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DO THEY *RUN* WHEN THEY SEE YOU COMING?

REACHING OUT
TO UNCHURCHED
TEENAGERS

JONATHAN MCKEE

ZONDERVAN[™]

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Youth Specialties
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	7
Foreword by Chap Clark	8
Chapter 1: Youth Ministry in One Word	12
Chapter 2: I Thought I Already Had Compassion Looking at “the unchurched” through different eyes	16
Chapter 3: In the Minds of Unchurched Students Why they think what they think	27
Chapter 4: A Rude Awakening How I finally realized that “sharing my faith” starts with MY faith	40
Chapter 5: Do They <i>Run</i> When They See You Coming? How to <i>NEVER</i> reach students	45
Chapter 6: Reaching...Not Repelling Developing a relational approach	62
Chapter 7: Finding Frames Communicating in a language they understand	73
Chapter 8: Building Bridges Moving beyond everyday conversations to sharing the gospel	83
Chapter 9: Door-Opening Questions Nothing sparks interest better than well-placed questions	106
Chapter 10: Focus on Christ (It’s More Than a Tract) Sharing Jesus’ story simply, clearly, and memorably	119
Chapter 11: The Key to Follow-Up Getting them plugged in	135
Chapter 12: Outreach in Action: What It Looks Like Diverse methods for diverse groups	143
Epilogue: Initiating Outreach to the Unchurched You’ve read the book—now what?	159

Youth Ministry in One Word

Dear Jonathan,

I just graduated from high school, and now I'm working as a youth intern at my church. I've been reading a lot about youth ministry. There are so many different theories as to what is important. Some people say worship. Others say outreach. Others say discipleship. Others say all of those—but make sure you know your purpose.

This is all cool, but the bottom line is that there are a bunch of my friends who have never even come to church. And now that I have graduated and work with teenagers, I see a bunch of the kids at the school in our area who never come to our youth group and activities. What about those kids?

To be completely honest, most churches I've been in are so focused on the kids inside their walls that they've forgotten about the kids outside. And for those of us who do try to do outreach—let's be honest—the outreach ministry of most churches extends only as far as the friends of church kids, and there are a whole lot still left.

I'm thinking we're missing something here. I think we're missing the big picture. I don't want ministry programming tips... just tell me what you think youth ministry is all about. As a matter of fact, just give me the one word you think youth ministry is all about!

*Thanks,
Bryan*

~

Dear Bryan,

LOVE

Jonathan

~

Dear Jonathan,

Hey, thanks for getting back to me so soon.

Okay, you took me seriously. Now forget all that stuff about one word. Love isn't the answer I want. I mean—it's cool and all—it's probably even right. But I just need you to expand on it a little bit. How do we reach the kids outside our church walls? How do we reach unchurched students?

Bryan

One Word

How do you sum up students reaching other students in one word? How do you verbalize—in one word—youth leaders reaching out to youth?

14 Do They *Run* When They See You Coming?

Let's go to the only place I know to go: the Word of God. Jesus was asked basically the same question in Matthew 22, Mark 12, and Luke 10. The conversation went something like this: "Okay, Jesus—then what is the most important thing? Don't give me the long answer, just what is the bottom line?"

Jesus answered, "Love God...love others."

That's what it comes down to. Love.

Bringing God to People

Our church has a missionary in Laos named Jim Gustufson. Jim told us about a church he visited in Thailand. It was a church founded by Westerners from America, reaching Thai people. Jim told us about a Sunday when he arrived at the church early. Other than himself, the first person to arrive was a woman who walked in dancing, singing in Thai, and praising God for what he had done that week in her life. Two more people walked in singing together and praising God. This happened more and more until the audience was filled with people singing songs in Thai and praising God for what he had done.

Then Jim told us about someone else who walked into the church. This person didn't dance or sing. With his head down, he walked in and stepped onto the stage—and the Lord left! The place went silent as the American pastor took his place on stage, opened the American hymn book as stoically as possible, and announced, "Everyone turn to page 256 and let's begin worship this morning." Ironically, that call to worship ended any worship that was going on.

Many of us use the terminology "bring someone to Christ" or "lead someone to Christ." However, Jim made an important point. In the Bible, the Gospel of John says that when Jesus came to earth, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus left his seat next to God to be with us—to come to us. Let's not forget about the greatest act of love in history—God brought Jesus to us! This American pastor simply brought Western rituals and religion to an Eastern culture. He didn't let the people

meet Jesus where they were. Instead he tried to bring them to Jesus via a Western tradition they didn't understand.

We don't need to bring people to Christ; we need to bring Christ to them.

A fast-food restaurant by my house just went out of business. Every time I went in there, the people behind the counter were always rude and preoccupied with their own business. Many times, as I was trying to order my combo number three with no pickles, the cashier would start arguing with the fry guy. Often customers would be waiting for service while the manager was trying to resolve the most recent scheduling problems or employee strife. Well, it wasn't long before they were out of business.

I know why.

They forgot what they were there to do.

They forgot that a fast-food chain does not exist in order to highlight the concerns of those who are working behind the counter. The whole reason a fast-food chain exists is to provide food for the people out there—on the other side of the counter.

Sadly, that can be true of us today. As believers we get so caught up with what's going on inside the church walls while we're shepherding our own people that we forget about the people out there. We forget one of the main reasons we still exist on this planet is to "go and make disciples of all nations."

So how do we reach those who aren't coming into the walls of the church? How do we bring Christ to them? It starts with compassion.