerts? Why are we more comfortable sending mass information driven Facebook hits and tweets instead of getting face to face with a student? If the need for relationship is so high, let's use the social media to earn the opportunity to get face to face. It is at this point that we can get to a depth or feeling level. May Angelou said, "I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Bob Kelly, ed., *Worth Repeating: More than 5000 Classic and Contemporary Quotes* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003).

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## PODCAST 5

### **WHEN DYSFUNCTION BECOMES THE NORM**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to identify how the dysfunction of the family has become normal.

Welcome to the fifth in a series of podcasts titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the previous podcasts, I began to share with you some of the symptoms that are leading to the departure of students from the church and more importantly from their connection to a faith journey with Christ. Today, I will talk with you about the family and how dysfunction is becoming the normal.

Okay let's face it, we all probably have a little taste of dysfunction in our families. We may have a family member that we don't talk about much because they are just a little strange or have done something hurtful to the family. Maybe we have a family that is built on guilt and shame rather than on grace and forgiveness. We could also be families that strive to keep the peace with a go along to get along mentality, rather than communicating well to make peace last in the family. However it might be in your family, the families of students we minister to are changing.

We no longer have the 1960's television families like the Leave it Beaver family. The one where mom is at home almost always making cookies within a home where nothing is ever out of place. Dad comes home and solves all of life's problems that came up that day. We also don't have the families of the 1980's and 90's of the Huxtables from the Cosby Show. The power family of two professionals, a doctor and a lawyer, with enormous amounts of time spent together as a family.

We all know this but let's lay this out; the definition of family has changed. It is more than just a married Mom, Dad with kids. In a November 2010 USA Today article, Sharon Jayson quotes Kelly Musick of Cornell University, "Families are more diverse and the structure of them is more in flux...One of the things that's happened is people have lot more leeway to design the families that work for them."<sup>257</sup> In the same article Stephanie Coontz, a professor of history and family studies at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington states people think today that "family as a relationship rather than

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<sup>257</sup> Sharon Jayson, "What Does A Family Look Like Nowadays?," *USA Today*, November 25, 2010.

an institution,"<sup>258</sup> and therefore; "If you have a close relationship and act committed, then you count as family."<sup>259</sup> Coontz is also quoted as saying; "If you're making obligations to partners and kids, you get counted as family, as opposed to older ways of thinking when it was purely the legal definition."<sup>260</sup>

Chap Clark and Steve Rabey from their book *When Kids Hurt* state, the concept of family has changed dramatically and may continue to change. Family is no longer seen as people related by birth, marriage, or adoption. It can have a variety of definitions using the concept of commitment.<sup>261</sup>

Sharon Jayson in her USA Today article also quotes Brian Powell, a professor of sociology at Indiana University and his research about the changing definition of family. Powell states that, "Americans are focusing less on the structure of family per se and instead they're focusing on the functions or purpose of family. Think about what families do. Families take care of each other. Families help each other out. They love each other. As long as Americans see that the living arrangement is doing those types of tasks, then they're willing to accept the idea that these are families."<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 21.

<sup>262</sup> Sharon Jayson, "What Does A Family Look Like Nowadays?," *USA Today*, November 25, 2010.

Yet the concept of commitment has no basis of understanding when commitments are only held to when they create good feelings. Remember the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism definition – that God is only about feeling good? Once bad or uncomfortable feelings enter into a commitment, a separating of the individuals within the commitment is possible and even probable. Kendra Dean points out in her book *Almost Christian*, when the parents of the family do not show high commitment to God or the church and activities that indicate connection and growth in their own faith journey,<sup>263</sup> students question why they should live something they do not see in their parents.

This is especially critical when it comes to the father of the family. Ruth Tucker from her book *Walking Away from the Faith* writes, the involvement of the male parent not only by their actions of commitment to God and the church, but also in relationship with their child, is an indicator of the commitment of the family.<sup>264</sup> We must be challenging the dads of our churches and ministries with this truth. The influence of dad is huge. It is not that moms do not have influence or speak to their kids with strength and wisdom, but there is something about dad. How a dad expresses his love to his kids has such an influence on how students respond in life. The dads who are completely absent or even connected-but-distracted due to work or other issues are missing a great opportunity to help their kids. Without parents or other adults living as a positive example for the

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<sup>263</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75.

<sup>264</sup> Ruth A. Tucker, *Walking Away from Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 13.



students and engaged in students' lives, students feel abandoned and are forced to figure out their life and faith on their own.<sup>265</sup>

This systematic abandonment is becoming an issue even within the new definition of family systems we have today. When students need to have feelings of support and encouragement, they are being ignored, forced to grow up too quickly, or made to become the adult in the family. Students will develop a feeling that no one really cares about them and they have to face life alone. Chap Clark in his book *Hurt* tells of three major issues that students face when feeling abandoned:

- 1) They believe they have no choice but create their own safe place world.
- 2) They search for an emotional and relational home where they feel welcome.
- 3) They connect with others that feel like them.<sup>266</sup>

Let me remind you that this is a big reason the social media movement is growing at such a rapid rate. Students have a longing to belong. If they don't have it they will create it!

Let me add one other issue here; the high need for feeling loved and accepted leads many to choose sexual encounters. The confusion our culture has between sex and intimacy has filtered to our students. Many times this becomes a momentary Band-Aid for the emotional pain of feeling alone. The sex acts mean nothing in the long-term, but in the short-term comfort the pain. The phrase "it's just sex," is a normal response of students when confronted. Again, if our families and even the church does not offer to students a

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<sup>265</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 21.

<sup>266</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 59-60.

safe place to feel emotionally and relationally connected, we will continue to see students jump in and out sexual encounters simply to ease the pain of feeling alone.

Another issue creating this dysfunction is the high pressure to achieve. Competition is high when it comes to getting into the college of choice, to be recognized for doing something good, or even to simply be recognized. This creates a high expectation level and the push that parents, the school, and even churches offer.

In the church we recognize students that have achieved something. Also at school it is about high grades and accomplishments on a field or court. Finally at home, if they are even recognized at all, they are expected to achieve or get a job. The balance of challenging students to achieve and pushing them too hard is a fine line. It is my opinion that if they don't achieve they may question if we will still care and connect with them. We all want to make a good impression, but maintaining the balance of trying to look good or do too much is a difficult one.

Added to this pressure, can be a parent that is trying to live or relive their life through their kids. This is dangerous. Parents will push and see that their kid is the best at everything. When that student realizes they aren't the best but the parent keeps pushing, there is going to be a battle. It will either be a loud confrontation or the student will crumble and question their worth in the eyes of their parents. As youth workers we need to keep our eyes open for these battles.

There is another issue here where some students are simply under challenged. We expect so much out of them and want high achievement, but they are not being challenged in meaningful activities. Tim Elmore of Growing Leaders, wrote in one of his blogs:

On the one hand, 94% of college students say the top word to describe their life is “overwhelmed.” About half say they are so overwhelmed it is almost difficult to function, and nearly one in ten have considered suicide in the last year. At the same time, we see volumes of reports that lead me to believe they are under-challenged. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reports that not only does a large percentage of students cheat on tests, but so do the teachers who lead them. Once the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal broke last year, the AJC uncovered 196 school districts who also cheat. Sadly, investigations on the whole ordeal have been extremely lax; schools and students want to minimize and gloss over the flaw...The problem is a paradox: Kids today are both overwhelmed and under-challenged. They’re busier than ever, but not with meaningful activities that prepare them for life.<sup>267</sup>

We challenge students to achieve but as adults we cut corners. We strive to give the impression of achievement because we want to look good. Students learn well by observation. Adults who we are trying to achieve the most but cut corners along the way to steal the achievement have only taught students that achievement at all cost is worth everything. Even to the point of blowing up a personal value system. This is a paradox for our students. The sense that I have to achieve to get your attention, but I am not challenged in this area so I will not work at it, but I need to achieve to feel loved and accepted, so I have to cheat or steal to gain the achievement. It becomes an ugly vicious cycle. Are we setting our students up to fail? Are we challenging them with so many opportunities and yet never giving them a life transformational challenge?

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<sup>267</sup> Tim Elmore, "Students Are Overwhelmed But Under Challenged," [www.timelmore@growingleaders.com](http://www.timelmore@growingleaders.com) (accessed October 1, 2012).

Dysfunction in commitments and achievements leads to the breakdown of feeling loved and accepted. As this becomes a pattern of the family or even youth ministry system, we place layer upon layer of pain, confusion, and frustration eventually causing a student to give up and walk away. As I said before, dysfunction is here, because we are imperfect beings. As youthworkers we need to limit the amount of commitment and achievement dysfunction we place on students. We need to help them see the beauty of being saved by grace. We need to help them see that we can bring nothing of worth to the His table. Yet He finds us of great value. Not because of what we bring or can do, but because we are His.

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## PODCAST 6

### **YOU CAN'T ENTERTAIN ME ENOUGH**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to articulate the “Entertaining” mode of operation found in a majority of youth ministries and how it is not working in helping students learn, grow, and develop to be life-long followers of Jesus.

Welcome to the sixth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the last few podcasts, I began to share with you some of the symptoms that are leading to the departure of students from the church and more importantly from their connection to a faith journey with Christ. Today, I will talk with you about the “entertain me” culture that is found in a majority of student ministries today.

Our youth ministries should be a place where fun happens. Students today, as discussed in previous podcasts, are busy and consumed with school, sports, work, social media, and family. Then when it comes to youth ministry, it can become that one more thing to do in an already crazy schedule. So we as youth workers have learned to create attractational events. In this action we have added to the problem of why students are disconnecting from God and the church. Youth ministries become a place for free food, video gaming, with loud music but little spiritual engagement.<sup>268</sup> We see that our competition for the student's time is in how we can attract them to be with us, to attend our events, and to just show up. Senior pastors and church leadership teams are wondering why attendance is down, so we have to become more creative to compete with all that is out there drawing on students time and attention. The question then comes, is this what we have for students? Is this how we are going to help them grow in their faith journey? If so, they will continue to leave the church and end any pursuit of faith. Drew Dyck in his book *Generation Ex-Christians* writes; "As we fired up the fun in youth ministry, we watered down the gospel. Many have adopted that mentality, but it's only succeeded in making the gospel boring."<sup>269</sup> We have made the gospel more about games, ski trips, and "is it fun." We have added to the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism thought God is therapeutic enough to make life feel good and fun makes us feel good.

I was challenged with this several years ago. As a youth pastor, I had fallen into the "entertain me" culture. I was working hard to find the right games, the right activities to

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<sup>268</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Location 1721-1722.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 1726-1727.

draw a crowd. I was looking at other youth pastors and saw how big their ministries were, and I was jealous. I kept thinking why isn't my ministry reach as large as theirs? Then I started making excuses. My church wasn't as big as theirs, my budget didn't even come close to theirs, and I didn't have a volunteer base as large as they could pull from were a few of the arguments I would have with myself. It become way more about me than about ministry, and even more about me than the students I was serving. This inner struggle and questions of worth to God's Kingdom moved me to entertain more than challenge.

Sometimes with these personal struggles comes another issue to deal with, churches want the youth worker to be concerned with taking care of only the students of the church. Parents do have a desire to see their kids grow but they rely heavily on the church and youth ministries to get that accomplished. They want them to be taken care of and doing all the things that will draw the students into the church and youth ministry. You need to take care of our kids becomes the marching orders youthworkers receive. Taking care of students for some might be trying to keep them out of jail, or just getting them through high school, and for others it might be helping them get all the service hours they need to get a good scholarship or into the right college. The best way for parents and church leaders to think this is being done is to see bodies showing up on Sundays and Wednesdays or whenever you meet together. Creating attractional events does not mean they will show up. And showing up doesn't mean we are challenging them.



It has been written about for long time, today's students that are under challenged showing a lack of initiative and perseverance.<sup>270</sup> Tim Elmore of Growing Leaders recently wrote about the generation of students born after 1990 and one of the descriptions is slacktivist. A slacktivist is one that advocates for social change one tweet, Facebook Like, on-line donation and petition signature at a time.<sup>271</sup> They want to change the world, but as youthworkers and parents we need to help them understand commitment and sacrifice. This goes against the Moralistic Therapeutic Deistic beliefs. Making a difference in the lives of a student and for a student means leaving their computers and smartphones and getting close enough to touch and be touched by others. This takes a big dog challenge for the youth worker and the student.

Many youth ministries are creating ministry activities that have little challenge, gives the students all the answers, and usually tries to take care of the student rather than having them work out their salvation as we read in Philippians 2:12.<sup>272</sup> We are creating students that rely on us as youth workers for everything. This leads to a formula and or equation driven movement because it seems to be measureable.<sup>273</sup> The reality is that we cannot take the responsibility for their spiritual growth. That is up to God, not us. What we are

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<sup>270</sup> Andy Blanks, "YM Essentials: 5 Signs We're Doing A Crummy Job At Discipleship," YouthMinistry 360, [www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship](http://www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship) (Accessed October 4, 2012).

<sup>271</sup> Tim Elmore, "What Is A Slacktivist," *Growing Leaders* (blog), accessed December 6, 2012, [www.growingleaders.com/blog/what-is-a-slacktivist](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/what-is-a-slacktivist).

<sup>272</sup> Philippians 2:12 (NIV).

<sup>273</sup> Andy Blanks, "YM Essentials: 5 Signs We're Doing A Crummy Job At Discipleship," YouthMinistry 360, [www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship](http://www.youthministry360.com/blog/ym-essentials-5-signs-were-doing-a-crummy-job-at-discipleship) (Accessed October 4, 2012).

charged with is not setting attendance records or taking care of students, but challenging them with the truth of the one and only Almighty God.

This gets back to the relational concern. Relationships are hard and messy, and we are left with an under challenged, overwhelmed student body. On top of that, churches want us to take care of their students keeping them out of trouble and visibly connected to the church, which must mean they are connected to God. It is way more than that. The reality of it is youth ministries are not helping students with a relational connection with God or with others when we are about drawing a crowd, when we should be helping them draw closer to Jesus.

In a recent blog, Ken McIntyre wrote that a reason why students stop showing up is that “it’s too fun. (We are so concerned about having fun and drawing a crowd that) there is no depth either relationally or spiritually. Students crave meaning and mission.”<sup>274</sup> We can build our schedule so full of trying to do the creative attractional events that we miss traveling on the journey with students and giving them depth of relationship and spiritual challenge. Leonard Sweet said it well in a tweet “We like to think others are here for us, whereas Jesus calls us to be there for others.”<sup>275</sup> It is not about how much we wow students, and even how many show up. It is how many of our student’s lives we can impact.

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<sup>274</sup> Ken McIntyre, "8 Reasons Why Students Stop Showing Up," *Ken McIntyre.org* (blog), [www.kenmcintyre.org/1696/8-reasons-why-students-stop-showing-up](http://www.kenmcintyre.org/1696/8-reasons-why-students-stop-showing-up) (accessed June 12, 2012).

<sup>275</sup> Leonard Sweet, Twitter Page, [www.twitter.com/lensweet](http://www.twitter.com/lensweet) (accessed November 25, 2012).

For years I have used a phrase that is credited to Howard Hendricks, but I am not sure where I heard it first. I used with my volunteers both in the church and para-church settings and it was to set the context of what ministry is to be about. It is simply, we impress at a distance; we impact up close. We cannot be about impressing students we have to impact them. We cannot impact them with a “wow” event. We can only impact them when we get close enough to go on the journey with them. Kevin Libick tweeted a thought from Tic Long “Youth ministry is way more about serving than skills, listening than talking, caring than charisma.”<sup>276</sup>

It is amazing to see the growth of youth workers in the last several years. A simple Google search of youth ministry degree brings over three million results. Youth ministry education in colleges and universities can be traced back to the mid 1970’s<sup>277</sup> and it has grown ever sense. In the 1990’s there was a heightened seriousness and support for youth ministry as a profession.<sup>278</sup> Therefore, in 2000’s there has been a marked increase in the undergraduate and graduate educational opportunities for youth ministers.<sup>279</sup> With the increase of college majors also brought an increase in the number of professors as

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<sup>276</sup> Kevin Libick Twitter Page, [www.twitter.com/kevinlibick](http://www.twitter.com/kevinlibick) (accessed October 27, 2012).

<sup>277</sup> Mark W. Cannister, "A Brief History of AYME," Association of Youth Ministry Educators, [www.aymeducators.org/?page=AYMEHistory](http://www.aymeducators.org/?page=AYMEHistory) (accessed August 12, 2012).

<sup>278</sup> Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff, *Timeless Youth Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 49.

<sup>279</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, eds., *Starting Right* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 84.

well as increasing the prominence of a youth ministry degree from universities. The graduating classes of these universities continue to increase. You are receiving good theological and Biblical education. We are seen as well educated and highly qualified even if we don't get paid like it. Yet the issue still remains are we "Wowing" students with our education and creative skills? Or are we willing to go on a journey with them to help them see Jesus?

Lets face it; we can't entertain students more than the rest of life can. Between all they are involved in and the opportunities they have in life; we can't compete. Add to that just the numbers. Adam McLane in his blog wrote about the number of students every youth worker needs to reach. He quoted from the latest census information that we have 427,000,000 10-19 year olds in the United States. He also approximated that we have about 100,000 youth workers. That is a 1 to 427 youth worker to student ratio.<sup>280</sup> That is overwhelming. Let me make it a little better. According to the Coaching Center and Campus Alliance there are 22,834,682 junior high and high school students enrolled in our schools in the United States.<sup>281</sup> Again if we use the number of 100,000 youth workers, then it is only a 1:228 youth worker to student ratio.

No one youth worker is going to be that good. No one youth worker can reach 228 students effectively. If that is agreed upon, then why do we keep trying to accomplish it?

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<sup>280</sup> Adam McLane, "Infographic: Why Youth Ministry Must Decentralize," *Adam McLane* (blog), accessed October 31, 2012, [www.adammclane.com/2012/10/31](http://www.adammclane.com/2012/10/31).

<sup>281</sup> "Schools By State," The Coaching Center/Campus Alliance, [www.app.gocampus.org/cctr/admin/AnalyticsViewing](http://www.app.gocampus.org/cctr/admin/AnalyticsViewing) (accessed October 1, 2011).

The number of students in the United States alone that need to have a chance to hear the truth of an Amazing God can not be done by one, or even 100,000. We need to enlist parents, volunteers, church leaders, others from our churches and communities to serve our students.

I am not sure why we feel like we have to entertain students. I would love to hear from you some thoughts. What I can say is that we are not going to be able to out entertain what is in front of them right now. We don't have the budget, the staff, or the time to do what it would take. What we do have is what no one else or no other industry has – relationship. We will go a little deeper with this on the next podcast. Thanks for listening!

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## PODCAST 7

### **IS THERE ANYTHING DIFFERENT**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to critique the failure of a programmatic approach to the faith journey.

Welcome to the seventh podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

I am working through several podcasts that deal with the symptoms leading to the departure of students from the church and more importantly from their connection to a faith journey with Christ. Today, I will talk with you about programmatic approach that many take in student ministries, and how this is adding to the issue of disconnection students experience with the church and with God.

In the last podcast I talked with you about the entertainment mentality that is creating attractional event development. Today I want to take it a step further with the issue of our teaching gatherings. As student ministries continue to grow and the atmosphere is becoming more professional, a structured or programmed approach to student ministry is developed. Most student ministries have two teaching experiences; one is a large group gathering and the other a small group Bible Study or discussion group.

Let's talk about the large group for a moment. The large group incorporates music, maybe video or drama along with a speaker delivering a carefully planned message. This is not a bad ministry output. It has the opportunity to incorporate students into the planning and implementation of the event. It can become the springboard for information to be delivered to the greatest number of students possible in one setting. The problem comes with the "Its about Sunday Stupid mantra."<sup>282</sup> Sunday mantra includes a well-practiced worship band, Intelligent lighting effects, and high quality production much like a live television performance. Ministries strive to be relevant, but relevance is not related to the bells and whistles that fill youth ministry rooms across the United States.<sup>283</sup> Unfortunately, many church budgets reflect this mentality where more money is spent on what happens on Sunday morning than any other time of the week. The Sunday mantra works its way throughout the rest of the week with the creation of a step-by-step structure. Don't get me wrong, there needs to be a structure in student ministry to create a focused approach and we are not flying all over the place. Without a structure the youth

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<sup>282</sup> Thom Schultz, "Its About Sunday Stupid," *Holy Soup* (blog), <http://holysoup.com/2012/07/18/its-about-Sunday-stupid> (accessed July 18, 2012).

<sup>283</sup> Bret L. Allen, *Shift!* (Sacramento: Toolzone 4 Leaders, 2005), 33-34.



ministry will go in multiple directions and may never assist the student in their growth process. However, the creation of a program only approach will not allow for the variety of students within the ministry, and by its very nature does not allow for a truly relational element in the ministry. The assumption of a program only approach takes a pool of students with different learning styles, needs, and or questions, moves them through a series of events and or curriculums, and expects the same outcomes. This mindset creates a simple arithmetic formula of A (student) + B (events) + C (curriculum) = Disciple. Duffy Robbins says it well in his book *This Way to Youth Ministry*; the scriptures do not give a step-by-step, systematic approach to spiritual growth and development.<sup>284</sup> The inability to realize the variables of the student's life creates a potential problem for the outcome. These variables might consist of family structure, family history, life experiences both positive and negative, relationships, as well as opportunities for service, expression of opinion, and challenge to learn, grow and develop. There is a need for structure, but if we are to help most students in their growth process, it will take more than "if you build it they will come"<sup>285</sup> mentality. Last time I talked about the attractional model of ministry to create the wow-factor events to draw a crowd. The Sunday Mantra movement takes the Attractional and adds to it a Propositional statement and Colonial<sup>286</sup> movement. As I said before the attractional is creating the goal of drawing a crowd. The reality is that our Sunday Mantra becomes the delivery system of

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<sup>284</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 387.

<sup>285</sup> *Field Of Dreams*, directed by Phil Alden Robinson (Dyersville, IA: Universal Pictures Studio, 1989), DVD.

<sup>286</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 18.

information but students do not grasp it because it has no relational component. Even with the increase of attractional creativity, it has not taken into account the cultural changes for students.

The propositional issue is that we offer scripture in a manner in which there is no mystery or question. Does anybody remember the words of our parents; because I said so? Are we not doing the same to our students if we do not allow them to do what we have done; wrestle with truth, question, or even doubt what was said? A sermon driven by propositional arguments that are not speaking to the individual are making students even more resistant to the life-changing message of Jesus.<sup>287</sup>

We will also colonialize programs too. We find what someone else is doing and try to recreate it in our setting or we try to recreate what we have done. Maybe we are using the same information in our talks that we used the first year we started in ministry? Maybe we are doing the same ministry approach as we always have because everyone knows what we are doing and expect it.

When we have a tendency to become programmatic we take out all the mystery that creates anticipation. Ken McIntyre in his blog 8 Reasons Why Students Stop Showing Up talks about how our ministries are becoming too predictable.<sup>288</sup> Student will begin to

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<sup>287</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Location 391.

<sup>288</sup> Ken McIntyre, "8 Reasons Why Students Stop Showing Up," *Ken McIntyre.org* (blog), [www.kenmcintyre.org/1696/8-reasons-why-students-stop-showing-up](http://www.kenmcintyre.org/1696/8-reasons-why-students-stop-showing-up) (accessed June 12, 2012).

know what is going on and that creates boredom. One of the worst things I ever heard about the camps I would run is that students called Thursday night cry night. They told me that was when we held nothing back and delivered the biggest challenge followed by everyone praying and crying together. We became so predictable and programmed students' responses. The reality is that they are not here to listen to us speak or listen to a band play music they only listen to at church or play a few latest and greatest games we found. They show up because of the other students; those they call friends. It is about relationships not a cool room, a kickin' band and funny speaker. It may attract them, but it won't keep them. And it certainly will not be what guides them on their faith journey. Jon Acuff was quoted well on a Youthmin.org blog; "If you only preach the gospel on stage but don't live it off the stage, you're not a pastor, you're an actor..."<sup>289</sup> Ministries that work to attract for the sake of attendance do not create or even earn the opportunity to speak into the lives of those they have been charged to serve.

Connected to the issue of the Sunday program mentality, many student and adults as well do not understand what Christianity is all about. They pick and choose their approach to their faith, and their behavior or outer expressions of life are worse than those who do not attend church.<sup>290</sup> Many can sit in church services or religious gatherings, surrounded by people who look and in many cases act alike and still not advance in their faith journey. There is such a desire for knowledge and experience, but it has no core foundation, no

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<sup>289</sup> Andy Gill, "State Of Youth Ministry," *Youthmin.org* (blog), [www.youthmin.org/2012/08/29](http://www.youthmin.org/2012/08/29) (accessed August 29, 2012).

<sup>290</sup> Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (United States Of America: Group Publishing, 2001), 34.

heart for the Christ follower. It is simply to check off a to do list of information development therefore fulfilling a duty and a craving for something different to experience, but both fade along the journey. New information is offered and new experiences of something that seems bigger and better enters the follower's path. There is no dedication to Christ, seeking His knowledge, and experiencing all that He offers. It simply remains something to be done every week at the same time with little or nothing changing.

If there are these many issues with the large group what about the small groups?

Most of our small groups feed off of a pre-packaged curriculum, and this creates a need for quality curriculum. With a walk through most Christian bookstores or a web search, it is obvious that there is no shortage for curriculum. The amount of curriculum available can be overwhelming. Youth Ministry curriculum and how-to books are becoming a significant industry in the United States. This market with high energy, visible, and large budget programs promise great youth ministry in a box.<sup>291</sup> Which one is best, who wrote it, how much is it, how easy is it to deliver; are just a few of the questions that a youth worker considers as they decide on a curriculum. Curriculum is also written for a volunteer led ministry.<sup>292</sup> With many volunteers caring for a family, working a full time job, and more than likely fulfilling many volunteer responsibilities within the church time

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<sup>291</sup> Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, *Awakening Youth Discipleship* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 3.

<sup>292</sup> This information comes from conversations with Group Publishing, Youth Specialties, and Wesley Press editors. These conversations were in regards to a request that I write some curriculum and this was a parameter given to me.

to create high quality curriculum is not their primary concern, finding one is. Many professional youth workers also do not take the time to create a systematic learning curriculum for their specific students. They too will turn to the curriculum of higher visible, higher quality, large budget programs to allow them more time for other issues.

The marketing by publishers is to sell the product, and selling the product to as many youth ministries, volunteer led or professional youth worker led, as possible. This leads to another issue with spiritual development curriculum; it is written with a big target in mind. It does not narrow in on specific groups of students with their specific needs. The needs of students are vast and different based on their history, family, and culture in which they live. When a youth worker needs to discover a curriculum, they need to find one that fits the needs of many students. This is a difficult task. While curriculum is needed to give direction towards an end goal of educating and informing a student, it is not personal for each student. Curriculum is used to assist the youth worker and educate the student, however, it may miss the mark for a portion of the students within the ministry. We have grown accustomed to using written resources to attract large numbers of students, to get them to make a profession of faith.<sup>293</sup> Looking for the latest and greatest youth ministry book and following the ten simple steps to improve your youth ministry will not create an atmosphere for spiritual development.<sup>294</sup> Please don't misunderstand me, a good curriculum is needed, but it is a tool just like the social media.

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<sup>293</sup> Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, *Awakening Youth Discipleship* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 3.

<sup>294</sup> Chap Clark and Kara Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 17.

The greatest ministry does not happen based on a curriculum, but on a person that will journey with the student through life.

This person is important because our program only structures have not taken into account the extension of adolescence. Chap Clark in his book *Hurt* indicates that adolescence is a transitional phase of life where they are part student and part adult.<sup>295</sup> Developmental psychologist John Santrock calls adolescence the period of life between childhood and adulthood lasting from roughly 10-13 years of age and ending between 18-22. Tim Elmore wrote in his blog; “Minimally, this shift has delayed their entrance into adulthood. More than one college dean has told me, “26 is the new 18.”<sup>296</sup> Defining when adolescence ends is a difficult task as it begins with biology and ends in culture.<sup>297</sup> Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith describes this new extended phase in life when he writes; “The transition from the teenage years to fully achieved adulthood has stretched out into an extended stage that is often amorphous, unstructured, and convoluted, lasting upward of twelve or more years.”<sup>298</sup> Most student ministries do not extend past the high school graduation. Students leave their high school and their church. There is a mistaken assumption that students will spend their four years of college growing their faith, starting a career, beginning a family and return to church as a

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<sup>295</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 27.

<sup>296</sup> Tim Elmore, "What Is A Slacktivist," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/what-is-a-slacktivist](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/what-is-a-slacktivist) (accessed December 6, 2012).

<sup>297</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 28.

<sup>298</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Locations 2165-2167.

complete adult.<sup>299</sup> When the program only ministry ends, the assumption is that all students are prepared for anything that comes their way especially within their spiritual development.

Our students need healthy people who are on their own faith journey to ask a student to tag along with them. It is when this relationship between a student and adult is understood as a journey of faith, each will begin to learn, grow, and develop into a life-long follower of Christ.

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<sup>299</sup> Reggie Joiner, Chuck Bomar, and Addie Smith, *The Slow Fade* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 25.

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## PODCAST 8

### **AM I A FOCUS OR AN AFTER-THOUGHT**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be able to analyze the benefits and potential drawbacks of the family ministry focus.

Welcome to the eighth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

I am working through several podcasts that deal with the symptoms leading to the departure of students from the church and more importantly from their connection to a faith journey with Christ. Today, I will talk with you about the family ministry movement with its benefits and potential drawbacks.

My last position at a local church morphed into a position titled Family Ministries Pastor. We were working to develop a positive transitional movement for students from birth through college graduation. The goal was to guide kids and students through the key transitions of life and determine how the partnership of the family and the church could work together so students would not disconnect from God and the church. This movement was a wave that we caught called the Orange Movement. I am sure many of you have heard of this movement and are currently working on implementing its strategy.

The Orange Movement was birthed out of North Point Community Church under the leadership of Reggie Joiner who was their Family Ministries Pastor. The goal was not to make another model of church growth but a strategy that establishes a partnership between the church and parents for the greater spiritual development of children and students. The premise of the Orange Movement is that two combined influences make a greater impact than just two influences.<sup>300</sup> Creating a greater partnership between the church and parents is always a positive. Reggie stated that both influences exist because God desires to use them to demonstrate His plan of redemption and restoration.<sup>301</sup> Without question, if the church and parents will work together there is a potential for students to remain on a life-long journey of faith in God. There is an ugly reality that parents can do everything right, but their kids still make the choice of faith. Even the church and parents can partner together and do everything right, but the students still

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<sup>300</sup> Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange* (United States Of America: David C Cook, 2009), 15.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

have choices to make. It is a better situation if they are working together and as Reggie puts it; “Too much is at stake for either one to fail.”<sup>302</sup>

This thought regarding the importance of parents in their kid’s faith development is not a new one. One of the resulting issues found in the National Study of Youth and Religion Report determined the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.<sup>303</sup> Because of this we have to understand that if a parent is not growing in their spiritual development then by following their lead, the student will not be growing. This is one reason why students are not just a student ministry issue and why family ministry is critical. Adults need to be growing on their faith journey so they can share with the kids and students of their church community in the growth process of faith development. Dr. Jim Burns, author and long time veteran of student ministries wrote on his twitter page; “The best faith conversations come when parents see themselves as fellow learners and not as teachers.”<sup>304</sup>

Kara Powell, one of the researchers and writers of *Sticky Faith* takes this a step further than parents. This research indicates that for a student to feel welcomed in the church community it takes 5 adults that will invest into the life of 1 student.<sup>305</sup> That is not five

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 261.

<sup>304</sup> Jim Burns Twitter Page, [www.twitter.com/drjimburns](http://www.twitter.com/drjimburns) (accessed December 22, 2012).

<sup>305</sup> Kara Powell. "Sticky Faith" (seminar for the Center for Congregations, Ft. Wayne, IN, December 5, 2012).

volunteer youth workers, but simply five adults that will show the student that they care about them and will invest in them.

But let's face it, there is some real tension here. The birth of the youth sub-culture began in the 1950's and became a driving force in the 1960's. Entertainment companies and the clothing industry began to focus their attention on this new sub-culture that was gaining prominence.<sup>306</sup> Within the 1960's assassinations, nuclear proliferation, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, civil rights issues and unrest all created questions and issues for this generation of students and for their parents and grandparents to answer the questions that were raised. Added to these questions were the issues of the 1970's including Watergate, economic confusion, hostage taking in Iran, the expression of free love, and the mysterious illness now known as AIDS. This culture began to ask questions of their elders and churches and they could not give adequate answers. Adults went from being a part of a relatively stable and cohesive community intent on caring for its young to a free-for-all of independent and fragmented people seeking their own pleasure and survival.<sup>307</sup> The students of the 1970's and early 1980's are now the parents of our students. Looking at today's culture of students, it appears to be healthy, most having even more than they need, and the opportunity to accomplish more than previous generations. Students need adults to become adults who are available, who care for them, and do not have a hidden or self-centered agenda.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 21.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>308</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 42.

One of the battles with the partnership between parents and the church is when parents state that things haven't changed much. Dr. Jean Twenge describes this generation in her book *Generation ME*; "The individual has always come first, and feeling good about yourself has always been a primary virtue."<sup>309</sup> (Remember when I talked about the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism?) Generation ME's expectations are highly optimistic: they expect to go to college, to make lots of money, and perhaps even to be famous. Yet this generation enters a world in which college admissions are increasingly competitive, good jobs are hard to find and harder to keep, and basic necessities like housing and health care have skyrocketed in price. This is a time of soaring expectations and crushing realities. The head of the Roper Youth Report says that for young people "the gap between what they have and what they want has never been greater."<sup>310</sup> Things have changed. Jim Burns has made this statement many times; "I was sixteen once, but I have never walked in (this generation of students) shoes."<sup>311</sup>

Today, students face many challenges that have only been advanced by an emerging culture that does not accept the wisdom of church leadership and in many cases their parents. Research completed for the book *UnChristian* found many young adults outside of Christianity have little trust in the Christian faith and those who are Christ followers.

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<sup>309</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 240.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>311</sup> Jim Burns. "Trainer Of Trainers" (training of Youth Workers, San Clemente, CA, October 1, 1994).

Many feel rejected by Christians and so they reject Christianity.<sup>312</sup> Another addition to the continual feelings of being disconnected not just from the institution or the gathering of Christ followers, but of the individual followers and therefore the Almighty God they represent. Student begin to recoil from the church and Christ followers because of the pain they feel from not being accepted for who they are, and not being able to express themselves.<sup>313</sup> If there is no connection between a student and the gathering of Christ followers, other than their parents, there cannot be a sense of belonging to the church or to Christ followers. Without a connection there is no way for the church as an organization and as Christ followers to understand the plight of the students. When the students realize they are not heard or understood, the church becomes a place where they do not belong. A continual search for spiritual satisfaction will grow and become more intense.<sup>314</sup>

This is a great movement, but many have used this movement at the expense of the students and the ministry to students. In most of our larger churches around the United States we create a separation issue. The only time kids, students and adults are together is when they are walking in the door and when they reconnect to leave the building. Kara Powell describes it like the kids table versus the adult table at family Thanksgiving

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<sup>312</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 11.

<sup>313</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Location 539-541.

<sup>314</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 25.

gatherings.<sup>315</sup> The kid's table is usually the folding table, off in a corner, maybe paper plates and plastic silverware with paper napkins. The adult table is the big dining room table, covered with the best tablecloth, nice dishes and glassware with cloth napkins. Bring back any memories? We separate our kids and students from anything that is connected to an adult gathering. To make matters worse, if we bring kids and students into the adult gatherings we want to see them but not hear from them. We allow the students to sit in a certain section, up front is best so we can keep an eye on them. However, we never want to hear them sing their kind of music, or hear them speak any message that is coming from their heart. If we really care about our students, we need to not only see them, but also hear from them. Okay, they may not be all that eloquent and they may struggle through a song or a message. But letting them know that what they think and feel is important to us will show them we care.

For those churches that already combine sixth graders on up together, it has to be more than just combining students with adults in ministry opportunities. By the time adolescents enter high school, nearly every one has been subjected to a decade or more of adult-driven and adult-controlled programs, systems, and institutions that are primarily concerned with adult's agendas, needs, and dreams.<sup>316</sup> If we really believe they are important, then we need to respond to their needs not just in the messages or songs. As adults they need to take the first step to ask a student about their life, school, work, or activities. I have taught adults that need to start a conversation with students to use the

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<sup>315</sup> Powell, Kara. "Sticky Faith" (Seminar for the Center for Congregations, Ft. Wayne, IN, December 5, 2012).

<sup>316</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 46.

S.L.I.R. method. This has been my method of earning the right to talk to a student. First, talk about their school (S). Where do you go to school? What grade are you in? What classes are you taking? Then if you are getting good information ask about what they like (L) followed by clarifying questions. What is your favorite band? Why do you like them? What kind of music is it that they play? Then you can ask about their interests (I). Are you on a sports team or involved in a sport. What about choir, band, or orchestra? Are you in a club at school? Do you work? Where at? Do you like it? After spending several conversations and if this goes well, you have earned the right to talk about religion (R). What did you think about what they pastor said today? Do you have any big things coming this week that I could pray for you about?

Just having them in the same room will not get it done. We need to hear from them and as the old Young Life statement holds true, earn the right to be heard.<sup>317</sup> This has to be a partnership because our students matter!

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<sup>317</sup> "History," Young Life, [www.younglife.org/AboutYoungLife/history.htm](http://www.younglife.org/AboutYoungLife/history.htm). (accessed January 2, 2013).



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## PODCAST 9

### **DOES CHRISTIANITY REALLY MATTER?**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to articulate why students question if Christianity really matters today.

Welcome to the ninth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

I am working through several podcasts that deal with the symptoms leading to the departure of students from the church and more importantly from their connection to their faith journey with Christ. Today, I will talk with you about why students are question the validity of the Christianity they see.

It is amazing to me that now more than ever through the eyes of students Christianity is weak and losing its effectiveness. As I talk about students today I am talking about both the ones that grew up going to church and those who did not. Having conversations with students, they seem to have questions that deliver the same painful punch. Does all this really matter? Does Christianity, as they are seeing it, really matter?

There has been some extraordinary research that stepped into these types of questions. Three of the best came from David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons who wrote *UnChristian*, *Generation Ex-Christian* from Drew Dyck and *Sticky Faith* from several researchers and authors at Fuller Theological Seminary. I would encourage you to read all of these books if you haven't already. Today I will talk about issues that have come from both of these research projects, my own experiences with student's questions and how it is causing many to disconnect from God and the church.

Students face many challenges that have only been advanced by an emerging culture that does not accept the conventional wisdom of our churches, church leadership, or even their parents. Research for *UnChristian* found many young adults have little trust in the Christian faith and those who are Christ followers. Much of this lack of trust comes from the perceptions students have about Christianity and the church. Student perceptions can be because of second hand information or first hand experiences. Either way, their perceptions are important for us to consider and we cannot ignore them.

One issue is that many feel rejected by Christians and so they reject Christianity.<sup>318</sup> I believe that some of the feelings of disconnection begin at early ages. As discussed in previous podcasts, as soon as a family enters the doors of the church building they are separated by age and rarely are they ever reunited until they leave the building. I have seen it and experienced it when the student ministry is asked to make a sacrifice by the church leadership that is coupled with the phrase, because students are flexible. I agree that they are flexible and doing the same thing all the time with students is not a good idea. Students are still constantly being told to deal with the change. Adults need a new room on a Sunday; we can take the youth room. Adults need space for an event, we can ask, more like tell the youth pastor, to find a new space for their activities. Students are told that they cannot have messy events cause we don't want to stain the carpets. Don't get me wrong we need to be flexible, but it seems that the student and student ministry are the only ones being flexible. This may seem like an administrative issue, but it goes much deeper than a room issue.

This is one of many issues that can and does create feelings of being disconnected, not just from the institution or the gathering of Christ followers, but of the individual followers and therefore the God they represent. I have been in churches when people have left a service because the students were going to be involved that day. Or some don't even show up on Youth Sunday, even though is only given to students once a year.

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<sup>318</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 11.

Students begin to recoil from the church and Christ followers because of the pain they feel from not being accepted for who they are, and not being able to express themselves.<sup>319</sup> If there is no connection between a student and the gathering of Christ followers, other than their parents, there cannot be a sense of belonging to the church or to Christ followers. Without a connection there is no way for the church as an organization and as Christ followers to understand the plight of the students. How can students understand the adult world? They are not there yet. While adults will not understand what it is like to be a sixteen-year-old today, they have the ability to listen, learn and begin to understand the complexities of a high school student. When the students realize they are not heard or understood, the church becomes a place where they do not belong. A continual search for spiritual satisfaction will grow and become more intense.<sup>320</sup>

Another issue is that students see the church and Christians as hypocritical. Hypocrisy is understood as saying one thing but doing something different. Many of us would begin to defend ourselves if we were called a hypocrite, but the reality is this is the perception that is seen and heard by students. Kinnaman and Lyons discuss it this way; it's not just our lifestyles that have gotten us in trouble; it's the very way in which we convey the priorities of being a Christian. The most common message people hear from us is that Christianity is a religion of rules and regulations. They think of us as hypocritical

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<sup>319</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Location 539-541.

<sup>320</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 25.

because they are measuring us by our own standards.”<sup>321</sup> We have become a movement of management. Dallas Willard coined the phrase sin management as a way of describing how we live our lives. We are looking for the lines to be sure we don’t cross them. We strive to find out how bad we can be to still be good. It is more of a perception of what good and bad is so we create the do and don’t list. That way if I do these things, void of emotion, and don’t do these things I am good. But what is good?

I have a group of college students that I have been working with for a few years. We have wrestled with this issue for a long time. They have heard people being called a good Christian. So they ask, does that mean there are bad Christians? What does it take to be good in the eyes of God? In Romans 4<sup>322</sup> we read that it is not the works Abraham did that gave him righteousness. It was that He believed. Have we not created a mindset that we have to look good and play the part of Christianity? Students see that and call it hypocrisy.

Another issue with hypocrisy that the Sticky Faith research found is that most students believe in a gospel that's a lot like a jacket.<sup>323</sup> Many of us have tried on jackets. It takes time to find the right size and feel. Students look at it much the same way. It is easy to take on and off. If you don’t like the feel, try something else. You don’t have to keep it

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<sup>321</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 48.

<sup>322</sup> Romans 4:1-3 (New International Version).

<sup>323</sup> Kara Powell. "Sticky Faith" (seminar for the Center for Congregations, Ft. Wayne, IN, December 5, 2012).

with you all the time. According to Ephesians 2<sup>324</sup> we are saved by grace. It is not anything that we could do. So coming to Christ is not what we do but being a good Christian is all about what we do. Where do they get this? They get from us. Are we as consistent as we need to be, or as honest as we should be about our failures? These are the questions that lead to hypocrisy that students are seeing and asking about.

The Sticky Faith Research also asked third year college students “What does it mean to be a Christian?” 1 out of 3 didn’t mention Jesus at all.<sup>325</sup> The most common language was “We are to love people.” It has to be more than behaviors, which is about lifestyle, and again rolls back to sin management. The need for hope and healing is not looked for in God, because they had been taught the sin management process. When we are in the midst of this management process we cannot connect with God due to guilt and shame. Another issue my college group talks about often is grace. I have to admit, I grew up in a denominational tribe that spoke of grace, but I never really understood it. I was a youth pastor and attending a Youth Specialties Convention in Orlando, Florida, when I heard a message that challenged me about grace. It was from Gordon McDonald. McDonald told the story of his life. He had completed the book *Ordering Your Private World* and all things from the outside looked good. Then he had an affair, confessed it to his wife, family, and church. He went through several years of counseling and restoration. I really don’t remember the specifics of what he said. But for the first time I heard a man talk about experiencing a depth of grace. I cherish that moment. It challenged me to begin a

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<sup>324</sup> Ephesians 2:1-8 (New International Version).

<sup>325</sup> Kara Powell. "Sticky Faith" (seminar for the Center for Congregations, Ft. Wayne, IN, December 5, 2012).

journey to understand grace. It is not based on our actions; it is based on a love that was shared. When I tell the college students this story, they desire to understand more of this grace. It is no longer a jacket we wear; it is a love given. The issue of hypocrisy is a problem that we have to guide students through. To me it is the issue that can crumble the foundation of their faith journey.

There are several other issues that UnChristian, Generation Ex-Christian, and Sticky Faith discovered. Arguments about Christianity being too political, judgmental, programmed, and linear cause students to see Christianity as an organization, not a relationship. They hear conversations within the church about attendance, the building, and budgets. They see and sometimes hear from youth workers about the political environment within the churches staffing structure. Many times youth ministries get the left over rooms and are made to adjust their use of rooms and schedule for the older adults or the children's ministry. They are told to be careful with sound levels and avoid messy games that could ruin the carpet. These words and actions create a mentality that the church is not for them so they don't fit the church or Christianity.

The reality is that 1 in 2 cross the bridge from Youth Groups to adulthood with faith intact and that 4 out of 5 intended to cross well, but 50% don't.<sup>326</sup> The reality is that for a church and student ministry to have students that passionately follow Christ, they should never lose them in the first place. The issues mentioned above can be confronted by a simple truth. If we are in relationship with students we are earning the opportunity to

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<sup>326</sup> Kara Powell. "Sticky Faith" (seminar for the Center for Congregations, Ft. Wayne, IN, December 5, 2012).



journey with them in faith. Failure to have the relationship will result in these issues becoming more prevalent and more of an obstacle causing students to disconnect from God and the church.

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Romans 4:1-3 (New International Version).

## PODCAST 10

**ITS TOO HARD SO WHY TRY**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to articulate why students struggle with the thought that the faith journey is too hard to try.

Welcome to the tenth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

I am working through several podcasts that deal with the symptoms leading to the departure of students from the church and more importantly from their connection to their faith journey with Christ. Today, I will talk with you about why students struggle with how hard it is live on a faith journey.

Working with students over the years, I have heard all sorts of statements and questions about the journey of faith. As I indicated in the last podcast, the question of how far is too far has always been an issue. For many years that seem to be about one subject, how far can I go sexually with my date? Now it seems that the how far question is about everything. How far can I go in what I say and still have integrity? How far can I go without getting caught cheating? What if I take someone else's homework and copy it, is that cheating? I mean I don't cheat on tests and this really isn't for a big grade or anything.

I have also heard from those who older than I am that we don't preach on sin anymore. We don't challenge people with conviction. We don't point out what is wrong and what their sins are? Don't you love it? It is always someone else's sin.

This thought battle between generations is amazing. Who is the buffer between these groups of thinkers? That would be each and every youth worker. That would be the youth worker that works with adults, parents, and donors to gain the support for our ministries, but who also works with students that are trying to navigate through life.

This is an interesting dance between these two groups. For the older generations, duty and responsibility were the battle cry of life. You fulfilled your responsibilities before you worried about anything that you as an individual wanted or even needed.<sup>327</sup> Today, with the infusion of the Moralistic Therapeutic Deistic mindset it becomes all about me.

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<sup>327</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 19.

Dr. Jean Twenge in her book *Generation ME* describes our students this way. “GenMe is twice as likely to agree with statement ‘There is no single right way to live.’ Young people say that the most important quality a child can learn is to think for himself or herself and only half as many young people as old say that obedience is a good lesson for children...This is the social trend – so strong it’s really a revolution...do what makes you happy, and don’t worry about what other people think.”<sup>328</sup>

Did you catch the last phrase? Do what makes you happy has become today’s battle cry. What is worse is that this battle cry has filtered into our ministries. I think previous generations have a point when they say we don’t challenge people any more. I will not be willing to go back to the blame, shame, and guilt ministries of the past, but we have to challenge our students.

Again this becomes a fine line dance. Students see Christianity as a difficult journey and if it is too hard or makes me uncomfortable they will not do it. They will simply leave it untried. Students see it as difficult to live at a high moral Christian standard, and do not wish to live a compromised moral life.<sup>329</sup> This is where things get a little interesting and confusing. Students want a moral life. That is the Moralistic piece of the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. However the moral code that many strive for has no foundation. There is no foundation to the ‘do what makes you happy and don’t worry about what others think’ direction of life. So this battle between searching for a moral life while

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 19-20.

<sup>329</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Location 205.

living for what feels good in the moment creates a major issue. This is part of the complexity a student is confronted with every day. If they then try to live by a Christian standard while following sinful desires of what makes them happy, this creates a moral dilemma that they are not willing to confront. Therefore they walk away from their Christian commitments that were made in the confines of a safe and somewhat sterile environment of student ministries, churches, and families.

This battle, called cognitive dissonance by psychologists, explains the opposing behaviors and beliefs that cause mental distress and emotional hurt. Drew Dyck in *Generation Ex-Christians* writes it this way; “We seek to resolve the tension by dropping or modifying one of those contradictory beliefs or behaviors. Once we do, our psyche’s harmony is restored.”<sup>330</sup> This becomes the Therapeutic piece of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Therapy for the conflicting behavior and belief that is causing my stress and emotional hurt is to simply walk away or to never really try it in the first place.

Christianity then is found to be too difficult and students simply walk away. Remember, this disconnect begins to be noticed as they leave high school and enter into the work force or college. The new found freedoms and the responsibilities of making most if not all of their own decisions now gives them the power. If it gets too difficult, just walk away. We have taught them this behavior with the enormous erosion of relationships even in the Christian culture. I am not talking just about marriage, but church leaders that

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, Kindle Locations 205-211.

have conflict and won't take ownership and address it appropriately or those who claim Christ but talk poorly of their neighbors.

We also bring them to large group gatherings at churches and student ministries and offer sermon after sermon with a central theme that anyone can "be a successful Christian if you just try hard enough."<sup>331</sup> Then we tell them to spend thirty minutes a day reading the scripture and praying, to give their tithe, and serve somewhere within the church and here you have the success movement of discipleship. So not only have we not challenged students, we have given them simple four steps to success as a Christian formula.

Life isn't that easy and a journey with Christ is not that simplistic. We have made joining into a relationship with God hard and living on the journey with Him easy. As a matter of fact it is just the opposite. Joining into a relationship with Jesus is made possible by the grace offering action of Jesus taking our punishment for sin. The journey with Him is where we are challenged to flesh out the truth that He offers. We can't water down how difficult it is to live on the faith journey with Jesus. The tendency then is to create the just try harder routine. If you are struggling, do more and try harder to grow more becomes a chant that has little meaning. After many cycles of trying harder and failing more, a student gives up and simply says, I can't do it. Due to what students see as inconsistent living between faith statements and Christ follower's actions, Christianity, to them, just has no validity in their world.

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<sup>331</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 123.

So as youth workers what should we be doing to guide students through the difficult journey of life and a life of faith in Christ? It all begins with relationship. Students have made relationship a life mission.<sup>332</sup> As youth workers we have to understand this and work to earn the right to have a relationship with the students we serve. We will never see growth in our students if we speak of God and a life with Him as if we are giving students travel directions to someone's house. This really doesn't work anymore because they have MapQuest or a GPS to follow. Students will find other avenues to discover the truth they are seeking and that truth is to make them feel good and not to have to deal with pain. As youth workers we need to create social interactions that allows students to work out the information they are attaining, and process it through the relational lens.

Second, youth workers must offer the incentive of "why" before the "what" of being a Christ follower.<sup>333</sup> Speaking to students must reach into their passions based on a relational connection with God versus a theological argument about Him. While youth workers still need to challenge and teach the intellect of the student, the opening will be found through an emotional connection. Students are engaged in a passionate pursuit of a cause and a desire to have a life that has meaning. Transformation will not be found in gaining more information, but connecting emotions and passions to the information gained.

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<sup>332</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 306.

<sup>333</sup> Tim Elmore, "Communicating With The Next Generation," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation) (accessed August 30, 2012).



Third, Sticky Faith encourages that our teaching is centered in “Obedience as a Great Big Thank You Note to God.”<sup>334</sup> As I stated in a previous podcast, students do not understand grace. I believe because many of us do not understand grace. I can’t say I am an expert here. I am still on this journey discovering the depth of grace from a loving God. We have to help students understand the battles of life are covered by grace. The mindset of “I Can’t” is a great place to start. The reality is we can’t, but the truth is God has, is, and will show us grace. The undeserved and free forgiveness of wrongs is so hard to grasp, but I do not understand how we do life without it.

Sticky Faith also gives us the challenge to share with our students that “Jesus is bigger than any mistake!”<sup>335</sup> Jesus can handle anything we struggle with and fall into. He loves us no matter what we do. We can run to Him all the time, with everything we have done, no matter what it is. Again, this is found in the foundation of grace.

Finally, we need to allow for doubt. Doubt is not seen as a positive character trait. Those who doubt are seen as weak. I would like to challenge that. Those who doubt are not simply willing to accept something because someone said it. They want to dig deeper and investigate it further. What is that a bad thing? According to the Sticky Faith research 70% of kids doubt their faith in High School, but few actually talk about those doubts. Students were asked what were their doubts? They stated:

#### A. Does God Exist?

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<sup>334</sup> Kara Powell. "Sticky Faith" (seminar for the Center for Congregations, Ft. Wayne, IN, December 5, 2012).

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

- B. Is Christianity true/the only way to God?
- C. Does God love me?
- D. Am I living the life God wants?<sup>336</sup>

In many research projects from Sticky Faith, to UnChristian, and Generation Ex-Christians, students state that they believe the organized church and many Christians can't handle tough questions. That leads them to wonder; can God handle our tough questions? If we do not allow space for doubt, we are creating a robotic response. We will be encouraging a culture to only accept what we give them. If I am not mistaken, that is what the Pharisees were doing. They were instructing people to do specifically as they were being told. Doubt was not welcomed, and we know how well that turned out. We need to not be afraid to challenge students. In turn we cannot be afraid when they do not accept what we have said. I heard Kara Powell of Fuller Theological Seminary put it this way, "In 11<sup>th</sup> grade students can study and learn Shakespeare, but we teach them with baby food."<sup>337</sup>

I believe we need to rise to the challenge and be challenged. The faith journey is not an easy road, but it is a journey filled with excitement.

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

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## PODCAST 11

### **DEFINING THE FAITH JOURNEY**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to describe the faith journey we can have with a student as they work through their needs and the obstacles they face.

Welcome to the eleventh podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

Today I will be describing and defining the faith journey. I will share the variety of definitions we have of discipleship and look at the obstacles and needs for students along this journey.

The word disciple defined in Greek is *mathetes* meaning learner, pupil, follower or apprentice.<sup>338</sup> From Latin, disciple is derived from the verb form *discere*, meaning to learn.<sup>339</sup> In both cases, the Greek and Latin, indicate a disciple and therefore discipleship is a process beyond a one-time understanding or learning opportunity, and more of a movement of growth over an extended period of time.

Rick Warren defined discipleship as the process of transformation that changes us to be increasingly more like Christ through the Word (John 17:17), the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18), and circumstances (Romans 8:28-29)...Discipleship is based on continual repentance ("Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" Romans 12:1-2). It takes far more than Bible study to grow a disciple – it takes a *balance* of worship experiences, fellowship experiences, engagement with the Word, ministry experiences, and evangelism/mission experiences. Without balance there is no health, and without health, there is no growth.<sup>340</sup>

Francis Chan wrote an article for the Catalyst website. Disciples in Jesus' day would follow their rabbi (which means teacher) wherever he went, learning from the rabbi's teaching and training to do as the rabbi did. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is as simple as

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<sup>338</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 15.

<sup>339</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 12.

<sup>340</sup> Linda Lowery, "Rick Warren's Definition Of Discipleship," *Exponential* (blog), [www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/warren-on-discipleship](http://www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/warren-on-discipleship) (accessed November 15, 2012).

obeying His call to follow. Basically, a disciple is a follower, but only if we take the term follower literally. It's impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person.<sup>341</sup>

Rob Wegner, a pastor at Granger Community Church and author defines disciple as someone who is an apprentice, learning a way from a teacher they adhere to. A disciple is one who follows another in their ways and teachings. So, discipleship happens all the time. Everyone is a disciple of someone or something. Discipleship is unavoidable. We are all being Discipled and we are all discipling others. The question is: To who or what am I discipling others?<sup>342</sup>

Lance Ford, pastor, church planter, coach, consultant, and author defines discipleship as an intentional relationship where one follower of Jesus invites another person to be with him on his journey of following Jesus, with a willingness to share wisdom, experience, counsel and resources along the way. He goes on to state that disciple making as a relationship costs not only the person being discipled, but the discipler as well. Jesus risked as much or more than the twelve by inviting the ones He did into that follow me relationship. He was putting his reputation and his life literally on the line. These guys were not the cream of the crop. They were not best of class, but Jesus was willing to give

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<sup>341</sup> Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, "Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples," *Catalyst Space* (blog), [www.catalystspace.com/content/read/multiply\\_disciples\\_making\\_disciples](http://www.catalystspace.com/content/read/multiply_disciples_making_disciples) (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>342</sup> Linda Lowery, "Rob Wegner On Discipleship," *Exponential* (blog), [www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/rob-wegner-on-discipleship](http://www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/rob-wegner-on-discipleship) (accessed November 20, 2012).

the time and energy it took to bring them to maturity. He poured his life into them. He didn't hold study groups that he could walk away from when class was over. He was committed to them beyond the pulpit or classroom.<sup>343</sup>

We then have an understanding that disciple and the discipleship process is one who is a follower of Jesus, who is with Jesus, who is learning from Jesus<sup>344</sup> and passing on this passion for Jesus to others. It becomes a thought that my life rubs off onto the other person. As I pursue what it means to journey with Christ, my words, actions, passions, and compassions are passed on to another because we are so close to one another.

I love the words of Jesus as He described a disciple in Matthew 5-7. Jesus preached what is known as the Sermon on the Mount describing characteristics of a follower of His. He describes these followers as gentle, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, salt of the earth, and light of the world.<sup>345</sup> Jesus also used the term "my disciple" giving a description of a true follower and learner. Found in Luke 14:25-33, Jesus challenges those following Him that were not serious about being a disciple. He challenged them that to be a disciple of Jesus a person must love Christ above all other relationships, follow Him even

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<sup>343</sup> Linda Lowery, "Lance Ford On Discipleship," *Exponential* (blog), [www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/lance-ford-on-discipleship](http://www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/lance-ford-on-discipleship) (accessed November 28, 2012).

<sup>344</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 291.

<sup>345</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 10.

in suffering and death, and surrender everything to Him.<sup>346</sup> In John 8:31-32, disciples are to hold to His teachings allowing them to know the truth and be set free.<sup>347</sup> John 13:34-35, Jesus teaches that a true disciple models the same kind of love that has been shown to them.<sup>348</sup> In John 15, Jesus challenged disciples to be connected to Him by abiding, bearing fruit and keeping his commands.<sup>349</sup> This indicates that a disciple will be known by their actions.<sup>350</sup> A disciple is then recognized by a willingness to know and follow the teachings Christ gave, to love Him above anyone else, to live by actions that honor Him, and surrender everything to Him.

Now that I have given you a lot of information on the definition we have to look at how we are doing, since we were given the challenge to make disciples centuries ago. George Barna states it this way; “Unfortunately, the twenty-first century church has many followers of Christ... We dabble in Christianity. That is not what Jesus had in mind when He called us to be His disciples.”<sup>351</sup> Dallas Willard, an incredible author states, “It is now generally acknowledged, as we have noted, that one can be a professing Christian

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<sup>346</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 16.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 10.

<sup>350</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 16.

<sup>351</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 19.



and a church member in good standing without being a disciple.<sup>352</sup> Kyle Idleman in his book *Not a Fan* writes; “Jesus has a lot of fans these days. Fans who cheer for Him when things are going well, but who walk away, when it’s a difficult season. Fans who sit safely in the stands cheering, but they know nothing of the sacrifice and pain of the field. Fans of Jesus who know all about Him, but they don’t know Him.”<sup>353</sup> This is a painful truth as the church bears witness to the ministry problem of disconnected students from the church and more importantly from God. In many aspects students are following their parents, and in some cases church leaders, lead in following propositions that hold no meaning, passions that have no depth, actions that are for personal gain, and surrender to self not to something greater.

Students are looking for something that means something. They are increasingly looking for something that matters, is sustainable, and a greater adventure than what they are seeing today. They are looking for a relationship with someone bigger and greater than what they see around them. Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird in their book *Lost in America* write, they are looking for a relationship with transcendence, knowing the mystical and the divine, surpassing all that is normal to someone or something that fills their God-shaped vacuum.<sup>354</sup> While the increase in individuals that consider themselves not affiliated to a religious movement continues to grow, David Kinnaman from the

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<sup>352</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 291.

<sup>353</sup> Kyle Idleman, *Not a Fan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 25.

<sup>354</sup> Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (United States Of America: Group Publishing, 2001), 43.

Barna Group describes many of them as Nomads or Exiles. Nomads are have walked away from the church, but still consider themselves Christian. Exiles are those still invested in their faith journey, but are confused between the church and the culture.<sup>355</sup> There is still a desire to believe in and experience something or someone that is recognized as a God that matters. They are also desperate for significance, meaning and purpose.<sup>356</sup> They want to know that they are doing something and living a life that has meaning. They want to move beyond a life as usual mentality to a life that has a cause to live for where they can be fully engaged. They are also looking for community, connecting with other people in meaningful connected relationships.<sup>357</sup> A connected relationship is defined as a relationship that offers love and acceptance, creates a comfort level infused with honesty, and declares that people are becoming; not that they have arrived.<sup>358</sup> The needs of our students are not being met in a discipling relationship with parents or other caring adults. This is why students are leaving the church and their relational connection to God.

George Barna and Barna Group completed research that looked at barriers to overcome in an individual's faith journey. While most of this project was focused on adults, it has an impact on students. The first barrier is that of commitment. "Four out of five self-

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<sup>355</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 61-62, 66.

<sup>356</sup> Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (United States Of America: Group Publishing, 2001), 44.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>358</sup> Richard Ross, ed., *Transforming Student Ministry* (Nashville: Life Way Press, 2005), 69-71.

identified Christian adults (81%) say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today. More than three out of four self-identified Christians (78%) strongly agreed that spirituality is very important to them. Yet, less than one out of every five self-identified Christians (18%) claims to be totally committed to investing in their own spiritual development.<sup>359</sup> So we accept the almost mentality. We almost go all in.

The second barrier is that of repentance. Most of the self-identified Christians in the U.S. (64%) state that they have confessed their sins to God and asked for His forgiveness. But the evidence is quite clear that relatively few self-identified Christians are serious about abandoning the lure of sin and handing total control of their life to God.<sup>360</sup> We fear giving up control. Surrender is not a word we like in the United States.

The third barrier is activity. Mired in a culture that rewards hard work and busyness, it's not surprising that tens of millions of self-identified Christians have confused religious activity with spiritual significance and depth.<sup>361</sup> We seem to be comfortable with the group activity, but it is not happening when we are alone.

The fourth barrier is spiritual community. Most self-identified Christians note that they feel comfortable and connected within their church. However, various measures show

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<sup>359</sup> George Barna, "Self Described Christians Dominate America But Wrestle With Four Aspects Of Spiritual Depth," The Barna Group, [www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/524-self-described-christians](http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/524-self-described-christians) (accessed September 13, 2011).

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

that there is not much vulnerability and accountability occurring within the context of those faith-based connections.<sup>362</sup> So the depth of relationship is not involved. We come together in our gatherings we shake a few hands, sing a few songs, listen for a while and never really know the people around us.

Are these so different than what our students face? We are following a path that is a little frightening. We are consumed with activity, but this is not what we hear of the definitions discussed previously. This faith journey is a journey together. We can no longer attempt to run students through a challenge of activities with no commitment. We need to redefine the faith journey if we ever hope to see the number of disconnected students change.

In the following podcasts I will not lay out something that is new, but a refocused view of the being on a faith journey.

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

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## PODCAST 12

**GROWTH IS UP TO GOD**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to apply the spiritual growth dynamics that growth is up to God but the efforts and discipline of growth are mine.

Welcome to the podcast number twelve in the series titled “The Faith Journey in H3.”

My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the next several podcasts I will be talking about spiritual growth dynamics that will help anyone on their faith journey. Most of these dynamics I learned from Dr. Gary Newton, a professor of mine at Huntington University, and they have been so valuable to me. Today, I will talk with you about two dynamics; 1) Growth is up to God and 2) My Efforts and Discipline for Growth are Critical.

Dr. Newton started most of his classes teaching us about the dynamics for spiritual growth. At first, like most students, my thoughts were great I have to memorize a list of nine things and what they mean. However, as time progressed and after graduating from Huntington in the early 1990's, these dynamics have become very important to me. They have challenged my thinking regarding the growth process we all go through along our journey of faith. As we begin to look at the growth process of our faith journey, we need to have some direction or focus. If we do not it will be as if we throw something out there and hope it sticks. With a culture as it is today, we need to know it will stick.

I didn't understand why he used the word dynamic instead of principle, but as time moves on it made more sense. According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, a definition for dynamics is "the forces or properties that stimulate growth, development, or change within a system or process."<sup>363</sup> So a dynamic of spiritual growth can stimulate but not cause growth. There are two foundational dynamics that all others will stand on their support.

The first dynamic is simply Growth is up to God. Dr. Newton describes this point; "There is a dangerous tendency within this sophisticated, technological culture to attribute spiritual 'success stories' to clever human strategies, wise choices, or determined hard work. Without downplaying the importance of human responsibility in

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<sup>363</sup> Elizabeth J. Jewell and Frank Abate, eds., *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

spiritual growth, God's role must always be central."<sup>364</sup> The reality is that everyone is looking for the next latest and greatest strategy for discipleship. This becomes a problem of colonializing or trying to transfer a process used in one organization to another without personalizing it. The truth is that an individual enters into a connection relationship with God based on grace; not by anything the individual has or can accomplish.

This dynamic is found in both the Old and New Testaments. In Isaiah 61: 11 we read, "For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations."<sup>365</sup> The prophet Isaiah points out that the Sovereign Lord is the one that makes righteousness as indicated by the metaphor of the soil. There is no indication of the gardener doing anything specific. With my limited understanding of gardening, I do realize that gardeners have a place and responsibility for the sprout to grow. I will refer you back to this later. The reality is without the soil, there is no sprout, and that is the critical point.

In I Corinthians 3:7-9, Paul gives a picture of garden and God as the gardener. Dr. Newton points out "there are many servants helping the Gardener (God) grow His seeds, yet, it is the Gardener who caused the growth."<sup>366</sup> There is nothing any follower can do to create the growth. This is solely the actions and power that comes from God. Duffy

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<sup>364</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 5.

<sup>365</sup> Isaiah 61:11 (New International Version).

<sup>366</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 6.



Robbins backs this up when he wrote; “This is the step of regeneration where God acting alone gives the Christ follower life when death is deserved.”<sup>367</sup> In I Corinthians 3:7 we read; “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”<sup>368</sup> Paul was challenging the Galatians in the third chapter regarding how they received the Holy Spirit. He asked; “How did you receive the Holy Spirit? Did you receive the Spirit by following the law? No, you received the Spirit because you heard the Good News and believed it. You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now are you trying to make it complete by your own power? That is foolish.”<sup>369</sup>

I think the Biblical evidence is clear, but we continue to create instant methodology that will create instant growth. None of that is found in the scripture. As we join our faith in God along our journey, we begin to see His work even in our mistakes. God works in spite of us. That is a comforting thought for those of us that carry the role of a shepherd for a flock of students. It is because of God that growth happens. However, this does not allow us to sit back and do nothing. It leads us to the second dynamic.

The second dynamic comes alongside the first. While spiritual growth and development are up to God, the Christ follower’s effort, diligence and discipline are absolutely

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<sup>367</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 387.

<sup>368</sup> I Corinthians 3:7 (New International Version).

<sup>369</sup> Galatians 3:2-3 (New Century Version).

necessary for growth.<sup>370</sup> Understanding that God is the provider of growth, but as Philippians 2:12-13 challenges the Christ follower to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”<sup>371</sup> Here the Christ follower must take the responsibility to work in cooperation with God’s purposes.<sup>372</sup> We cannot be slackers here. In Ephesians 4:22-23 we read, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”<sup>373</sup> We are going to have some work to do.

These two partnering dynamics are the foundation for everything that follows. At times we get these two out of order. We get busy doing spiritual things to ensure growth attempting to take on all the responsibility for our growth. This mentality takes away the reality of surrender. If we follow the first dynamic in order, we will have to wrestle first with the concept of surrender. We will have look deep within ourselves and give up. Several years ago I read the book by Andrew Murray titled *Absolute Surrender*. What a challenging book and thought. In a culture today that has no desire to give, we are challenged to surrender all that we are and will be to the one and only Almighty God.

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<sup>370</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 6.

<sup>371</sup> Philippians 2:12-13 (New International Version).

<sup>372</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 387.

<sup>373</sup> Ephesians 4:22-24 (New International Version 1984).

This becomes the first step of work that we face, but it creates the partnership with God. It all begins with Him and a trust in Him.

If there is anything we can teach our students it must be that we can trust God. When we jump over this first dynamic to the second, we take the role of leader. We must challenge our student to take a step back and learn the art of trusting God. I want point out the word art versus a specific principle. It is an art because it will be different for every one. We bring our own baggage for this journey and everyone's bags are different, but they are to be laid at the same place, the feet of Jesus. I have many people that have come through my office and said they are not growing. They have blamed the pastor for not teaching well. They blamed themselves for not working harder. They offered to me the number of Bible studies they attended, the service projects they did, and even the amount of money they gave to support ministry. All this and they were still not growing. I asked if they have surrendered their all to God. Some got mad and left. Others asked more and were willing to investigate their lives all the more. As we begin to look deep into our lives and ask the hard question of who is in charge, we begin to lay the foundation for growth.

As we deal with students, this is a tough issue. This is not normal for them. In a culture that tells them that they own their destiny and how hard they work reflects where they end up, surrender is confusing. We do have to work hard, but it begins with trusting Him. Once we have realized that growth is up to God and surrender our all to Him that is when our work begins.

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## PODCAST 13

**BABY STEPS WITH ALL THAT WE ARE**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to apply the spiritual growth principles that spiritual growth is found in the baby steps and that we have to all in for spiritual growth to happen.

This is podcast number thirteen in the series titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the next several podcasts I will be talking about spiritual growth dynamics that will help anyone on their faith journey. Most of these dynamics I learned from Dr. Gary Newton and they have been so valuable to me. Today, I will talk with you about two more dynamics that build on the first two offered in the previous podcast. They are 1) Growth is found in the baby steps and 2) We have to be all in for growth to happen.

As I shared previously, Dr. Newton started most of his classes teaching about the dynamics for spiritual growth. As we begin to look at the growth process of our faith journey, we need to have some direction or focus. If we do not it will be as if we throw something out there and hope it sticks. With a culture as it is today, we need to know it will stick. Again we will use the word dynamic instead of principle, because according to the New Oxford American Dictionary; a definition for dynamics is “the forces or properties that stimulate growth, development, or change within a system or process.”<sup>374</sup> So a dynamic of spiritual growth can stimulate but not cause growth.

The third dynamic of spiritual growth is growth and development happens in the baby steps and may be hard to see at first.<sup>375</sup> We live in a culture that wants instant everything. The Lottery culture that wants to invest a little and gain everything is alive and well in desire for spiritual growth along the faith journey. As a result it is not always easy to see our growth at first. Dr. Newton writes; “As we evaluate our lives, we must be careful not to underestimate what God can do in and through us. Rather than compare ourselves to spiritual giants at the end of their pilgrimages, we would be wiser to acknowledge where those people began their walk with God.”<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Elizabeth J. Jewell and Frank Abate, eds., *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>375</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 7.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Do you remember the movie *What About Bob?* It's one of my favorites. Not really Oscar material, but a funny movie starring Bill Murray. The plot starts with a successful psychiatrist having a highly manipulative obsessive-compulsive client transferred to him. In their first appointment, the psychiatrist challenges his client to read his new book *Baby Steps* and realize his road to recovery starts with the baby steps.<sup>377</sup>

While this concept added to the humor of the movie, it also has a direct connection with our faith journey. Jesus in Matthew 13:31-32 tells us; “He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”<sup>378</sup> A great tree can come from a small seed. A series of baby steps can lead to something great along our faith journey. It is the journey of little steps that allows a Christ follower to see growth, but only over longer periods of time. Leonard Sweet challenged me about the importance of the small things when he wrote in his book *Viral*; “Small is big if God is in it, so Paul encourages the church to do little large... Small, simple inputs can have massive consequences.”<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> *What About Bob*, directed by Frank Oz (Moneta, VA: Touchstone Pictures, 1991), DVD.

<sup>378</sup> Matthew 13:31-32 (New International Version 1984).

<sup>379</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 982 and 987.

We can never underestimate the little experiences and how they will affect the rest of our lives. I have story after story from students that remember something that happened or something that I have said, not in a message that has stuck with them. Most, if not all, of them I have forgotten. They were moments that were not on my schedule or agenda. They were not something that I had planned to say. They were moments and statements that just happened that had a direct impact on a student. These moments of baby steps happen because of the first two dynamics; Growth is up to God – Surrender and the Efforts, Diligence and Discipline for growth is mine.<sup>380</sup> It amazes me and I love to hear those stories. I am in no way patting myself on my back, because I am sure you have those stories too.

In I Samuel 16 we can read how God surprised everyone as to who would be the next King of Israel. Samuel was looking for the oldest and biggest to anoint as the new King. God put in front of Samuel the youngest. This small boy became King David a man after God's own heart.<sup>381</sup> It was the small steps of David's life that God used to make him a great King. It was the battles with the lions as he protected his sheep that helped him when he took on Goliath. It was the battle with Goliath that allowed him to meet Jonathon and gain favor with Saul. It was his friendship with Jonathon that saved his life. It was his favor with Saul that caused him to not kill Saul. The story grows from baby step to baby step.

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<sup>380</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 5-6.

<sup>381</sup> Acts 13:22 (New International Version 1984).



One of the great stories of the New Testament is found in John 6:5-13. There was a large crowd, nowhere to get food, one little boy, and a small lunch with a big outcome. Who would have thought that this little guy with a meager lunch would be able to feed five thousand? This little boy did something big. It is the baby steps that lead to great change.

The fourth dynamic for spiritual growth on our faith journey is that “every aspect of our lives has to be all in.”<sup>382</sup> Our culture today encourages us to compartmentalize our lives. We create separation so that nothing interferes with our lives. We like to keep work at work, home issues out of our work place, and nothing comes close to our play times. We don’t want one aspect of our lives invading another. I have seen some that have had to go so far as to have multiple cell phones so one part of life is completely separate from the others. I get that. The problem is we do the same thing with our faith journey. We classify one aspect of our lives as our church life. We then try to keep bottled up and separated from other aspects of our lives. We create that compartmentalization of life.

Dr. Newton challenges this. “What begins inside the person eventually affects every aspect of life; family, friendships, leisure, business, etc. God’s desire is that every person love Him with their whole being; body, mind, and spirit. Spiritual growth, seen in this light, is a process in which a person willingly allows the Holy Spirit to control increasingly more of their life.”<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 10.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

This dynamic connects back to the first dynamic that emphasizes surrender. The reality is that this is a process. Once we have surrendered ourselves and begin our efforts, diligence and discipline, we begin to surrender all the little aspects of our lives. We cannot keep issues of integrity separate between the office and our faith journey.

Jesus gives us the example of this dynamic. Luke 2:52 states that Jesus grew intellectually, physically, socially and spiritually. Every aspect of Jesus' life was given over to His Father. Every aspect of the Christ follower's life must be given over too and fully engaged in the process of growth along the faith journey.

Romans 12:1-2 speaks of it as becoming a living sacrifice. It begins with God's mercy, is followed through with our renewal, and ends as we test it by living it out. Each step, every moment, every aspect of our lives is in the renewal process. It is a journey of a thousand steps in a thousand different places of life and it all begins with one.

Ever watched a poker tournament on television? I really like watching the bold players that are willing to risk everything and go all in. They are holding nothing back, putting their faith in what they know and what they think is out there. Can you see the connection? There are times when we have some of the information we need and there are times we only have some of the information. Yet if we trust in the One that knows all things, we have all we need to go all in. This isn't a simple interaction. With each baby step we learn to offer more of who we are to the Christ of our faith journey.

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PODCAST 14

**AN EPIC MRI**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to apply the spiritual growth principles that growth is EPIC and all about the MRI.

Welcome to podcast number fourteen in the series titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In this podcast I am continuing to talk about spiritual growth dynamics that we have to be aware of so we can help others on their faith journey. Today’s dynamics I learned from Dr. Leonard Sweet and they have been a real challenge to me personally. I have taken two thoughts and combined them into one that will create a focus our attention in helping students on their faith journey. This dynamic is we need to lead with an EPIC - MRI.

EPIC is an acrostic that Dr. Sweet used in his book the *Gospel According to Starbucks*. It was after reading this and another one of his book, *Post Modern Pilgrims* that I decided I wanted to learn more from him and found the school where he was teaching. He has been one of my professors and I greatly appreciate what he has taught me.

Let's get back to EPIC. It stands for Experiential, Participatory, Image rich, and Connective. Dr. Sweet took the movement of the Starbuck's business and their operational movement to be EPIC and connected it to how we should approach ministry.

For our understanding, we need to realize that the faith journey must be experiential. Dr. Sweet writes, "Maybe we should warn spiritual seekers in advance that Jesus is not for the faint of heart, instead of 'cooling down' the gospel so we can all sip religion comfortably on cushioned, suburban pews. The gospel was not meant to be comfortable or safe. Jesus does not invite lukewarm faith, the brand practiced by the Church of Laodicea. Instead, God promises to spit the lukewarm out of God's mouth."<sup>384</sup>

We can look throughout the gospels and see that when people experienced Jesus it was not just another day. It was an extraordinary day. It was a day that changed everything. Tim Elmore from Growing Leaders, in a recent blog calls this providing laboratories and supplying wings. He states that when we provide experiences we are also providing

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<sup>384</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2008), Kindle Location 527-530.

laboratories for our students to live out what they are learning.<sup>385</sup> We are creating a safe environment where people who care and are willing to offer support surround the student. It goes back to the Sticky Faith research of five adults to one student.<sup>386</sup> They now have experimented along their faith journey to spread their wings. As Tim Elmore states we have provided the experiences that gives them wings and allows for “them to think big and expect big things from God, from life and from themselves.”<sup>387</sup> We need to give them every challenging experience possible. One of the goals I always had was that every student would be a part of a short-term mission experience before they graduate. Not just to go do something for someone else, but go and experience a big push from God.

We also need to create experiences that allow students to participate with God and others. Dr. Sweet challenges us this way; “This is what missional means: to participate in the mission of Jesus in the world, to incarnate in the experiences of our lives and our communities the good news of God’s love for the world. We must become a G.O.O.D. Church, which stands for Get Out Of Doors. We must get out of the church building and venture into the world to join the God who fills ‘the hungry with good things.’”<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Tim Elmore, "Becoming A Life Giving Mentor," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/life-giving-mentor](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/life-giving-mentor) (accessed October 19, 2012).

<sup>386</sup> Kara Powell. "Sticky Faith" (seminar for the Center for Congregations, Ft. Wayne, IN, December 5, 2012).

<sup>387</sup> Tim Elmore, "Becoming A Life Giving Mentor," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/life-giving-mentor](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/life-giving-mentor) (accessed October 19, 2012).

<sup>388</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2008), Kindle Location 527-530.

Allowing students to participate in something that seems big to them and causes them to move beyond what they can do alone is a golden opportunity within their faith journey. These moments where they have to participate with God is far different than the world many of them live in. Here in the United States most of our students have the basic necessities of life. Many do not have any great needs, just a long list of wants. Helping them experience a moment where they see that they can't do something on their own, but God can, causes them to have to trust Him.

We also have to realize that our faith journey is going to be image rich. We have the opportunity to not just tell them about the faith journey, they can see it. Dr. Sweet states, "You can't avoid having images frame your spiritual life. At the heart of Christianity is the use of images as well as words. The question is this: how can Christians make the imagery of faith so identifiable, so accessible, so unmistakable, that faith can't be confused with anything else? It's not ritual, dogma, religion, or spiritual weirdness. It's authentic experience made personal through our full participation in what God is doing. And all of this is empowered by vivid imagery."<sup>389</sup> Tim Elmore calls it painting a picture. He states, "Pictures stick, longer than mere words...I believe the surest way to deliver a memorable message is to paint a picture in their mind. Use metaphors, images, word pictures and stories to drive home the principle you want them to catch. I try to live by the axiom: give them a point for their head and a picture for their heart."<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2008), Kindle Location 1710-1714.

<sup>390</sup> Tim Elmore, "Becoming A Life Giving Mentor," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/life-giving-mentor](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/life-giving-mentor) (accessed October 19, 2012).

The final part of E.P.I.C. is to be connective. It is obvious that students desire community and connection. If you go back to podcast 4 in this series you will hear about how the rapid increase of the social media movement is caused by the need students have to be connected. It is not just the cool new tech gadget, but community. Dr. Sweet challenges church leadership to renew the movement of community. He states; “The community we hunger for—but which eludes many of us—needs as many proponents as it can get. In the past, the church was a third place of the highest order. Churches doubled as community centers, town meeting halls, centers for disseminating news, places of community celebration, and bases of operation during times of emergency. Churches saw themselves as much more than simply a place for members to gather on Sunday morning. In many small towns across the country, this is still largely the case. But for the most part, the church has lost its reputation for supporting and building community. I’m not against finding community wherever I can, in a coffee shop or elsewhere, but I look forward to the day that Christians and the church reclaim the identity of community builder.”<sup>391</sup> We have lost this key movement. We have become more comfortable behind the computer screen than we are face to face with discussions deeper than the weather and whatever sport is in season. Just as Jesus was given the name Immanuel which means “God with us,”<sup>392</sup> God sent His Son to be with us. We need to be with those we serve.

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<sup>391</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2008), Kindle Location 2174-2179.

<sup>392</sup> Matthew 1:23 (New International Version 1984).



So how does the MRI fit in? MRI stands for Missional Relational and Incarnational.<sup>393</sup> Being missional, relational, and incarnational must surround our epic faith journey. The problem in some churches is that we become missional without being relational or incarnational. We confuse the ultimate mission and an ulterior one. Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon discuss it in their book *The Art of Neighboring*. They define ultimate as the farthest point of a journey. An ultimate goal is an eventual point or a longed-for destination.<sup>394</sup> Our ultimate mission is to help students stay connected to their faith journey with Jesus for a lifetime. Yet we can allow an ulterior mission take priority. Pathak and Runyon state; “Ulterior means something is intentionally kept concealed. An ulterior motive is usually manipulative. It’s when we do or say one thing out in the open but intend or mean another thing in private.”<sup>395</sup> The ulterior mission is when we are about growing big groups to gain support from church leadership and secure our jobs, but in reality losing why we stepped into ministry in the first place. Jay and Dave state; “We need to drop the well-meaning tendency to be friends with people for the sole purpose of converting them to our faith. Many so desperately want to move people forward spiritually that they push them according to their timetable, not according to how God is working in them. It’s tempting to offer friendship with strings attached.”<sup>396</sup> Our calling, our ultimate mission is to share the story of Jesus and others experience His grace, love, forgiveness, and strength in our lives and the lives of those we serve.

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<sup>393</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 18.

<sup>394</sup> Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 102.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

If a youth ministry begins with this mission in place, to be relational is a logical movement. The relational foundation is the key within the spiritual development and growth process. Without this as a primary foundation, nothing of this process will have meaning. John Burke, pastor of Gateway church sums it up this way:

“We chase something we think will bring us life. In our fast paced society we talk fast, drive fast, think fast, eat fast, but have you ever thought about why you speed through life – going around in circles on the giant ball of dirt? Most of us spend our lives trying to get what we think we want, but often when we get it, we ask, Now What?...I’ve come to believe that our deepest longings only find fulfillment through relationships – with God and with other people. Without those relationships our pursuits and goals and dreams and achievements are like a train going around in circles – what’s the point?”<sup>397</sup>

I learned this truth the hard way. I was working with Youth For Christ and had been building a friendship with a student. He seemed to be going through a difficult time so I saw it as my chance to present the gospel to him and pray the prayer with him. As we talked I told him that he needed a relationship with God. He said some pretty pointed things and said he didn’t want another relationship because relationships were killing him. He went on to tell me that his parents were divorcing, that his girlfriend broke up with him, and he was in a fight with his best friend. But then he looked up at me and said, so if I don’t accept your Jesus will you still be my friend? I had blown the whole

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<sup>397</sup> John Burke, *Soul Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 10.

mission of why I was in ministry, why I was in that community, and why I was in the McDonald's® with him.

Our student ministries need to be missional but always pointing to Christ, not an agenda, a program, an event, or an address. Our mission is to be relational and incarnational. It is to be with students going into their world for the purpose of knowing and caring for them.

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## PODCAST 15

### **CREATE TENSION, STRUGGLE, AND EVEN CONFLICT**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to apply the spiritual growth dynamic that growth happens in the tension, struggles and battles of life.

Welcome to podcast number fifteen in the series titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In this podcast I will be talking about a spiritual growth dynamic that will help anyone on their faith journey, but will not make anyone comfortable. I learned this principle from Dr. Gary Newton and it is one I love and hate at the same time. Today, I will talk with you about the dynamic; growth happens in the tension, struggles and battles of life.

The harsh reality is when things are good we act as if we don't need Jesus. In our culture here in the United States we are not always happy with what the government is doing or happy about how culture is going, but we mostly have the basic needs of life being met.

However, we have all watched as a national tragedy occurs there is a cry out to God.

Looking back over the history of the United States we have experienced some difficult situations. The one that quickly comes to mind is 9/11. I was in North Carolina, on staff at a church. My administrative assistant came into my office and told me that there was a terrible accident in New York. I wandered down the hallway and heard the crowd gathering around a small television set. After I walked in and we talked a little, we saw the second plane hit. The mood in the room changed. It went from a concern for the people of New York to concern for the whole country. So much began to happen. One of our staff guys also worked as a Chaplain for our city's police force. He started getting calls informing him of the preparations our small city was putting into place. Our senior pastor called us all in for a strategy discussion regarding what our response should be. We immediately put the word out the church was open and available for people to come and pray. We planned a prayer gather for that evening. We were not the only ones. Churches all over the country opened their doors that evening inviting people to come in and pray. As the years have passed, I think why did it take a tragedy like this to get people to pray? Was it fear and self-preservation? I know many were praying for the victims, hoping to see people come out of that rubble alive. For months church attendances were way up. We followed the same movement we can see through out the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament we see the cycle of sin, consequences, and redemption. The American Journal of Biblical Theology describes it this way; “The people would often promise to obey God, but would turn away from Him, only to be turned back by one defining event after another. The cycle of promise, disobedience, and repentance is unbroken as the story unfolds.”<sup>398</sup> We are not much different than the children of Israel. Some would argue that their process was due to the fact that they did not have the Holy Spirit. I look at our culture today and see that when things are good, we don’t act as if we need God, and then a tragedy happens. We call out to God and things smooth out. I do believe that is because God steps in, but we get comfortable and take our eyes off of God again and again.

In the midst of this craziness, there is a truth that we must understand. Most growth happens in the context of frustration, suffering, or challenge.<sup>399</sup> We grow when we face the battles of life. I am sure you are thinking, as I am, that I wish it didn’t take painful situations to get our attention and help us grow.

So while this sounds like a dreadful thought, we need to create tension, struggles, even conflict and allowance to disagree so that a student can begin to understand why they

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<sup>398</sup> "2 Samuel 24:1-25 Sin, Consequences, And Redemption," American Journal of Biblical Theology, [www.biblicaltheology.com/2sa/2sa\\_24\\_01.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/2sa/2sa_24_01.html) (accessed January 02, 2013).

<sup>399</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 13.

believe what they believe.<sup>400</sup> These moments challenge the student to think through their thoughts and belief statements. It gives the student a picture that the youth worker trusts them with their development of knowledge and the ability to understand greater truth. It will also not be a simple question and answer process where a student has to work through difficult thoughts and even doubts.

When life seems to be on a smooth path, the Christ follower tends to rely upon themselves what they need each day. When the battles and challenges of life arrive, the Christ follower turns to rely on Christ. At these moments the Christ follower is more attuned to listen and respond to God's leading. It is here where growth happens. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, Paul encourages the perseverance and faith of the people of Thessalonica as they endured persecution and trials. Persecution and trials usually produce fear, and this helps the Christ follower produce faith. "Fear awakens us to danger, but creativity inspires us to climb out of ruts to embrace life. Those who don't face the future with fear and trembling have something missing from their faith. Or said another way: their faith is so listless that even appropriate fear can't arouse it."<sup>401</sup> It is after these moments that growth and development become apparent.

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<sup>400</sup> Tim Elmore, "Communicating With The Next Generation," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation) (accessed August 30, 2012).

<sup>401</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 764.



In podcast 10 of this series I discussed with you that some students find the faith journey too hard and so they disconnect. As the Sticky Faith research points out, we need to challenge students and allow them to doubt and question.

A couple of years ago I took a group of students to Jamaica on a mission trip. I have been there several times and I like taking them to a place called Blossom Gardens. It is an orphanage that houses kids from birth through age six. Usually there are between 60 and 80 kids with two shifts of approximately 18 workers. Some of these kids have lost both of their parents, others were taken away from their parents for their own safety. What we generally find is a large group of Jamaican kids that see us coming and know it is playtime. Our students will play with those who can walk, hold those that are too young, and help those in the kindergarten school. No one wants to leave. The kids want us to stay because they have someone's attention. Our students don't want to leave because one of those little ones has captured their heart. On our last trip, I had two students that were just mad all day long. We talked and they wanted to do something to change the situation for these kids. They wanted to adopt, but they were too young. They wanted to get their parents to adopt, but the government in Jamaica doesn't like to see young Jamaicans leave the country. Everything they mentioned to me, I told them they couldn't do. Finally one of them had their fill and yelled, so what do I do? I said, trust God with them. That wasn't enough. She wanted to do something because God had allowed this to happen to them already. For the rest of the trip, she was frustrated and my words stayed the same, trust God with them. Finally, as we were preparing to return

home, she said I get it. It is not about me and what I can do. It is about what God can do. She took a big step.

It is moments like that where we allow students to be in a calculated risk environment where they have to wrestle with their thoughts, feelings and actions. It is in these moments that we challenge them with the why before what and the unfamiliar to the familiar. Tim Elmore challenges us to create this search for greater truth of God by connecting the unfamiliar to the familiar through active involvement.<sup>402</sup> Challenging the students to move beyond intellectual development to active learning causes them to practice what they are learning. Practicing what has been learned intellectually attaches the truth to action making it more real and attainable to the students. This is not a learning environment that has four walls and a couch in a small group room at the church.

Dr. Newton offers this truth; "Suffering is presented as a necessary, and even normal part of the Christians life...God uses Suffering and persecution in our lives to challenge us to higher levels of spiritual thinking and living...Suffering and persecution challenge the reasons why we follow the Lord. It might be relatively easy to obey God's word when it is profitable, it makes us feel good, or it brings us popularity...Staying obedient to the Lord in the midst of suffering or temptation, Christians can strengthen their faith."<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Tim Elmore, "Communicating With The Next Generation," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/podcast-2-communicating-with-the-next-generation) (accessed August 30, 2012).

<sup>403</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 13-14.

We have an opportunity to help students discover a deeper thought, feeling, and action along their faith journey. However, it will not happen because we simply told them this information. We need to help them experience it. These EPIC experiences become a catalyst for growth along the journey. We have put them into a position where we cannot and should not give them the answer, but challenge them to search for it themselves. In those moments, because we care about them, we want to protect them from pain and frustration. I agree. I don't want to see any student hurt, but God is bigger than the hurt. We need to not imply that we know better how to care for the students we serve. We need to Trust Him with Them!

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## PODCAST 16

### **H3 EXPLAINED**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to articulate the H3 model of spiritual growth along the journey of faith.

Welcome to the sixteenth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

Today I will begin to explain the H3 model of spiritual growth along the faith journey.

H3 stands for Head, Heart and Hand. I first learned this concept from Dr. Gary Newton.

Later I discovered a book simply titled *Head, Heart and Hands* by Dennis Hollinger.

This is not a new method or plan, so it can be easily transferred. It is personal and it will shape our lives for the journey of faith in front of all of us. I can lay claim to this truth, because it has been my journey and how I have guided students for past several years. I

didn't start here and my early student ministries are proof of that, but it will be how I end my journey.

If you go back to podcast eleven in this series, I explained how many define the faith journey that we call discipleship. The word disciple defined in Greek is *mathetes* meaning learner, pupil, follower or apprentice.<sup>404</sup> From Latin, disciple is derived from the verb form *discere*, meaning to learn.<sup>405</sup> In both cases, the Greek and Latin, indicate a disciple and therefore discipleship is a process beyond a one-time understanding or learning opportunity, and more of a movement of growth over an extended period of time.

Rick Warren defined discipleship as the process of transformation.<sup>406</sup> Francis Chan describes a disciple as a follower and discipleship as a process of becoming like the one you follow.<sup>407</sup> Rob Wegner, a pastor at Granger Community Church defines discipleship

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<sup>404</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 15.

<sup>405</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 12.

<sup>406</sup> Linda Lowery, "Rick Warren's Definition Of Discipleship," *Exponential* (blog), [www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/warren-on-discipleship](http://www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/warren-on-discipleship) (accessed November 15, 2012).

<sup>407</sup> Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, "Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples," *Catalyst Space* (blog), [www.catalystspace.com/content/read/multiply\\_disciples\\_making\\_disciples](http://www.catalystspace.com/content/read/multiply_disciples_making_disciples) (accessed November 14, 2012).

as an apprenticeship, learning a way from a teacher they follow.<sup>408</sup> And Pastor Lance Ford defines discipleship as an intentional relationship where one follower of Jesus invites another person to be with him on his journey of following Jesus, with a willingness to share wisdom, experience, counsel and resources along the way.<sup>409</sup>

There are so many good pieces to all of these definitions. Depending on which author you like to read or follow, will give an indication of what definition you will lean towards. For me, and what I see our students need, it has to be a relational journey.

I fear the concept of a process for several reasons. First, a process creates the A + B + C = Disciple mentality. Many have the thought that if I do Bible Study plus a small group plus a mission trip plus read my Bible and pray, then I will be a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is to be a learner and follower of Jesus, so these things may assist a person in their pursuit of Jesus, but they are not the whole issue. We need to be in love with Jesus not just in the activities that can lead to Jesus. We can get so caught up in the activity that we miss the relationship.

Two, it does not allow for the variable of life. Let's face it; we have different backgrounds, different family histories and traditions, different experiences of life, and

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<sup>408</sup> Linda Lowery, "Rob Wegner On Discipleship," *Exponential* (blog), [www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/rob-wegner-on-discipleship](http://www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/rob-wegner-on-discipleship) (accessed November 20, 2012).

<sup>409</sup> Linda Lowery, "Lance Ford On Discipleship," *Exponential* (blog), [www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/lance-ford-on-discipleship](http://www.blog.exponential.org/2012/11/lance-ford-on-discipleship) (accessed November 28, 2012).

different pieces of baggage we all carry for the battles we have faced in life. Those become the variables that make the faith journey different for each of us.

Third, a process means that it has to be the same for everyone. With the realization that there are variables in every student's life, there is no way we can put every student through the same process and hope they all become disciples. Look, Jesus challenged and pushed Peter, let Thomas doubt and search for truth, called Matthew out of a culturally negative occupation, and loved on John. If that is what He did with His twelve, why do we think a process is better for our students.

Fourth, when we try to make our faith journey into a process we develop the "Got to Have Order" spirituality. In our culture today, we want order. Everything is supposed to work and work properly, but life does not work that way. Life is messy. Life is never going to work out as we think it should. We pray we don't face big battles and that all of life is smooth. We want God to provide abundance for us when He promised to take care of our needs. We also do not want to fail in life, but we see throughout the scripture that failure is normal. We are going to have our battles. We will be tempted. We will have times where we take steps forward only to hit a wall. It will not be linear stair step up growth process. Growth is all over the place because life is messy. This goes in true contrast to the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism thoughts of our students.

A process mentality of the faith journey creates a Revelation 3 Apathy Problem. We have grown so comfortable that we have lost our fire for God. We have settled into a



comfortable process that has caused us to avoid being stretched for greater and deeper growth. We have lulled ourselves to sleep as we have sought a normal way of life while God calls us to an abnormal life in this culture. When culture says get everything you can, God says give. When culture says to have others serve us, God says to serve others. What was once hot has not grown cold, but simply comfortable or luke warm. We are making God sick. We don't challenge students who are screaming for it

Finally, a process mentality to the faith journey causes us to have a Compartmentalized Life. In our culture we have separated or compartmentalized our lives. We have different lives based on the arena we are in at the time. I talked about this in podcast 13. We have work lives, home lives, play lives, and church lives. This gives us several roles to play: husband/wife, father/mother, employee, employer, coach/team parent, the list can go on and on. We talk of trying to balance life, but if we balance life will we only give God a portion of our life? We are emotional beings, intellectual beings, physical beings, social beings and spiritual beings. The problem comes when we try to balance these areas of our lives. We balance God to be one-fifth of our life. We need God to invade all of our life, so that He has control of all of us. We are to surrender all of us not just one-fifth of who we are.

We have to understand that discipleship is not a process at all; it is a journey of one who is a follower of Jesus, who is with Jesus, who is learning from Jesus<sup>410</sup> and passing on this passion for Jesus to others. Mike Yaconelli describes it in his book *Messy*

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<sup>410</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 291.

*Spirituality*; “Spirituality is not a formula; it is not a test. It is a relationship. Spirituality is not about competency; it is about intimacy. Spirituality is not about perfection; it is about connection. The way of the spiritual life begins where we are now in the mess of our lives. Accepting the reality of our broken, flawed lives is the beginning of spirituality not because the spiritual life will remove our flaws but because we let go of seeking perfection and, instead, seek God, the one who is present in the tangledness of our lives. Spirituality is not about being fixed; it is about God’s being present in the mess of our unfixedness.”<sup>411</sup> The journey is about being with Jesus so much that His life rubs off on me and His life in me rubs onto others. As I pursue what it means to journey with Christ, my words, actions, passions, and compassions are passed on to another because we are so close to one another.

It is found in Deuteronomy 6, Matthew 22, and Mark 12. It has been titled the Great Commandment. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”<sup>412</sup> This journey has been described in many ways; Missional – Head, Relational – Heart, Incarnational – Hand,<sup>413</sup> “Trinitarian logic of thinking, loving, and doing;”<sup>414</sup> Character, Community, Commission,<sup>415</sup> and

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<sup>411</sup> Mike Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), Kindle Location 215-219.

<sup>412</sup> Mark 12:30 (NIV).

<sup>413</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 29.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>415</sup> Klaus Issler and Ronald Habermas, *How We Learn* (Eugene: Wipf And Stock Publishers, 1994), 173.

Orthodoxy – Faithful thinking, Orthopraxy - Faithful practice of the Christian life,<sup>416</sup> and Orthopathy – Faithful and compassionate feeling. I simply call this process H3 with respect given to the no longer produced third generation Hummer vehicle. This journey is not a linear process where one action builds upon another. This journey is not a business contract with projects to be completed. This journey is not a simple feel good relationship. The faith journey is a collection of all the experiences found in the atmospheres of our head, heart, and hand that build and mix with each other in a relationship with our Savior, Teacher, Leader, Friend, and King. The atmospheres of our head, heart, and hands are to be understood as interconnected circles. Where they intersect is the soul, and it is the sweet spot of growth. Remember, growth is up to God<sup>417</sup> and that is found in the soul. However, our effort diligence and responsibility for growth<sup>418</sup> is our found our head, heart, and hands. While we are on our faith journey we are responsible to engage into our H3's, and God will provide what we need for our sweet spot of growth the soul. The H3 journey becomes that partnership of growth found in the relationship of teacher and learner or leader and follower. While each atmosphere has a distinct purpose, each must work and connect with the others to create the fertile soil for growth that can only come from God.

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<sup>416</sup> Chris Folmsbee, *A New Kind of Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 51.

<sup>417</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 5.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

This journey is based on an intimate relationship with Jesus.<sup>419</sup> John 15 talks about the depth of relationship with Jesus. Verse four states; “Remain in me and I will remain in you.” This is a great relational promise. If we are diligent in our part, He promises to be connected to us. As we remain in this relationship, He promises to help us grow as described by fruitfulness. Verse nine and ten describes being close and loved. Jesus is connected to His Father and we are too as we stay connected to Jesus. Verse eleven describes this as joy, “a supernatural inner peace that brings emotional satisfaction even in the midst of the most distressing circumstances.”<sup>420</sup>

So how we stay close to Him? Remember, it is not an A+B+C linear process, it is a be with journey. In the next several podcasts I will describe how to be with Jesus with our head, heart, and hands.

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, 9.

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## PODCAST 17

**IT IS IN THE HEAD**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to identify the importance of head knowledge in our faith journey.

This is the seventeenth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the last podcast I began to explain the H3 journey of spiritual growth along the faith journey. I first learned this concept from Dr. Gary Newton. Later I discovered a book simply titled *Head, Heart and Hands* by Dennis Hollinger. This is not a method or plan, that can be easily transferred, but a relational journey that can and does shape our lives for the journey of faith in front of all of us. Today I will talk about the issue of gaining head knowledge for the faith journey.

Historically, when we speak of discipleship, people go immediately to some sort of knowledge-based process of collecting information about God and His work in our lives. The foundation for children and student ministries comes from Proverbs 22:6 that states; “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”<sup>421</sup>

The concept seems to be, keep putting the Word of God in front of students and eventually they will get. So we created discipleship material that became fill in the blank booklets and or worksheets. We would guide students into the process of transferring information found in the scripture to the appropriate blanks. There was little challenge and I watched students work ahead just to get it done, much like they did their homework.

We also created Bible quizzing teams for those who, we thought, desired to go deeper in their understanding of the scripture. The reality is that it became another “sport” team to be on through the church ministries. Many years ago, I overheard two students talking about their weekend. One was asked how his wrestling match went. He said it was great he pinned his opponent. The other was asked how the Bible quizzing went; he said, “Great, we kicked their BEEP!” Obviously the accumulation of information did not work so well here.

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<sup>421</sup> Proverbs 22:6 (New International Version 1984).

We have also encouraged Bible memorization. Again a great truth that is found in Psalm 119 that states; “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”<sup>422</sup> This is a good thing, but again it can simply be a collection of information. James Fowler, developmental psychologist and author of *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, offered information on how we develop faith as we age and develop. He speaks of a Stage 2: Mythical-Literal Faith where the person begins to take on the stories, beliefs, and observations, with linear and literal narrative construction of meaning.<sup>423</sup> According to Fowler, this is typically the stage of a school age child, but can be found in students and adults. Stage 3 is the Synthetic-Conventional Faith where a person’s experience extends beyond the family and synthesizes values and information providing a basis for their outlook of life and their identity.<sup>424</sup> This is the stage usually found in our students. Here is the problem, while they are trying to create identity and gather information from multiple sources; we are giving them a linear and literal challenge of memorization. When students are begging for and needing a challenge we offer what should be given to their little brother or sister.

Unfortunately, these became more of an exercise of learning about God rather than learning from God. As we offer student the opportunity to learn about God, we fail to offer any thoughts that challenge a student to go deeper versus reciting information back to us that we have given them. This is one of the issues that aids in the development of

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<sup>422</sup> Psalm 119:11 (New International Version 1984).

<sup>423</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (United States Of America: Harper Collins Publishers, 1981), 149.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid*, 172.



Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as discussed earlier. Bible study became more of a surface level study that can only be done with a group and personal study was and is rarely done.

Please understand me here; I am not advocating that we do not dig into the scripture.

Don Whitney, **Senior Associate Dean** at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary challenges us that “Spiritual transformation cannot happen without learning...And the alternative to transformation via learning is conformity to the world.”<sup>425</sup> On the contrary, I am suggesting we go deeper. We have become comfortable offering scripture on the big screen on Sundays or never really looking into the Word during small groups. We have a tendency to offer a verse that justifies a good point of information we want students to learn. We fail to jump into the richness of studying blocks of the Word or even full books. There has been no desire to dive deeply within God’s Word to gain greater knowledge that only He can give. Learning about God can be an acquisition of knowledge and possibly storing that information for a later day. It can also be an understanding of responses or if ...then propositions. We have to move from learning about God to learning from God.

Learning from God allows the Christ follower, as Dallas Willard states, to learn to live their life as Christ would live their life if He were living their life.<sup>426</sup> This goes deeper into the meaning of the scripture or learning not just historical data of dates, places, and

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<sup>425</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith To Come* (Nashville: B&h Publishing Group, 2008), 57.

<sup>426</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 283.

people, but engaging with the Living Word of God. When Christ followers begin to desire greater knowledge from God, they will begin to put His truths together and formulate a greater knowledge beyond propositional thinking. According to Dr. Ted Ward from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, learning from God becomes more of a constructed knowledge where the Christ follower discovers, builds on, and discovers even greater truth than the surface level allows, because of the many truths of God.<sup>427</sup> We are taking students to where Jesus and the knowledge of God becomes the attraction not us, not our bands, and not our lights and videos. A Christ follower is no longer a passive sponge receiving information, but one actively building greater knowledge of God,<sup>428</sup> while moving beyond the information gathering to creating meaning of something greater. Kendra Creasy Dean and Ron Foster declare in *The Godbearing Life* with students today “Believing in God is not the issue; believing God matters is the issue.”<sup>429</sup> As Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola state it in the *Jesus Manifesto*; “We move beyond religious knowledge of good and evil and into a full yieldedness to the life of Christ that beats with every Child of God...So the Bible gathering is not the destination; it’s a compass that points to Jesus.”<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> James Wilhoit and John M. Dettoni, eds., *Nurture that is Christian* (Grand Rapids: BridgePoint Books, 1995), 8-9.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>429</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 15.

<sup>430</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 136, 138.

So how do we do this? James Fowler encourages the use of critique, questioning, reflection, and evaluation for a young adult to discover greater faith development.<sup>431</sup> The engagement of scripture and how Jesus lived, responded to people, and handled the situations of life is critical for a student and creates the desire to learn from God. They are ready to move beyond the quick Sunday school answers to wrestling with the difficult issues of truth development. Youth ministries that continue to use quick and easy, it is all in the box curriculums will continue to see students walk away from the faith because it has no challenge and cannot stand up to the criticism of culture.

We must help students fall in love with the scripture. Since every student is different, one method will not work. The issue is we need to help students engage with the scripture. Taylor University recently established the Scripture Engagement Center to assist in training people to help students engage with God's Word. They define scripture engagement as an "interaction with the biblical text in a way that provides sufficient opportunity for the text to speak for itself by the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling readers and listeners to hear the voice of God and discover for themselves the unique claim Jesus Christ is making upon them."<sup>432</sup> Dr. Phil Collins shared with me how the Scripture Engagement Center is seeing students desire to connect with the scripture and is helping them in transformational discipleship on faith journey.

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<sup>431</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 405.

<sup>432</sup> "The Center For Scripture Engagement," Taylor University, [www.tucse.taylor.edu](http://www.tucse.taylor.edu) (accessed November 11, 2012).

The American Bible Society offers six scripture engagement methods: Inductive Bible, Ignatian Method, Lectio Divina, PR3 Method, S.O.A.P. method, and F.I.R.E. Study method.<sup>433</sup> I would encourage you to try each one, introduce them to your students and encourage them to discover what works best for them.

The biggest piece for me is that we need to refocus our teaching and challenge to look at Jesus' life and how He lived. Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola said it well in their book *Jesus Manifesto*; "The world likes Jesus; they just don't like the church. But increasingly, the church likes the church, yet it doesn't like Jesus... When we dethrone Jesus Christ from His rightful place, we tarnish the face of Christianity and redefine it out of existence."<sup>434</sup> If we want to see students grab hold of a truth that will change them, they need to look at Jesus. If they want to try to figure out how to live their lives, they need to look to Jesus. Even Paul said in I Corinthians 2, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 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

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<sup>433</sup> "Uncover The Word," The American Bible Society, <http://uncover.americanbible.org/resource/5-scripture-engagement-method-bookmarks-pdf#.UXRIsBmE65I> (accessed December 27, 2012).

<sup>434</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), xvi.

power.”<sup>435</sup> There is nothing more engaging than Jesus, so let’s learn from Him and challenge our students to engage with Him.

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<sup>435</sup> I Corinthians 2:1-5 (New International Version 1984).

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## PODCAST 18

**IT MOVES THE HEART**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to identify the importance of heart knowledge in our faith journey.

This is the eighteenth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the last couple of podcasts I began to explain the H3 journey of spiritual growth. I first learned this concept from Dr. Gary Newton. Later I discovered a book simply titled *Head, Heart and Hands* by Dennis Hollinger. This is not a method or plan, that can be easily transferred, but a relational journey that can and does shape our lives for the journey of faith in front of all of us. In the previous podcast I talked about the Head Knowledge and learning from God instead of just about Him. Today I will talk about the

issue of gaining heart knowledge for the faith journey. It is generally believed that if youth workers refocus the view of the head and challenge the Christ follower to dig deeper into the scripture to learn from God, the heart will also follow.

When we begin to talk about the heart, the first thing that comes to my mind is emotions. We talk about love and connection at a deeper level. Today, students are in the middle of a culture of perceived plenty and emotional frustration. They have been taught to expect more out of life at a very time when good jobs...are increasingly difficult to obtain.<sup>436</sup> This dangling of the carrot in front of students to encourage them to keep pressing forward is backfiring. Dr. Jean Twenge writes in *Generation Me*; “Generation Me has so much more than previous generations – We are healthier, enjoy countless modern conveniences and are better educated. But Generation Me often lacks other basic human requirements: stable close relationships, a sense of community, a feeling of safety, a simple path to adulthood and the workplace. Our grandparents may have done without television and gone to the bathroom in an outhouse, but they were usually not lonely, scared by threats of terrorism, or obsessing about the best way to get into Princeton. As David Myers argues in his book, *The American Paradox*, the United States has become a place where we have more, but feel worse.”<sup>437</sup>

We are not helping matters much within the church and our student ministries. The heart of a Christ follower’s journey focuses on passions, compassions, worship, and

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<sup>436</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 109.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, 136.



meaningful experiences. So we create those worship-gathering productions to see an emotional response to what is presented. We create these worship experiences to get a response. We want to see emotions moved and displayed. There could also be times where we have, dare I say, manipulated a few things to try to get an even greater emotional response. I am guilty of this. I shared with you in podcast seven that I used to direct an annual camp for students. They told me how the last night of camp became cry night. I realized we had found ways to create an emotional response for the evening. Years ago I had a friend who would ask me, after I spoke to a group of students, did you make them cry? He would say if you make them cry you got to them and they heard you. I am not saying that setting an atmosphere is a bad thing. I am saying we have to be careful about who or what we are trying to draw attention to. The reality is we are emotional beings. There is a fine line between trying to get an emotional response and trying to speak to the heart of the student. Dennis P. Hollinger, in his book *Head, Heart, and Hands*, expressed the need for a heart connection in a Christ followers' spiritual development.

“Our heart – the deep, inner core of who we are – evokes both joy and apprehension within us. It does so because we recognize that the within the heart are inner resources for coping with the challenges of life, but also patterns of affections, feelings, desires, and inner thoughts that we alone know and hope to keep that way. The heart is both friend

and foe... Without attention to the heart, we have no hope of a vibrant dynamic relationship with Christ.”<sup>438</sup>

Reaching the heart of students today is no easy task. The reality is they are hurting, scared, frustrated, and in some cases just angry. They are looking for a place to belong, to find others that will hear them and connect with them. This is one of the reasons why we have an explosion of the social media movement. The fear of being alone in a crowd, the frustration of not being heard or understood, and the hurt of being left out are all real concerns to our students. Each of these speaks of issues of the heart. What we read in Matthew 22 and Mark 12, and as a part of our faith journey; we get to love God with our hearts.

So how do we love God with our heart? It begins with worship. This is not what happens between 9-11 am on a Sunday morning, or even a style of music. The worship I am talking about is to the audience of One, the One that deserves it all.

I love the story about the song *Back to the Heart of Worship* by Matt Redman. The song dates back to the late 1990s when Matt’s home church, Soul Survivor, in Watford, England was going through a period of apathy. Redman’s describes that his congregation was struggling to find meaning in its musical expression. “There was a dynamic missing, so the pastor did a pretty brave thing,” he recalls. “He decided to get rid of the sound system and band for a season, and we gathered together with just our

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<sup>438</sup> Dennis P. Hollinger, *Head, Heart & Hands* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 73.

voices. His point was that we'd lost our way in worship, and the way to get back to the heart would be to strip everything away...the pastor challenged the people 'When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?' Matt says the question initially led to some embarrassing silence, but eventually people broke into acappella songs and heartfelt prayers, encountering God in a fresh way... 'The Heart of Worship' simply describes what occurred." *When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come / Longing just to bring something that's of worth that will bless your heart... / I'm coming back to the heart of worship, and it's all about You, Jesus.*<sup>439</sup>

I have used this song and story many times and add to the message Romans 12:1 "So brothers and sisters, since God has shown us great mercy, I beg you to offer your lives as a living sacrifice to him. Your offering must be only for God and pleasing to him, which is the spiritual way for you to worship."<sup>440</sup> Our lives are our worship. We need to change the thinking of our students to reflect that we are the worship to the audience of One.

Worship becomes the expression of the heart. Individuals can gather information about God without passionately seeking Him. They can show up, sit up, sing out, and never really worship God. As a Christ follower expresses worship, the individual focuses

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<sup>439</sup> Davis Schrader, "Song Story: Matt Redman's "the Heart Of Worship", " CrossWalk, 3, [www.crosswalk.com/church/worship/song-story-matt-redmans-the-heart-of-worship](http://www.crosswalk.com/church/worship/song-story-matt-redmans-the-heart-of-worship) (accessed January 2, 2013).

<sup>440</sup> Romans 12:1 (New Century Version).

attention to God, giving Him honor, and expressing to Him just how good He has been and will continue to be to each of us. This expression does not need to be in a church building, or even a gathering of other Christ followers. It is a moment for the individual and God and can be expressed publically or privately. Either expression will warm the heart, the core of the Christ follower.

One of my more profound moments came at a NBA playoff game. The Indiana Pacers were playing the New York Knicks, huge rivals in that day. The Pacers were winning and it was towards the end of the game. Market Square Arena was going crazy. It was so loud. No one was sitting down and everyone was yelling. The place was going nuts and I was just as into it as everyone else. At that moment, I sensed God speaking to me. Not in an audible voice, but a presence that was amazing. The thought came over me; this is what it will be like when Jesus brings us all home to heaven. I was yelling and now crying. The guys I was with thought I was really into the game and the Pacer win. What really happened was that I had a moment with God that I have treasured ever since. It was amazing. It was so profound that if that building was still standing, I could take you the spot I was at. That moment with God was a worship experience I will never forget. Are we searching for those moments? Are we challenging our students to experience them?

Another focus of the heart in faith journey is the building of community. True community is life-on-life, eating together, sharing journeys, working through difficulties, wrestling with praxis (theology in practice), accountability, safety, openness, serving side

by side, cultivating shared passion and holy discontent, mutuality, and host of variables.<sup>441</sup> One of the key factors for the growth of a student is the development of identity and identity is discovered within community. Sociologists consider a student's sense of belonging to a Christian community, more important than church attendance, as an indicator of life long spiritual transformation.<sup>442</sup>

True and healthy community occurs when an individual has a sense of belonging publically, socially, and personally. Joseph Meyers states in his book *The Search to Belong*; "Public community and belonging occurs with a shared experience."<sup>443</sup> Creating opportunities for students to have a shared experience, such as a service project or mission trip, gives them something to talk about and share a common story. Social community or belonging is the snapshots or small talk moments of life.<sup>444</sup> These moments are short lived, but allow an individual to learn more about others. Personal community or belonging is where an individual shares private experiences, feelings, and thoughts.<sup>445</sup> This is the moment of risk for a student. Will this person they share personal information with still accept them? While this is difficult, it is critical for the development of the individual and their identity. This reaches the point of refrigerator

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<sup>441</sup> Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry 3.0* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 73.

<sup>442</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 72.

<sup>443</sup> Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 41.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

rights.<sup>446</sup> Refrigerator rights are when someone has earned the right to go to the refrigerator, open it up to look for food without asking for permission. It is at that point that a sense of belonging or community has become evident with the individuals involved. You would think with students that this wouldn't take long. However, they are looking for permission to move beyond information passed in 140 characters of text or from twitter. They need to know that others give them the right to come into community with one another.

With the two aspects of the heart, worship and community, the student that engages their heart will have taken great steps in their faith journey. This journey into spiritual development is not a journey that is taken alone. This creates the issue of "Witness and Ubuntu."<sup>447</sup> Witness is to be with Jesus and with others. Ubuntu is a South African ideology implies human interconnectedness: I am because you are or I can't be me without you.<sup>448</sup> The concept is simple we need each other. It begins by needing God and is lived out because we need each other. With the heart engaged with God in worship and with others in community, the potential for growth is exponential.

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<sup>446</sup> Will Miller, (Speech given at the Willow Creek Small Groups Conference, Chicago, IL, October 27, 2008).

<sup>447</sup> Dr. Leonard Sweet. "Leadership In The Emerging Culture" (class Lecture, Portland, OR, August 31, 2006).

<sup>448</sup> "Our Mission And Story," Ubuntu Education Fund, [www.ubuntueducation.org/who-we-are/mission-story](http://www.ubuntueducation.org/who-we-are/mission-story) (accessed January 2, 2013).

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## PODCAST 19

**WE ARE HIS HANDS**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to identify the importance of hand knowledge in our faith journey.

This is the nineteenth podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In the last several podcasts I have been explaining the H3 Faith Journey. I first learned this concept from Dr. Gary Newton. Later I discovered a book simply titled *Head, Heart and Hands* by Dennis Hollinger. This is not a method or plan, that can be easily transferred, but a relational journey that can and does shape our lives for the journey of faith in front of all of us. Today I will talk about the issue of gaining hand knowledge for the faith journey.



The third atmosphere for the H3 faith journey is that of the hands. This is the easiest to understand because it is the one that is visible to all. However, it can be the one that is most deceitful to the individual and to others within their community. The hands are about action and doing. They are taking the learning we have received from God, which has passionately challenged the individual, and moves them to action. This truth challenges the student to put their faith journey into action; therefore their faith becomes a verb.<sup>449</sup> In James 1:22 it is understood that we are not to just read the word but do what it says, and in James 2:17 faith without works is dead, so the faith journey must be demonstrated in real life.<sup>450</sup>

The hands become the basis in the foundation of being incarnational. Remember we are trying to guide the faith journey in an EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image Driven, and Connected) MRI (Missional, Relational, Incarnational). The “I” stands for incarnational<sup>451</sup> and it is a vital part of the Christ follower’s life. It is living a life representing Jesus, out loud – in word or action, all the time. Leonard Sweet in *So Beautiful* describes as when we become the *imago Dei* (Image of God) by participating in the *missio Dei* (Mission of God).<sup>452</sup> Additionally, mission or the activity of faith helps

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<sup>449</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (United States Of America: Harper Collins Publishers, 1981), 16.

<sup>450</sup> Dennis P. Hollinger, *Head, Heart & Hands* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 107.

<sup>451</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 18.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

give a realness of understanding regarding the teaching we have offered our students. Mission connects to the message and the heart creating a delivery system that is not just information but passion and action. The call to serve is given to all and even more clear in Matthew 9:38 with Jesus calling for the disciples to pray for more workers for the harvest and Matthew 28:19 to go and make disciples. The student is to take what they have been given in the head and heart and pass it on to others where words and action complement each other.

Another aspect of the hand in the faith journey is to be involved in the experiential opportunities to discover God. As stated previously in podcast fourteen, a part to the EPIC is to be Experiential.<sup>453</sup> In Leonard Sweet's book *Post Modern Pilgrims*, he quotes Marilyn Carlson Nelson, the chair, president and CEO of Carlson Companies. She states, "Anyone who views a sale as a transaction is going to be toast down the line. Selling is not about peddling a product. It's about wrapping that product in a service – and about selling both the product and the service as an experience."<sup>454</sup> Students are in the middle of an experience culture, and they want life laced with experience even within their education.<sup>455</sup> Educational experts are encouraging students to have service hours before they graduate from high school to help round out their educational experiences.

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<sup>453</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Post Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), VII.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

Students can find solid steps in their faith journey through experiences that the student ministries and youth workers help to create. Mark Driscoll, founding pastor of Mars Hill church in Seattle, indicates that people pursue three types of experiences. Observation Experiences is where an individual seeks out a performance to watch. Participation experiences require minimal effort without full engagement. Immersion experiences are where the individual helps create the experience.<sup>456</sup> Mark Oestreicher, author of *Youth Ministry 3.0* writes; “For today’s teenagers, experience is what they trust. And if we’re really honest, this is how we all live.”<sup>457</sup> Dr. Jean Twenge in *Generation Me* indicates that service experiences and involvement is one of the best ways to for students to find meaning, purpose and identity in life and build true relationships that are otherwise so hard to find.<sup>458</sup> Youth workers need to create opportunities for students to experience God through immersion and service helping students advance in their faith journey.

However, while volunteerism among students is on the rise, the motivation behind it is the problem. Stephanie Hanes from the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote an article that asked the question is this because of caring for someone else or for another reason. Hanes writes; “According to a new study released yesterday by the social change website DoSomething.org, American teens are spending their free time – some of it, at least – volunteering. (Many do not volunteer through organizations, so) These days’ kids are just as inclined to design their own, independent, volunteer activities. But they also

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<sup>456</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 72-73.

<sup>457</sup> Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry 3.0* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 104.

<sup>458</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 240.

acknowledge that half of the young people they identified as ‘volunteers’ actually volunteered less than every few months.”<sup>459</sup> She also indicated that much of the volunteerism has to do with peer pressure.

Tim Elmore of Growing Leaders also challenges the wave of students and service in his blog. He looks at the students born since 1990 and states; “Culture has molded them into different students than their earlier counterparts. They’re not bad kids, or troubled kids (necessarily) or slow kids. Some of them are smart as a whip.”<sup>460</sup> However, the description of these students is concerning. He indicates they have low empathy, are self-absorbed, ambiguous about the future, slowing in the maturity, highly connected to technology, fashionate about a cause (or if my friends are doing it I will), and *Slacktivist or one who advocates for social change one tweet, Facebook “Like”, on-line donation and petition signature at a time.*<sup>461</sup>

*We are seeing a culture of students growing up that have more experiences with a smartphone and computer than to see, smell, hear, taste, or touch.* Elmore goes on to say “These kids still want to change the world, but adults often fail to prepare them for long-term commitment and sacrifice. Fortunately, there are lots of ways kids can feel like

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<sup>459</sup> Stephanie Hanes, "Teens And Volunteering: Altruism Or Just Peer Pressure," The Christian Science Monitor, [www.csmonitor.com/the-Culture/Family/Modern-parenthood/2012/1025/teens-and-volunteering-altruism-or-just-peer-pressure](http://www.csmonitor.com/the-Culture/Family/Modern-parenthood/2012/1025/teens-and-volunteering-altruism-or-just-peer-pressure) (accessed December 5, 2012).

<sup>460</sup> Tim Elmore, "What Is A Slacktivist," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/what-is-a-slacktivist](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/what-is-a-slacktivist) (accessed December 6, 2012).

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

they're making a difference without leaving their laptop screen. Obviously, technology is not going away, nor do we want it to. The problems our world suffers with, however, cannot all be solved with an iPad. We must find ways to get kids out from behind the screen and into the real world.”<sup>462</sup>

We have a two-fold problem; we have a tendency of making mission trips and service projects the cool thing to do but it doesn't mean students are going, and these cool trips are not changing students, just changing the scenery. I have several recent conversations with youth workers that are telling me the same thing; fewer students are going on mission trips and it seems that it is the same students going year after year. They go on to tell me that the ones that go year after year are not changing. They will do all they need to do go on the trip, but the youth workers don't see how the trip impacted the student, and students don't come back any different.

Service and mission is what our students are seeing as something they need to do. When a tragedy strikes our country the television, movie, and music industries step up. They do a fundraising telethon or a benefit concert to raise money for the victims. Since our students want to be in the movies or on stage, they respond to these calls. This is not a bad thing, but it has become the normal. We have to challenge the normal and change in them.

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

How do we do that? To begin with we have to give them the challenge and opportunity to step up. Over the years, I would have students come to me and say they wanted to do something. In my early years of ministry, I would jump in and work with them and unfortunately, I would take the project over. It would become part of what our ministry or I would take on. It no longer became the student's mission. In the last several years I began to guide instead of take over. When a student would come to me with an idea, I would encourage them, support them, get people around them praying for them, and if need be I would let them fail. That is hard. The most important thing I would do, during the planning and after their mission, I would debrief with them.

On mission trips, I used to do everything for them. We would be sure everything was planned, the schedule was maintained, there would be no surprises. They would just need to show up and work. After learning a few things myself, I changed the way I do mission trips. First of all, there is no such thing as a solid schedule, only a guideline for a timeline. We began using a phrase that we adapted from the Marines. The Marines have a motto that I highly respect, *Semper Fi*, meaning Always Faithful. On a mission trip, it is *Semper Gumby*, Always Flexible. You never know what is coming, what you need to change, and how it might affect the trip, but God is always in control. Remember one of your trips that the bus got a flat tire and the students are still talking about what God did? Be *Semper Gumby*!

Second, I learned that I can't give them all the answers and we can't fix everything. When you are on a mission trip, you are going to run into things that you never even

dreamed of or planned. Questions will be raised that you will not have the answers for. I will never forget a trip to Brazil several years ago. At the beginning of the trip we were told that \$50 a month would take care of a family of four. One day, as our students were out walking in a neighborhood, four girls come to house where they heard terrible sobbing and pain. As they went to the door, they discovered a family of four had one of their children die due to malnutrition, and the other child was sick. They stayed and spent some time with them. As we were meeting up with them they were crying almost uncontrollably. One of the girls buried her head in my chest as I tried to find out what had happened. She said look at my shoes. I was looking for blood or something. She yelled again look at my shoes. I bought them for \$50 to bring on this trip. She finally calmed down enough to tell me what had happened. She felt that if she would have not purchased the shoes and brought the \$50 to Brazil, that baby might have lived. Later my wife, the missionary we were with, and those girls returned to that home with money the students put together to help the family. We couldn't change what happened, but we could allow it to change us. Just a few years ago I connected with that student, who now has kids of her own. She told me that they send shoes and money to organizations that help others. She said when my kids grow out of their shoes; we pass them on to someone that can use them. One event changed her for a lifetime.

My own daughter walked through something similar. She attended an awards ceremony and heard Coach Ron Hunter speak about his involvement in Samaritan's Feet, an organization that gives shoes to those who need them. It challenged her to the point that when she got home she said she needed to do something about it. Over the summer she

put a plan together and the first week of her senior year of high school she was camped out at the principal's office door. She talked to him about what needed to be done, so as a school, they could raise money to put shoes on kid's feet. She was sent to the Athletic Director's office. They gave a list of projects to do over a weekend. We thought that was to see if she was serious or not. She had them done and waiting for them on Monday morning. So she hosted a Barefoot night at a football game, a Barefoot night at a basketball game, and convinced the principal to purchase Samaritan's Feet zipper pulls for every graduate, teacher and administrator in attendance at graduation. For the year, she was able to raise over \$8,000, which put 1,600 pairs of shoes on kids that needed them.

When students go on a mission trip, a service project, or just get through a challenging event, I have two questions for them. One, what did you learn? Two, what are you going to do about it? The first question can never be answered with simplistic and surface information. It is a challenge to cause them to go deeper. What are the underlying things that they had to learn? The second question is all about life change. Again, there are no easy simplistic answers. The challenge is not to find an activity that they could do in their sleep, but a life change.

The other change I made is that when we land back on familiar soil, whether the church parking lot or the local airport, I will gather them together in a team huddle. We would talk about what to expect when they see their parents and I would make one last statement; The Mission experience has just ended. The mission trip is just beginning.



What is going to be different because of the experience you just finished? These are never rhetorical questions. I have challenged enough and helped them discover enough that they can answer these questions. They are to be life changing.

We have to move beyond doing mission trips and service projects because someone needs work done. There are many organizations that do that sort of work. We have to do mission trips and service project that change us. They have to move us from something we do, to something that changes us.

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## PODCAST 20

### **SURROUNDED BY RELATIONSHIP**

Objective: At the end of this podcast, listeners will be to describe the Faith Journey in H3 and how it can help anyone, but especially students along their life-long faith journey.

Welcome to the final podcast in a series of titled “The Faith Journey in H3.” My name is Randy Davis and I have spent nearly three decades working with students as a local church youth pastor and para-church youth worker. I am honored to have served so many students over the years, but I have also faced an alarming challenge in the last several years; “Why are we losing so many students from a commitment to the church and more importantly a commitment to God after their high school graduation?” Thanks for traveling with me through the podcasts as I share with you research and personal experiences regarding this major issue facing youth workers here in the United States.

In this last podcast I will help you pull together all the information that has been offered in this series on how to help students on their faith journey with Jesus. It has been an honor to produce this series and I pray that it has been helpful to you. Please remember, this is not a method or plan, that can be easily transferred, but a relational journey that can and does shape our lives for the journey of faith in front of all of us.

We begin by looking at the landscape of our culture and the students we serve.

In 2009, an America's Research Group survey found that 95 percent of twenty- to twenty-nine-year-old evangelicals attended church regularly during their elementary and middle school years, but only 55 percent attended during high school. By the time they reached college, only 11 percent were still attending church.<sup>463</sup>

In 2010, Lifeway Research reported 61% of churched high school students graduate and never go back to the church. Even worse: 78% to 88% of those in youth programs today will leave church, most to never return.<sup>464</sup>

In October 2012, Pew Research reported those who define themselves as religiously unaffiliated, atheist, agnostic, and those who have no connection with a religious thought or organization, have increased from 15.3% to 19.6% of all adults in the United States. Taking out the more than 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics, this leaves us with 33 million people who say they have no particular religious affiliation.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Reggie Joiner, Church Bomar, and Addie Smith, *The Slow Fade* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 23.

<sup>464</sup> Matt Marino, "What Is So Uncool About Cool Churches," *The Gospel Side* (blog), [www.thegospelside.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/wats-so-uncool-about-cool-church](http://www.thegospelside.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/wats-so-uncool-about-cool-church) (accessed September 23, 2012).

<sup>465</sup> Luis Lugo (editor), "Nones" On The Rise," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx> (accessed October 9, 2012).

A study published in 2009 discovered that 73% of the “Nones” came from religious homes, and 66% were considered “deconverts” or ones that were de-converted from Christianity.<sup>466</sup>

This is a sad commentary on where we are and where we might be going. This movement has to change. We can no longer see students come through our student ministries only to graduate from high school and in a sense graduate away from a connection to God and the church.

We have seen the birth of the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism that helps people be nice, feel good and leave God in the background, and serves as the default position for adolescent religious affiliation.<sup>467</sup>

The components of MTD are:

1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.

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<sup>466</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) Kindle Location 1956-1961.

<sup>467</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

5. Good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>468</sup>

We looked at several different factors that create the battles for students and their faith journey. There is a student's need to know and be known and found in the explosion of the social media movement. This is evident when we see that in the United States we collectively spend 12,207,423,487 hours every day browsing social network sites.<sup>469</sup> The rapid changes to the family are seen when it is no longer people related by birth, marriage, or adoption. It can have a variety of definitions using the concept of commitment.<sup>470</sup> Realizing our student ministries have adopted the mentality of firing up the fun in youth ministry that ultimately waters down the gospel and has made it boring for students.<sup>471</sup> We talked about the A + B + C = Disciple process of discipleship has not been effective because the scriptures do not give a step-by-step, systematic approach to spiritual growth and development.<sup>472</sup> It was also understood that the church is trying to work with families for the sake of the students because "Too much is at stake for either

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<sup>468</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-163.

<sup>469</sup> Jeremy Smith "How Social Media Is Destroying Productivity," Church Mag, [www.churchm.ag/how-social-media-is-destroying-productivity-infographic/#.UNCaSuFIFfk.email](http://www.churchm.ag/how-social-media-is-destroying-productivity-infographic/#.UNCaSuFIFfk.email) (accessed December 13, 2012).

<sup>470</sup> Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 21.

<sup>471</sup> Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), Kindle Location 1726-1727.

<sup>472</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 387.

one to fail.”<sup>473</sup> We talked about critical questions our students are dealing with: Does Christianity really matter? Why is the faith journey so hard and since it is so hard why should I try?

We looked at faith journey growth dynamics. Growth is up to God, but my effort, diligence and discipline are critical for my growth on the journey.<sup>474</sup> Growth on the journey comes in baby steps and we have to be all in with surrender.<sup>475</sup> We also need to live an Experiential Participatory Image-rich and Connected<sup>476</sup> Missional Relational Incarnational<sup>477</sup> journey. In the mix of this, we need to create tension because most growth happens in the context of frustration, suffering, or challenge.<sup>478</sup>

Finally we began to discover the H3 faith journey of growth in Head knowledge, Heart knowledge, and Hand knowledge. Growth in these three areas of head, heart, and hand, when they are interconnected versus compartmentalized, create the sweet spot of growth that only God can give us – our soul. In many circles and denominational tribes this

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<sup>473</sup> Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange* (United States Of America: David C Cook, 2009), 20.

<sup>474</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 5-6.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid*, 7, 10.

<sup>476</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2008), Kindle Location 325.

<sup>477</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 18.

<sup>478</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity* (United States Of America: Evangelical Training Association, 2002), 13.

would be thought of as simply a conversion experience. However, it is more of a surrender experience. When a challenge is given to a student to surrender their life, their school year, even their day, they begin to own their faith. It becomes personal for them. It is not just a lesson learned, a phase to go through, or a mission trip to prepare for and then forget it two weeks after the trip. It is when they pick up their cross daily and follow Jesus.<sup>479</sup> It is not that they live anymore, but rather Christ living in and through them.<sup>480</sup> This is a big challenge to a student. They are a time where they are getting ready to take control of a vehicle at age 16 and life somewhat on their own as they enter college. It is here where this challenge of integrating their head, heart and hands creates the fertile soul of growth in their soul.

So how does all this come together? How does the H3 faith journey slow the pace of disconnecting students? Simply – Relationship. The focus cannot be on what is done, but on the student and the 5 adults that will find a way to connect with the student. The adults that surround our students create deeper connections with a Be-With mentality. Dallas Willard states; “If I am Jesus’ disciple that means I am with Him to learn from Him how to be like Him...The being-with by watching and by hearing, is an absolute necessity.”<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Luke 9:23 (New International Version).

<sup>480</sup> Galatians 2:20 (New Century Version).

<sup>481</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 276.



In many ways, our churches and youth ministries have become walled castles. Pastors and youth workers spend great amounts of time protecting the walls and those who camp out inside. They work hard to make the castle attractive. When one enters the castle, they are given well-prepared, polished information. The attendees are kept at a distance because they bring with them a messiness that few want to know about or touch. The H3 Journey of head (learning from Jesus), heart (worship and community) and hand (serving and experience) growth that create the fertile soul for soul growth (surrender, the sweet spot of growth) is not for the walled castle makers. This has to change and we need to return to Jesus' style of ministry.

While Jesus followed His Father, He encouraged His twelve to follow too, and He did this relationally. Relational ministry is a term that has been used in youth ministry almost since it's beginning, and it is still critical today. Cognitive psychologists teach that significant relationships become the "blankies" students' carry with them from the familiar into the unfamiliar world as a late adolescent and beyond.<sup>482</sup> Others have said it well; relationships with students cannot be reduced to a commodity that can be bought sold, traded,<sup>483</sup> or created simply for cultural leverage<sup>484</sup> to bring in a bigger crowd of students. In student ministries, relationships should create belonging not for a cause or a

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<sup>482</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 27.

<sup>483</sup> Steve Saccone, *Relational Intelligence* (United States Of America: Jossey-bass, 2009), 4.

<sup>484</sup> Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 77-78.

padded number on a report.<sup>485</sup> It should be real<sup>486</sup> with a focus on the student. We cannot take a student on a faith journey and keep them at a distance. For too long we have tried to impress students, but that keeps them at a distance and accomplishes nothing for the student. Even this impression or attractional ideas is getting more difficult because budgets and creativity cannot create enough wow for the student. For a ministry to make an impression on a student, ministry leaders must get up close with those they serve. Acts 16 gives the understanding that Paul did not see Timothy as an object of mission to be won over or as a student to fulfill responsibilities Paul did not want to do.<sup>487</sup> Paul viewed Timothy as a friend and cared for his transformation, not for future work, but for Timothy's connection and growth with God. It is about life investment that does not end at high school graduation.

Incarnational movements are to understand the actions of Jesus. Doug Stevens wrote in *Called to Care*; "Jesus did not come halfway to earth, nor did He pretend to be a man. He became flesh and blood, lived among us (John 1:14), and walked the highways and alleys of first-century Palestine (Matthew 4:23). He was, emphatically, God with us (Matthew 1:23), and He was physically present to human senses (I John 1:1-3)."<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Reggie Joiner, Church Bomar, and Addie Smith, *The Slow Fade* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 41.

<sup>486</sup> Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 202-203.

<sup>487</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 25.

<sup>488</sup> Doug Stevens, *Called To Care* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 21.

Just as Jesus stepped out of Heaven in to our lives by giving us an example of how to live, youth workers must be intentionally incarnational with the students they serve. Youth ministry leaders must get off the platform, and get connected to the lives of students, changing the mindset of attractional mass appeal events with propositional statements to an incarnational focus that allows the youth worker to speak into the life of the student. The Missional, Relational, Incarnational<sup>489</sup> movement of ministry becomes a viral movement. It becomes contagious and simple enough to pass on to succeeding generations because it is a life-to-life movement. Paul gives example of this in 2 Timothy 2:2 reminding Timothy of the things he was taught and now has the responsibility and opportunity to pass along to others.<sup>490</sup>

Leonard Sweet says it well in his book *Viral*; “The future demands our hands. As the body of Christ, the church exists to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. St. Peter the apostle was the disciple entrusted with the church, and the future desperately needs a thriving, vital, hands-on church. The future demands our head. The head of the body is Christ, and the mind of Christ is imperative for right now, the teenage years of the twenty-first century...The future demands our heart. Mary and John symbolize the heart of the gospel. We need the example and inspiration of Mary, whose let-it-be heart trusted the impossibility of a virgin birth and who, as the mother of Jesus, pondered the mystery

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<sup>489</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 18.

<sup>490</sup> Neil Cole, *Search and Rescue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 116.

(See Luke 1:29). And John, whose writings best portray the beating heart of the gospel and the pulsating mystery of faith.”<sup>491</sup>

We have to ask ourselves, are we going to be a travel agent or a tour guide? Travel agents help us plan our trips by explaining what is out there to see, working out the timing of our adventure, but then leaving it all up to us once we got there. Tour Guides don't merely tell you where to go, they go with you. Tour guides are on the journey, experiencing every site and sound along the way, right next to you.<sup>492</sup> It is so much easier for us to be a travel agent and direct students from a distance. However, these numbers of disconnected students need tour guides for the journey. We need to be the tour guide that is on the journey following Jesus, but also be willing to be on the journey with students.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle Location 831-838.

<sup>492</sup> Tim Elmore, "Travel Agents And Tour Guides," *Growing Leaders* (blog), [www.growingleaders.com/blog/travel-agents-and-tour-guides](http://www.growingleaders.com/blog/travel-agents-and-tour-guides) (accessed November 18, 2012).

<sup>493</sup> Leonard Sweet, 11 (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 18.

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