

Barriers to Effective Youth Ministry

by Eric Dwyer, Youth Minister

When it comes to the unpredictable, youth ministry is second to none. I can't think of any other job in which you are shooting a paintball at a kid one minute, then talking to him about the work of the Holy Spirit the next. Youth ministry requires a lot of patience, prayer, and spackle. Our God is truly an amazing God. And if you can look past the energetic games, the blaring music, the unhealthy food, and the belching contests, you can see the sole reason for youth ministry is to bring the youth of this world closer to this amazing God.

The purpose of the youth ministry at Memorial Christian Church can be summed up in these four words: love, live, learn, and lead. We want students to *love* the Lord their God with all they are (Luke 10:27), carry their cross daily and *live* for Him (Matthew 16:24), *learn* His word and hide it in their heart (Psalm 119:11), and help *lead* His church as examples in their youth on into adulthood (1 Timothy 4:12).

There are many obstacles trying to block the path between our young people and their creator. These barriers may be quite personal so please hear my heart as you read this. I am not judging anyone. I am not trying to pick a fight. I truly care about our kids. And from personal experience, study, and discussion of this topic at length with youth sponsors from our church and fellow youth ministers across the country, here are a few barriers to evangelism in the life of young people.

The first barrier is **TIME**. Let's say a student attends Sunday school and our Wednesday night activities every week while he is in high school. He is in church for only two hours a week. He would spend just over seventeen days in church. If this same student spends three hours a week playing a video game, he would play games for twenty six days during high school. If a student is involved in band, theatre, or a sport, more time is required than just three hours a week. Why is it acceptable for the band leader, the director or the coach to demand so much time but it is not acceptable for the church to do so? It is a challenge to squeeze life changing youth ministry into two hours a week. Jesus does not call anyone to a part time faith. It is difficult to follow God if you don't make time for Him.

The next barrier is the **CULTURE**. The media presents as acceptable situations the Bible clearly states are against God's will. Those on screen don't come right out and say, "Hey kids, do all this stuff no matter what anyone says." Instead, the sin is placed next to something viewed as culturally unacceptable. Therefore, the original situation they have been told to abstain from becomes the lesser evil. If you do this long enough, the lesser evil becomes culturally acceptable and anyone who thinks otherwise is shown negatively. Sins are constantly joked about, flaunted, and encouraged. Uncertain youth looking to find their

identity as adults will see photos in magazines, applaud violence in movies, and laugh at vulgarity on TV and think, "I need to be like THAT." All of us are called to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. Taking in a lot of media trash makes this call very difficult.

The last barrier I would like to discuss is the **FAMILY**. I am not a parent. But I am a husband, a son, and a brother. I know families can be difficult, but families are crucial to the spiritual well being of young people. In our world today the family is under attack. They are falling apart both outside and inside the church far beyond an alarming rate. The next time you go to a wedding, see if the minister flips a coin and says, "Heads, you stay together. Tails, you divorce." According to the statistics, he would be justified in doing so. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, God commanded the Israelites to constantly remind their children about Him. From the moment of conception, kids are entrusted

to a family for love, safety, and an introduction to their creator. There are more opportunities for this to happen in the home than anywhere else. Kids spend most of their time at home. It is where they eat, where they sleep, and where all their stuff is. If a child sees anger, lies, and resentment in the family, they will seek the love, safety, and acceptance elsewhere. Does faith in God go beyond the walls of a building in your family? Do you pray with your family for anything besides the food you are about to eat? Do you read the Bible together? Your family should read about God, look at you and say, "Wow. You are a lot like Him."

How can we overcome these barriers? This road seems impossible. First of all, we can know our God is an expert in the impossible and pray for Him to open the eyes and the ears of our youth to reject the off-brand spirituality Satan is selling them. We also need to know and live the unchanging word of God to have the answers youth are desperately seeking. They may not ask you about your faith with words, but they will ask by observing you. In either case, be ready to model Christ. Lastly, we need to know young people and their culture. They may look and dress funny. They might txt u l8 @ nite. They may even eat all the food out of your fridge if you invite them over. But if you can look past the energetic games, the blaring music, the unhealthy food...and yes...even the belching contests, you can see the sole reason for *your* ministry is to bring the youth of this world closer to an amazing God.

If you would like to research this subject more on your own, I would strongly recommend you read the Book, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* by Walt Mueller.



Time Culture Family