

MINISTRY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH

STARTING & SURVIVING



Serge Lemée

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my nephew Kevin Lemée. He wasn't a complicated man, but some people made his life complicated. He was spontaneous, but was overwhelmed by the artificial world surrounding him, very much like many young people who suffer in silence. In spite of the support of his parents, he had a great difficulty bearing the maliciousness of humans and, later, the mistakes he made.

When he came to visit us and live with us in France for two months and a half, we were able to take the measure of his deep despair. But, after putting in practice the same principles contained in this book, he started to change his life. Better still, these principles gave him enough hope and helped him turn to his God, and accept Him personally as his Savior and Lord. Six months later, he suddenly died devastated by a bacteria. Here is one of his last words as a cancer was also attacking him:

"I am learning moment by moment to accept positively the challenges in my life, knowing that it happens according to divine purposes that only the Lord know the reasons behind them."

I can only dedicate this book to this loving young man who knew that his difficulties were not too big for his God. Yes, his life on Earth was short, but it's not that important compared to the eternal life he is enjoying now.

Kevin was my major motivation to write how to help you "survive" through a Youth ministry and in a sense helping youth to survive this portion of their life most of us went through.

Thank you, Kevin, for your love for those who, like you, had a hard time surviving in this world of ours.

FOREWORD

Youth ministry is extraordinarily strategic in the life of the Church. I'm not just referring to your local church setting, but the Church at large. The basis for this conviction is rooted in Scripture. While there are several examples we could look at – David, Esther, Ruth, Timothy – let us turn our attention to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Of the twelve disciples that Jesus poured His life into most intentionally, it is not a stretch to conclude that eleven of them were teenagers. This can be illustrated by taking a look at two passages of Scripture:

After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" "Yes, he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the children are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours." Matthew 17:24-27 (NIV)

"Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord." Exodus 30:13-14

Who was required to pay the temple tax? Men twenty-years-old and older. Those nineteen-years-old and younger were not. Who paid the temple tax when Jesus and the twelve disciples arrived in Capernaum? Jesus and Peter. The other eleven disciples did not.

Based on these two passages of Scripture we can conclude that Jesus led a group of teenagers with the help of one adult volunteer, Peter. Jesus would ultimately empower this Youth group to lead the charge of Gospel transformation as the Church was birthed after his life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Youth ministry is extraordinarily strategic in the life of the Church. I believe this with all my heart. I am passionate about the Gospel and Youth ministry and can see – even two thousand years later – that Jesus is still using teenagers to lead the charge for revival in the Church and in the world.

I have the privilege of serving Jesus at Dare 2 Share Ministries (www.dare2share.org). Our mission is to energize the Church, to mobilize their youth, to gospelize their world. As we live out this God-given mission, we are working toward the God-given vision of every teen, everywhere, hearing the Gospel from a friend. I believe that teenagers are central to leading this world to Christ. This means that resourcing and equipping youth leaders is paramount to mobilizing young people to share the Gospel with their friends. The most effective way to lead youth to live this out is for those of us who lead youth (Youth leaders) must live this out ourselves. At Dare 2 Share Ministries we call these Youth leaders, “Gospel Advancing Leaders: one who shares the Gospel personally and mobilizes teenagers to do the same.”

Because of all of these reasons, I am so grateful that my friend Serge Lemée has chosen to write this book. Serge brings his burden for youth, decades of Youth ministry experience, a truly global perspective of working with teenagers, and his deep and rich understanding of Scripture, all together in this book to help shape how we do Youth ministry.

This book is not one just to be read and archived in our memory to draw upon randomly through our ministry to young people. As Serge shares principles from Scripture and his own experiences, he prompts us to answer questions and consider what application might look like in our ministry settings. Through the pages of this book, Serge guides us through developing a blueprint for doing

Youth ministry. The plan that you develop for your Youth ministry will certainly help you get started, but it will also help you sustain the ministry God has called you to lead. I give you this encouragement that I often need to be reminded of as well: Ministry is a marathon, not a sprint. It is important for us to start this race strong, but it is just as important that we stay the course and sustain this race just as strong.

I am assuming that you are reading this book because you have a passion for Jesus, the Gospel, and for teenagers. You believe that investing in the lives of young people is both important and fruitful. I am praying that the wisdom that Serge Lemée imparts to us, the questions he asks us, and the plans that we develop, will be instrumental in guiding us to leading powerful Youth ministries that result in disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

Youth ministry is extraordinarily strategic in the life of the Church. May this book guide you in creating a Blueprint of Youth Ministry – How to start and survive it! May we do this together until every teen, everywhere, hears the Gospel from a friend.

Jason Lamb

VP of Mobilization - Dare 2 Share Ministries

PREFACE

Throughout my years of serving local churches in Youth ministry, I have examined much of the support literature available. With time, it became clear to me that there is a major problem with Youth ministry literature.

Books about the struggles and challenges of today's youth are easy to find, focusing on problems such as drugs, alcohol, sex and gambling...And many of these books, when considering these problems, forget that we have caused them or passed them to this generation, including divorce, war, violence, porn, etc. For example, when addressing pornography, we need to remember that it was our generation that created these calamities to create profits and now youth are afflicted by it. Therefore, as a result, how much greater should our generation's burden be for today's youth!

I personally recommend *The Handbook on Counseling Youth*. In this work, Josh McDowell¹ and his team brilliantly compile a host of issues into one volume and present biblical solutions to all of them. This is a rare example of a book written to those seeking to help youth, rather than to youth themselves, who for the most part do not take advantage of the plethora of books that address youth-related issues.

Throughout my many years of ministry, I have yet to find a book that explains how to launch a Youth ministry – and how to survive it! The present book is my attempt to fill this literary gap. I have compiled much information and tools in these pages to help you in your Youth ministry and perhaps in other areas of your life. Is what I'm writing revolutionary? No. Am I revealing some great hidden wisdom? Certainly not! I am merely presenting recognized principles that are based on the Bible and my own experiences in Youth ministry. Most of what I am writing is the fruit of my work with youth leaders like you. In fact, I sometimes feel like a thief, since much of what I am sharing has been learned from others. I hope they will forgive me

¹Josh McDowell, *Handbook on Counseling Youth*, Thomas Nelson, 1996, 560p.

though, as it will be used to further the kingdom. I will also share with you from my own years of experience serving youth and the local church.

I will attempt to show you the reasoning behind my studies, firstly by exploring knowledge, secondly by trying to understand that knowledge and finally by putting knowledge into practice.

Remember, however that “knowledge puffs up...” (1 Corinthians 8:1).

I will never forget the remarks of one particular university professor, who had doctorate and post-doctorate degrees and was teaching us, simple undergraduate students. I think he was attempting to curb our pride and I am grateful he did. He said, “You know, completing a degree is like building a container – a bucket, for instance. If you have a bachelor’s degree, you have a little jar. If you have a master’s degree, you have a medium-sized tub. If you have a doctorate degree, you have an aquarium. Just don’t forget, when you have finished building your container, THIS CONTAINER IS EMPTY! The bigger your container, the more space you have to fill. With time, experience will fill your container.”

I have therefore tried to build upon my experience as well as listen to and absorb the wisdom of people around me. I will likewise try to pass on this knowledge in the hope that you will be able to build on your experiences and go further than I ever could. I am not writing to display my knowledge but rather to share my experience, in the hope that you might dig deeper into Youth ministry and develop more insights that will advance the Church, for the glory of God. So be careful. Your container of knowledge starts out empty, and you must fill it with your own experience. In seeking a container of knowledge, you will build a container ready to be filled by experience, but take caution not to rely too much on your knowledge, and become a fool who cannot take a leap of faith when asked by God.

Let's talk more about experience. What do we learn from the challenges and trials that come to us? Sometimes, it is our circumstances that we find hard, if not frustrating. After all, how can we control the course of events? It is impossible. Other times, people become trials. In this case, the problem is easier to identify. I can go after the person and try to get them and the problem out of my way. Either way, with circumstances or people, we must not forget that God is in control of both – even people who seek to harm us. Indeed, all trials are under God's control and a way to test our growth. In order to grow, however, three qualities are necessary that are not found in any school, but that only God can give.

“But now faith, hope, and love remain—these three. The greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13 -WEB

Why are these three qualities necessary? Learning from experience is based on failure instead of knowledge. And only faith, hope, and love will allow you to grow out of any failure – failure in the eyes of men, but victory in the eyes of God.

Now for my testimony. I have been richly blessed by God through the people He has sent my way over the years. I have been supported by Word of Life Ministries and am thrilled to have served with them as a missionary for over 26 years now. I have learned much from the Youth leaders I have befriended over the years through my passion for Youth ministry. I have picked up a great deal from my teachers, my readings, and others around me. I hope to pass on what I have learned.

I would like to thank all those who have taught me, intentionally or not. After all, what part of this knowledge belongs to me? My hope is that God would be glorified, because all of this comes from Him. All the copyright belongs to Him.

So, I present in this book what I have learned in the simplest and clearest way possible. Without wanting to waste your time, I will try to repeat certain principles in different ways. If I am accused of oversimplifying, I would be flattered. My goal is not to complicate things – I will leave that to some theologians and scholars.

After reading this book, I hope you will be better prepared to decide which program is best suited to bring you from your context into your dreams.

May God bless you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have so many people to thank! I would never have been able to write this book without them. I present them to you, in the chronological order that they entered in my life. My Creator, of course, who upholds every single atom of my living being, Who, in His awesome Grace gave me life on earth and eternal life through His Son.

My parents, so loving toward me and who, by their own love for each other, gave me an example and a hope in the family model.

My spouse, who is my faithful companion for 40 years now and whose love is more and more precious every single day and of course who helped me during the long process of writing this book.

My daughters, who have their own family now, and whose love has always been present in the most difficult moments of my life.

The leaders of Word of Life, Harry Bolback, Jack Writzen, Paul Bubar, Mike Calhoun, Don Lough, Kris Stout and Alex Konya, who were role-models and inspirations, and also supported me from the very beginning of my missionary life and up to now.

I would like to give special thanks also to those who were and still are valuable friends, and without whom I would have not be able to continue in my ministry. They were of great help in difficult moments and helped me find the way I needed to go. Among those are Wayne Heikkinen, Ken Beach, Jean-Claude Gaudreault, Guy Gravel and Marco Seeba.

There are also all those who supported us by prayer, encouragements, and also financial help. I consider those as vital part of our team and, in these certain ways, contributed to this book.

I cannot forget to thank all the Youth leaders and also these young friends, too many to know or name them all, but supplied superb experiences who made this book possible. I cannot remember and name them all but their contribution was immense.

Finally, Elizabeth Lemée (graphic designer), André Renaud and Marc Lacasse (translators and correctors) and Randal Gilmore (online publishing).

INTRODUCTION

“... let us press on to perfection – not laying again a foundation...” Hebrews 6:1 -WEB

What should be the foundation of my Youth program? After all, the Bible speaks of the wisdom of those who build on solid foundations and the folly of those who build without them (Luke 6:48-49).

For many years, I taught the construction of a Youth ministry by starting with the basics – the core principles. I envisioned Youth ministry as a pyramid. The base was the core principles, which supported the philosophies, which supported the goals that supported the program, which in turn supported the workers. This approach seemed logical and biblical to me because it started with the “fundamentals” – the foundation.

The word “fundamental”, however, indicates something that exists before anything else. And, if we think about it, we do not build the foundation but we lay our work, our construction, on that foundation. The foundation is Christ. Only Him comes before anything else and on Him only should we build.

Confusion probably comes from the fact that in construction business we call foundation the cement base that is placed on the ground. But, in the Bible, the foundation is the ground on which lays the whole construction. We must choose, rock or sand, according to Jesus in Matthew 7:24-27. Then, our work will rise. And this choice of rock or sand, is our understanding of the Word of God and then we put it into practice by building for His glory: for example, this Youth ministry.

So, we will build on the foundation, which is the Word of God, but let's not concentrate immediately on the base for now. Why? Because no one builds a house by starting with the foundations! Construction is impossible without first gathering resources. What are my current and future resources to build my house, my building and my ministry?

Even before evaluating my available resources, I need to have a dream. Am I dreaming about a house, a trailer, a castle, or a cabin? What am I seeing through the eyes of faith? What is this dream that God puts into my heart? This dream impossible to man but possible to God?

Now, daring to dream, we need a desire, a motivation, a passion. This passion sees nothing, dreams of nothing and is nothing but a heart that beats and is occasionally wounded by the world that surrounds it. Sometimes passion comes from suffering, a void, or even an injustice, whether our own or someone else's.

It becomes clear that we must ask ourselves some questions before beginning to build foundations. We need to talk about passions and burdens before we lay down the base. Later, we will discuss the role of reason, but let's start with our hearts' longings.

Isn't it what God wants of us? Doesn't He want our hearts before our minds? Doesn't God speak highly of His servant David's heart? Clearly. Since we are created in the image of God, we are born with a passion inside of us.

I do not pretend to understand how God thinks. I do know, however, that I am created in His image and that He displays this process through His relationship with me. What has God gone through for my sake? He has been passionate for me, His lost sheep, and showed an ardent desire for my salvation. He has experienced injustice and suffering, the condition of my heart, and the loss of my soul. His heart has throbbed for me and my condemnation awoke His passion. He came to Earth to see for Himself as He has said, in Adam's and also in Abraham's time (Gen.18:21) and in many others, as when He created a people and visited us again in the first century of our era. He drew up a plan and executed it according to His own design for my salvation, to fulfill His plan for me. And all that began with love, God's passion for His creation, for me!

To help you follow where we are going with this, let me give you an overview of the contents of this work:

In the first chapter, we will discuss the passion that beats in our hearts – that is, the flame that cannot be put out and that no one can change, no matter the desire or strength behind it, because this flame is lit by God Himself in our hearts.

The second chapter will encourage you to dream. And not just small dreams but dreams that reflect the greatness of our God. We will then explore, in chapter three, the context – the resources, circumstances and the environment at our disposition.

The subject of chapter four is establishing a working plan. The goal is to understand God's plan then to synchronize our plan with His plan and how can these two plans come together.

In chapter five, you will have an invitation to write your own plan. Some will be willing to adopt a program that has already been laid out, thinking, "Why reinvent the wheel? Why would I think that I can do better than anyone else? I don't want to waste time." You can decide what best fits your plan. Whether you decide to write your own plan or to choose from something already existing, the key is to set aside your pride and to seek what will best glorify our God. There is no place for vanity in His plan.

We will see in chapter six the unfolding of a Youth gathering. All that in view of the context we've already tried to understand.

In chapter seven, we will see who are the workers that will forward this ministry, including an overview of what is asked of them and we will learn what kind of person can be called "worker in God's field".

We will finish, with chapter eight by touching upon common obstacles – after all, there will definitely be obstacles. Naturally, there will be an enemy, or enemies, attempting to make us stumble for all sorts of reasons, but usually to justify or lessen their own failures. However, we have an omniscient God who knows the obstacles that we will face before they even happen and who allows them to happen anyway. Why? Obstacles are a key tool for gaining experience. In effect, obstacles are to experience what the laboratory is to research, what learning is to the disciple.

I began working with youth in 1986 and joined the Word of Life program in Québec in 1992. I later became a full-time missionary with Word of Life, mainly in local church ministry. This program is designed to help you with your ministry, another existing program, or a program you will develop to address existing needs. I will leave that up to you. But never forget the priorities:

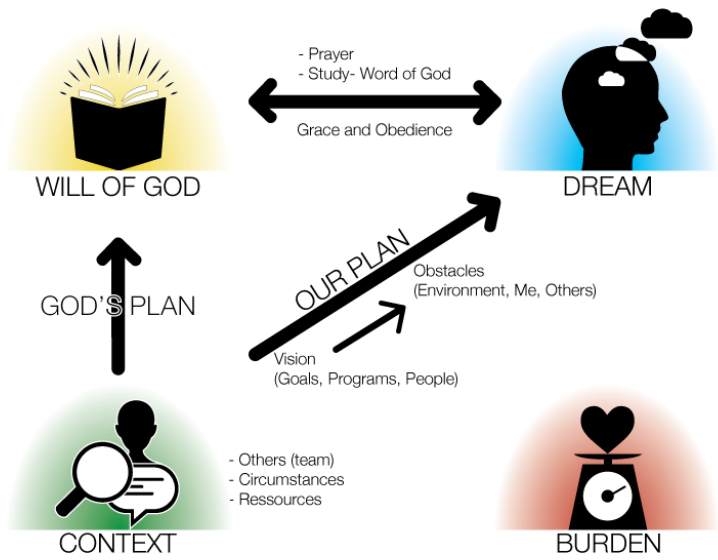
- Listen to the burden on your heart
- Dream according to the greatness of God
- Pay attention to the context God has given you
- Take planning seriously
- Learn from the obstacles that come your way

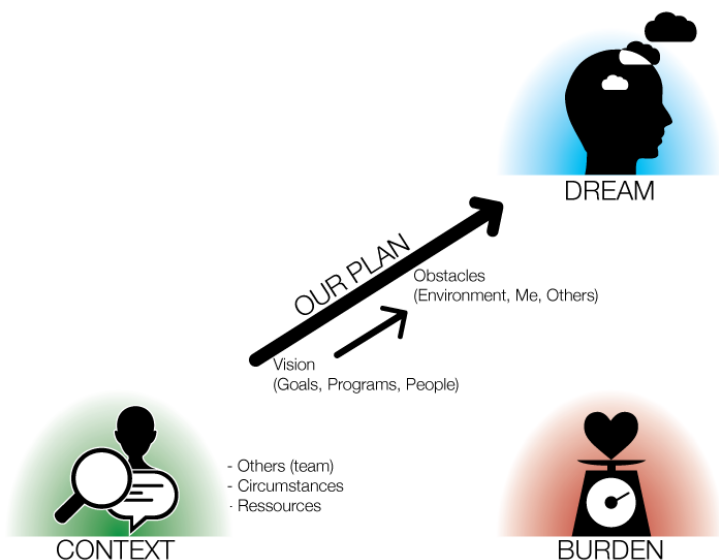
By praying and studying His word, he will show you the tools to use to reach his goals.

Are you ready to dive in and put your passion to the test?

THE METHOD

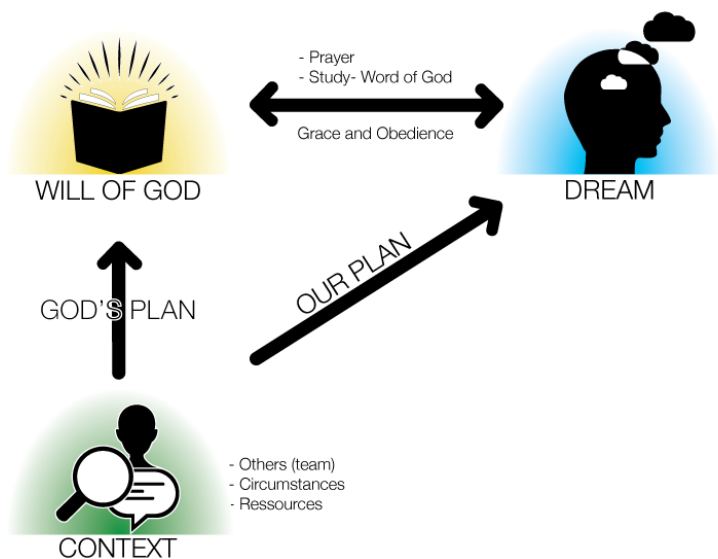
Here are the steps I suggest. I will later discuss them in greater detail.





First Steps

- My burden or rather the burden God has given me
- My/our dreams
- My/our context
- Vision and program
- Obstacles (environment, me, others)



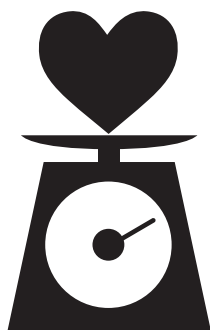
Biblical Perspective

- God's will
- Context
- God's plan
- Connecting His plan and my plan

CHAPTER

01

My Burden



CHAPTER ONE

Let's start then with our heart and our burden. In fact, burdens are the logical place to start from a divine perspective, because God does not desire simply to touch our minds but is most concerned with our hearts. So, you need to take time for introspection, in order to be able to understand what God has placed on your heart.

Even intelligence may become an obstacle to serving God and hinder our faith.

I am deeply thankful for the scholars and theologians who have passed down to us knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, thus helping us to understand the Word of God deeper. However, too many people fall into the trap of seeking knowledge above all else and lose sight of how much God cares about the heart. Like all abilities we receive from Him, we need to submit our intelligence under God's control. The talents we have are gifts to be used for His glory and do not belong to ourselves. When I am asked what the most important quality of a Youth leader is, I always answer, "A heart and a burden for the youth." I sincerely believe that God will give us all the other tools including intelligence we need for ministry. Without a heart and a burden, however, all these tools become useless if not dangerous.

I have had a heart and a burden for the youth for over 30 years, so it hurts me to see people who consider youth ministry as a launching pad to reach another level of ministry. Youth pastors that only want to become “real” pastors someday. Of course, few will admit of having this attitude towards youth ministry, but the way they use their life and ministry’s choices in order to advance their career show the true desires of their heart. This perspective is secular and should not be found among Christians, especially not in those who desire to serve the Lord. Christians who think this way act as if ministry was only a job.

*A JOB is one you choose;
A MINISTRY is one Christ chooses for you.*

*In a JOB you expect to receive;
In a MINISTRY you expect to give.*

*In a JOB you give something to get something;
In a MINISTRY you return something that has already been given
you.*

*A JOB depends on your abilities;
A MINISTRY depends on your availability to God.*

*A JOB done well brings you self-esteem;
A MINISTRY done well brings honour to Jesus Christ.*

-Charles H. Spurgeon

Note: Pursuing diplomas to accomplish Youth ministry is certainly characteristic of North America and not so common, if nonexistent, in the rest of the world. What is cultural here, in North America, is the physical and financial capacities to reach our goals. However, the desire to bring forward my knowledge, my talents and progress, before the advancement needs of ministry where God is calling us is a scourge all around the world. For example, there will be a search for diplomas and certificate in Africa, because they will open the door to recognition, appreciation and possibly financial advantages. In Europe, we will rarely find ministry servants with a diploma, but the problem stays as strong. The sadness of the context in Europe is the rise of some ministries at the expense of others. -1 Corinthians 12.13-25.

Therefore, I believe that Christian ministry comes from God and begins with a burden that He places in a person's heart. God seeks people who will answer His call. Some say, "Just serve and the burden will follow", a bit like the French saying "L'appétit vient en mangeant" (the appetite comes with eating). Instead, I would suggest "Wait for appetite before eating" and "Wait for a burden before serving".

In doing so, you will avoid "ministry obesity," which becomes, not only useless, but also harmful, since it prevents those to whom God has given a burden from serving freely.

I compare ministry obesity to physical obesity that comes from consuming too much (not obesity that is the result of disease of course), causing some to eat non-stop while others, in this world, starve to death.

Indeed, we live in a world which, according to research, has more than enough food to go around. Sadly, we see people dying from starvation and others from overeating. This is terrible.

Likewise, some will overindulge in gathering knowledge and diplomas¹ to further their Christian career, while others lack good teaching despite their thirst for even the very basics of faith. Worse yet, the former (obese with knowledge) criticize the second (starving of teaching resources) for their lack of understanding of the "right doctrine"!

Why am I being so critical? God put a burden on my heart for the youth and ministering to them. So, it pains me to see the needs in this ministry that go unfulfilled because of selfishness, pride, or a lack of wisdom. There is relatively little training offered for Youth ministry, while universities and institutes overflow with students at the master's or doctorate level. My heart aches from the lack of real interest in Youth ministry, but I am thrilled that you, the reader, are interested in it.

If you look at the world around you but do not have a burden, ask God to give you His burden for the lost. Ask Him for a particular burden and you will see this burden grow until it becomes impossible to do anything else. Action, of course, will present itself differently for everyone depending on the character and talents God has given them. In other words, I would like to see your burden grow and urge you towards the huge needs in Youth ministry. I am quite serious about this, and that is why I am dwelling on it here. The key question is this: Do you have a burden for the youth? You must be able to honestly answer this before continuing. Watch out, though. If you say yes, there will be no limits to what God can do with you. If God is calling you to Youth ministry, you owe it to yourself to answer accordingly. If you think you will someday pursue a different path, you will need a serious conviction that God is changing His call for you before you can leave Youth ministry. Neither trials nor salary, neither encouragement nor discouragement from others, nor anything else can pull you from your call. Remember, you are a slave to Christ!

I also believe the same approach applies to other ministries God may call you to. I am happy to hear people talk about their burdens for other ministries as I'm sure they are to hear myself share mine. In the end, all the burdens God gives us show the heart of His Church.

Am I starting off this book too seriously? Maybe, but I would rather be as clear as possible before you set off for on your ministry adventure. If this is what God has called you to do, your adventure will be wonderful; if you are only fooling yourself into ministry you will end up disappointed.

If you are seriously interested in Youth ministry, you should be able to answer some questions:

What is your burden for the youth?

What troubles you when you think of today's youth, whether they are around you or in a particular place or context?

Are you touched by their needs? How so? Which needs in particular?

Do you feel the need to do something for them even if you do not know what?

Now that we have expressed our burden, let's dream!

When you see empty lines like these, I encourage you to write your thoughts in more details in a personal notebook, or download the files associated to these files on the following website: www.sergelemee.com

CHAPTER

02

My dreams



CHAPTER TWO

"You are never too old to set another goal or dream a new dream."

C. S. Lewis

What dreams do you have for the youth of your church? These dreams come from a burden God has given you, so pay attention. Don't let your mind limit your dreams. Dreams from the heart have no limits. Do the dreams you have when you sleep have limits? In my case, they certainly do not, and my daughters know it well. More than once, when they were young, I would tell them my dreams of the night before. They were dreams so crazy that we would laugh about them over and over again. Can you dream like that?

"What could God do with me and my family for these youth I have such a burden for?"

Let's dig deeper into dreams and imagination. Some view imagination as a creative force. Personally, I do not believe that imagination can actually create. We use the word "create" when we talk about building new things, but these things are not true creations, which only the Creator can create. All we are really doing is reorganizing objects, colors, shapes and ideas that we have already seen.

"...there is no new thing under the sun. Is there a thing of which it may be said, 'Behold, this is new?' It has been long ago, in the ages which were before us."
Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 -WEB

On the other hand, should this passage of Scripture constrain our dreams and our imaginations? I do not think so. In fact, I would rather tell you to let loose your God-given imagination. Let yourself dream about all that God can do with the youth He brings you. Do not limit your imagination, because even if you cannot create, your dreams can be fantastic – even if humanly impossible. Remember, though, nothing is impossible to God and He will help you see your dreams fulfilled.

"Jesus, looking at them, said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God.'"
Mark 10:27 - WEB

Let me share with you my own experience with dreaming.

In 1992, I began Word of Life Local Church Ministry, in Québec, with the blessing of Harry Bollback, one of Word of Life's founders. We were to begin with our small Brethren assembly in Laval, Québec, and I dared to dream. One Sunday morning, I shared this dream with the congregation. In my dream, I could see our Youth ministry material being translated into French for our church so it could be used internationally through Word of Life, first in Québec, then France, Haiti, and even into francophone Africa. What a wonderful dream!

After sharing this, one of the elders approached me and reprimanded me for speaking in such a way. I asked him why, and he told me I could give people false hopes. If I shared my dream, I created high expectations and I didn't have the right to do that. He continued, saying that I should know that my dreams were impossible. He believed sharing my dreams would mislead the church.

Needless to say, it was a “cold shower” and I was discouraged, but I held on to my dream. This is what happened. I personally witnessed the Word of Life youth groups expand throughout the province of Québec over the course of 18 years of service with Word of Life ministry. In 1998, Paul Bubar, then vice-president of international ministry, called me to tell me that a property in Dinan, France, had been donated to Word of Life. A few years later, for two years, students from the Word of Life Bible Institute travelled to Haiti. And in 2007, two leaders at Word of Life (Mark Strout and Don Lough) called me to ask me to head to Togo to train churches with our francophone material. It took only 15 years (1992 to 2007) for the impossible to happen.

When I got the call for Togo, my first thought was to call the brother who told me my dream was impossible. I wanted to gloat, “You see, God does the impossible!” I wanted him to see that he had a lack of faith and that it nearly caused me to give up on my dream. But I didn’t. I knew he was going through a tough time, probably because of faith issues and I didn’t want to make things worse. Although I could have shown him my past faith I would also be displaying my present arrogance.

Never let anyone keep you from imagining and dreaming about what God can do. He can do the impossible in His way and with whom He wills. But you must be careful to avoid forcing your dreams on others to see them accomplished. Doing so would be attempting the impossible on your own strength. This is an easy way to become proud and lose sight of the faith while leading to burnout. Put your whole heart into your dream and watch God work. God has touched your heart? He will also touch some other hearts. May be those around you to help with your dreams!

And if you do not see your dream happening, do not be discouraged. God will work in His time and you may not even be around to see it accomplished. Remember, God has all the time in the world, and your lifespan is but a drop in the ocean of eternity – His eternity.

So dream on! Dreams are cut from the cloth of the impossible. That's why they're called dreams. It may seem impossible now but remember that your burden comes from God himself. He gave you the imagination and the capacity to dream, because He can make your dreams come true, if that is what He wills. He also gives us the faith to see the impossible. He makes the impossible possible.

"Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of thing not seen."

Hebrews 11:1 - WEB

By all means, He will not fulfill all my dreams and personally I would not want all of them to be fulfilled neither only those coming from the burdens He has given me.

Recently, I have had the privilege to meet Charles Ware, after having read his book “One Race – One Blood”*, which he co-authored with Ken Ham. When I read his book, I noticed that his ideas about developing and pursuing a dream lined up with mine. We have slightly different presentations and use different terms, but I believe, and am happy to say, that the principles remain the same. Charles Ware uses the acronym D.R.E.A.M. to describe how God works with our dreams.

DREAM inspired by Scripture

REALITY check-ups

EXPECTATIONS of challenges

APPLICATIONS within local context

MEASURABLE subsequent steps

AND NOW, IT’S TIME TO DREAM. THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU.

*CHARLES WARE & KEN HAM, ON RACE, ONE BLOOD - A BIBLICAL ANSWER TO RACISM, MASTER BOOKS, GREEN FOREST, 2017, 196 P. (P. 137-138)

MY DREAMS

What is your dream when you think about the youth of your region?

What is your dream when you think about the youth in your church?

What are the differences between your dreams for the youth in your church and the youth in your region?

Describe your dream for the youth in your church in a paragraph, in three sentences, in one sentence, and in one word:

Paragraph:

Three sentences:

One sentence:

One word:

CHAPTER

03

My Context



CHAPTER THREE

After that we've taken the time to dream; now it's time to wake up! There is a saying that goes "Live with your head in the stars and your feet on Earth". I feel like those who say that are those who call themselves realists but in fact do not want to recognize the worth of dreams. A friend of mine often said, "You're an optimist, I'm a realist." In truth, he wasn't a realist as much as a pessimist: pessimists are sure that they are the only ones able to recognize reality – with which they make their world.

Let me assure you that it is essential to dream and let our hearts just imagine what God can do! God is able to do anything He wills, yes, even with me! Yes, even me, that man that many may know as a sinner but God and I know even better!

However, at this point in the development of our ministry, we must study our context in order to figure out where to start. By context I mean environment, culture, laws, resources and so on. These are the elements that will make up the starter material for your church's Youth ministry. They represent everything available or "on hand" to begin the work that will lead us to our dreams.

What could be a more solid foundation than the Word of God? Yet any serious Bible scholar knows that context is essential to understanding a passage of the Scriptures. In the same way, I must know and understand the context of my own youth group before applying any principles to it.

I am often shocked by the incapacity of many to respect and understand the context, particularly in Christian ministry. The same people will fight to make sure the Word of God is studied in its proper context and then forget the importance of context in regard to service. It would not be too much of a stretch to say that the youth live in a different world or at least in a different context than ours. We must understand their context to be able to have an impact in their lives.

One of today's common subjects is globalization. People explain how our world is shrinking, thanks to widespread telecommunications and improved transportation. However, in my last 12 years of travelling worldwide to help churches with Youth ministry, one thing that invariably surprises me is the diversity of cultures in every country. Of course, technology connects people all over the world, particularly millennials who have grown up with it, but social, cultural, and ethnical context can vary strikingly, even from one church to another within the same area. I could talk for hours about the differences between the French, German, Hungarian, Polish, and Ukrainian peoples. Learning to navigate so many different cultures has transformed me. My work is to counsel youth leaders in these countries and many more, about Youth ministry.

How can I convince you of the importance of understanding the context of the group we are trying to serve? For this reason, whenever we begin to evaluate the needs in our mission field, we need to encourage locals and nationals to serve in their own countries, where God has placed them and given them a burden for their own people.

Now, getting back to our topic, we need to evaluate our resources.

Jesus reminds us that this is what a wise man does:

"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Or perhaps, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock him."
Luke 14:28-29 - WEB

Some time ago, an incident occurred which helped me understand why evaluating my resources is necessary to attain my goals.

Several years ago, my home was infested by mold. It spread all over our walls and we could smell it in the air. Without hesitation, I called a specialist to evaluate the air quality. His report concluded that we were living in a dangerous environment and should leave the house. Wait what? Just up and leave? The inspector gave us a report that effectively protected him from any later lawsuits. Although I'm not an expert, I could have easily come up with the same solution, which was easy for him to make but difficult for my family to experience. Instead I was hoping that the specialist could give me a real solution. Since it was out of the question to leave, I would have to clean and rebuild my house in such a way that the mold would not come back. I called another inspector, this time a mold infestation specialist. He gave me an estimate, and with a half-price discount between Christian brothers, I would have to pay \$11,000 for experts to tear down and clean my house. The problem was that I only had \$20,000 for the whole project. How would I be able to rebuild everything for only \$9,000? What's more, if it wasn't properly rebuilt, the mold would be back with a vengeance. So, it was important for me to evaluate my resources. The consultants may have been experts, but they did not understand the context. Each one only evaluated part of the job without considering the resources I had. I'm sure they cared more about their budget than mine!

You can hire the world's best specialists to tell you exactly what to do, but if you do not take a serious look at your resources – what I am calling your context – you will not accomplish anything. I like to think that I can help youth groups, but if I offer an opinion without understanding their context, my advice is worthless. I will add that you, who are working to build a youth ministry are best placed to study your context. You have what we can call “situational awareness”. As a reminder, there is no

one perfect youth program that will work for everyone everywhere. The base principles and fundamentals are good and useful anytime, anywhere, which is why they are fundamentals – they never change. However, their execution will depend on your context: time, place, and culture.

As I have said earlier, I think this principle applies even to churches in the same geographical area. Every church has its own flavor, its own personality. Of course, there are similarities between congregations but beware of misunderstanding your context or listening to smooth talkers who will try to convince you that their program works everywhere. This is how many ministries begin to fail. Horror stories are all too common. Many experts present themselves as “saviors,” explaining that their program is the best and can solve any problem. Yes, their program just might help your situation, but you can only know for sure when you have properly studied your context.

Ignoring context has consequences beyond Youth ministry. Many pastors, or even members, will join a new church and forget they need to understand the context before criticizing or trying to change the congregation. It becomes even worse in missions. We show up in a land with our hopes, our dreams, our programs, without taking the time to understand the local culture, government, or history.

I have often told newcomers to Québec or France that learning the language is easy compared to learning the culture. Sadly, without understanding the context, many have failed, if not hurt, the people they are trying to help. Even with good intentions, the wrong methods can cause much damage. As I can be shocked by the culture I am coming to serve, I can also shock the locals with my misconception of their culture. And, of course, it is the newcomer, entering a new environment, a new country, a new culture, who has the burden of adaptation.

Everyone's context is different, from country to country, from language to language, from region to region and from church to church.

In France, people speak French, drink coffee, and eat cheese. These are elements of their culture. In Québec, people speak French "a bit differently", eat poutine and do not always greet each other, even though they are a welcoming people. In Africa, people rarely use their left hand, always ask an individual how their family is doing before asking about the individual (because an individual belongs first to a family), and never get tattoos (unless they are obeying their village shaman). Well, I am sure you get the idea by now.

It is the same with youth groups. They have a new culture, and sometimes even a new language, that you have to learn if you want to serve them well.

It is time to evaluate your context. Here is a simple questionnaire to help you understand your context in Youth ministry.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Step n° 1 — My Context

List three characteristics of the youth in your area:

What is the history of your local church's Youth group?

How is your youth group doing? How does it fit in your local church?

How could your Youth ministry meet the needs of your community and region?

How could it meet the needs of your church?

What vision do you have for your church's youth? Can you write it down?

Step n° 2 — Youth Group

Read through all of the elements listed in this questionnaire and circle whichever number best represents the success of each aspect of your ministry (1- least successful and 5- most successful). You can add more aspects if you need to.

Youth ministry Activities Evaluation Questionnaire					
ACTIVITIES	EVALUATION				
Icebreaker	1	2	3	4	5
Prayer and Sharing	1	2	3	4	5
Music and Worship	1	2	3	4	5
Bible Study	1	2	3	4	5
Small Groups	1	2	3	4	5
Games and Activities	1	2	3	4	5
Refreshments	1	2	3	4	5
Decoration	1	2	3	4	5
General Participation	1	2	3	4	5
Visitors	1	2	3	4	5
Youth Participation in Small Groups	1	2	3	4	5
Youth Participation in Devotionals	1	2	3	4	5
Youth Participation in Service	1	2	3	4	5
Monthly Meetings and Rallies	1	2	3	4	5
Leader Participation in Training	1	2	3	4	5
Leader Participation in Small Groups	1	2	3	4	5
Leader Participation in Planning	1	2	3	4	5
Communication with Pastors and Elders	1	2	3	4	5
Evangelism Ministry	1	2	3	4	5
Discipleship Ministry	1	2	3	4	5
Youth Participation in Church	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
COMMENTS					

Step n° 3 — Strong and Weak Points

Discuss and answer the following questions with other youth leaders.

Looking at your answers in step 2, which aspects have:

The highest marks : _____

Why?

The lowest marks : _____

Why?

Step nº 4 — Listing Three Points

With the other Youth group leaders, decide which aspects to focus on throughout the next year.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

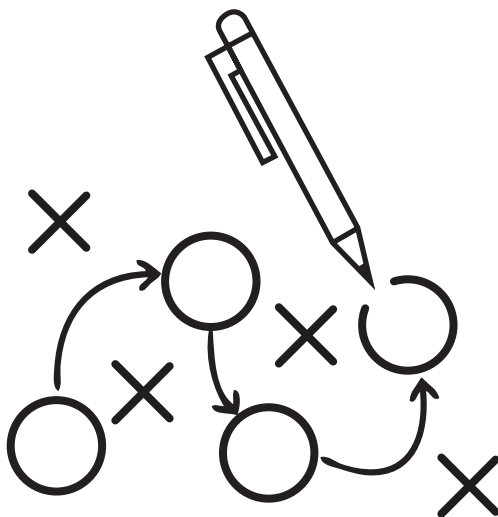
I hope this reflection will help you study and understand the context of your youth group. You must do this regularly. Your context changes regularly and so does your Youth group, society, church – even your own self. Doing this exercise as a group will help you in your Youth ministry. Not only will it help you understand the context of your youth group, it will help your team find a common starting point and thereby avoid conflict and frustration over planning and decision making.

Now that we know our context, we can figure out how we can use it to achieve our dream.

CHAPTER

04

Planning



CHAPTER FOUR

GOD'S PLAN

God's plan for mankind is clearly established throughout the Bible. He seeks to win man's heart so that He may use it to share with others the Good News of His love. It is such a simple plan, like everything that God does. After all, God is perfect and complete. What's more, this plan is woven into the text of the Bible. He uses the image of a family, an image known to all nations. He begins with Adam and Eve and their children, (Adam in Genesis 5, Noah in Genesis 9:1, 9), whom He gives the responsibility of passing on the Good News of His love from generation to generation (Deuteronomy 4:9, 31:19).

God adapts His plan to mankind's different social systems and habits through time, but it remains founded on the same basic principle – the relaying of His message of love through evangelism and discipleship.

God's plan for mankind, then, was and is carried out through a specific program: family. Everything began with family. It is such a perfect model that man's progress and aspirations were funneled through it. Unfortunately, in doing so, the model became corrupted. Man twisted it to fit his desires, passions, and goals, rather than God's. He sought to make his peers serve him instead of leading them to serve God. And so, society shaped itself to fit mankind's needs. From Babel on (Genesis 11:4), God has intervened to slow the evolution of a society, controlled by man.

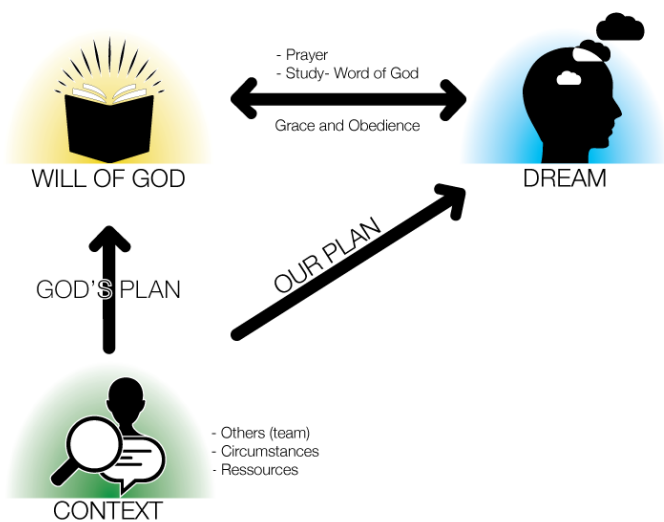
Still, God's plan remained based on family, even as other people groups expanded. God chose Israel to show the nations the importance of family, as it remained the core of His plan. Sadly, Israel let itself be influenced by the world more than it was able to influence it, leading the people of God to demand a hierarchy of power, to have kings to rule over them and act as intermediaries between them and God. To God's disappointment, family feuds in the wilderness led to outright divisions upon the nation's arrival in the promised land.

"Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.""
1 Samuel 8:4-7 - NKJV

By His grace, God accepted this change and brought the nations into His program. These nations are now responsible before God and will be judged as such for their leaders' actions. I do not understand why God would do such a thing – why he would show such love for humans, me included. God's love, compassion, and grace are too great for me to comprehend, but that is the plan He provides to the nations.

As we can see in the following diagram, man's plan can align with God's plan in two ways: man's obedience or God's grace.



As children of God, we are seeking to follow His plan for our life, which begins by getting to know Him. We have two ways to learn to obey Him: first through prayer and second through study and meditation of God's Word. It is worth repeating, since I remain in awe of God's mercy, that in His grace He will sometimes fit His plan to ours. He is ever so good!

And so, Jesus sends His disciples to all the nations:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”
Matthew 28:19-20 - WEB

The New Testament showed us a different program, the Church. Instead of replacing the family, the church actually included the family in its very nature. It also transcended the world's "nation-based" approach. The Church is both local, (as a model and support for families), and universal, going beyond national borders. Both dimensions are centered on God and bring us back to His original plan.

Naturally, man still tried to corrupt the plan in many ways. The local church became regional and national, introducing hierarchies that sought to regulate communion with God. Once again, religion tried to corrupt God's plan. However, God is much smarter than man and generous with grace. He adapted His plan once again to reach out to mankind by the message of His love. This plan still remains, at its core, evangelism and discipleship.

I confess that I am presenting here in a very simple way God's perfect plan. But let's be careful to not add complexity to His plan that He presents to us in its simplicity and perfection.

The prerogative of a clear and intelligent thought is simplicity; in this simplicity a narrow mind finds only complexity and confusion.

However, this book has for goal to present youth ministry so we cannot enter in too much detail, which would be best studied and exposed in a specific analysis on the subject and in a different context of study.

With this overview, I hope that I've shown you the basics of God's plan, which we need to understand in order to create our own. Let us return, then, to the topic of youth ministry.

We talked about how God uses family as a program. Then why should we serve in a ministry for young people outside of the family context? I have often heard people say, "Nowhere in the Bible is 'Youth ministry' mentioned, so we will not go into that, but rather work with family, which is God's plan for mankind." I agree wholeheartedly that family is God's program and that we should never

lose sight of that. I hope through this chapter I have convinced you of its importance.

However, the concept of family has been trampled on by the world's hierarchies and is still under attack all over the world. The fabric of family is tearing apart and is on the point of being destroyed. The enemy will not be satisfied as long as the family model exists. All of its members are under attack: fathers, mothers, grandparents, couples, babies, children, teenagers, young adults. Here are some of the common questions and thoughts raised by the world around us:

- Does a couple have to be a man and a woman?
- Some fathers have become so inadequate in the family that some cannot call God their Father since their earthly father was so awful.
- The best solution to divorce is not to marry, not to unite, and not to commit.
- When an old man gives candy to a kid they do not know, he is seen as a pervert!
- Grandparents, who were once prominent in the family, as worthy members until death, are left to wither away in geriatric facilities, where we give them dolls instead of real children to love.
- Man or woman? It is no longer decided at birth, but it has become the individual's choice, from youth if not from childhood. Sex change is now becoming a mere formality.
- Even our churches are often split by generation. The old die in old churches and the young congregate without their elders or children.

I will stop there, as I have already made my point, but feel free to continue this list of troubling statements on your own. In this light, can a youth program help support the family model? I am sure of it. However, as we will see in chapter 8, called "Obstacles", this program should never replace God's original program – family. However, Youth ministry can strengthen families and train youth to reach their generation for Christ. Who knows, it may even be able to slow the decay of society. I have known parents who came to the Lord through their children's testimonies and we can certainly say

that this is not the original plan of discipleship in the family. But it is a grace that God gives to man, in the context of a perversion of His family program. So, I believe that Youth ministry is this kind of grace from God, for a generation that badly needs it and we should accept this grace and plan with God, for His glory.

Here are the essentials of God's plan for mankind, according to the Word of God, which should be at the forefront of our minds.

Our main goals:

THE GOSPEL AS THE HEART OF MINISTRY

To bring the youth to know Christ as the Lord and Savior of their lives.

“Now I declare to you, brothers, the Good News which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you also stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold firmly the word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”
1 Corinthians 15:1-4 - WEB

DISCIPLESHIP

To bring youth that know Christ into His service by making disciples in their midst, as they are themselves disciples of the LORD and of their leaders.

“Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:19-20 -WEB

Keeping this in mind, it's time to lay out a plan for your future ministry.

MY PLAN

“But the noble deviseth noble things; and to noble things doth he stand.” Isaiah 32:8 - Darby

If you are interested in studying God's plan for you, you will find it clearly presented in the Bible. God also reveals His plan by the Holy Spirit to those who seek it, as Jesus says:

“One who has my commandments, and keeps them, that person is one who loves me. One who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him.” John 14:21 -WEB

So as a youth leader, I need to make a plan, or rather our plan as a leadership team (assuming I have the privilege of having a team). Praise God that he has given me the tools to find and discover this plan. These are intelligence, freedom to act, a heart for youth, talent, and spiritual gifts.

I am now responsible for establishing a plan with the tools He has given me. I will begin with what we already established:

- My passions
- My dreams
- My goals
- My context
- My resources
- My strengths
- My weaknesses.

“Therefore watch carefully how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Ephesians 5:15-17- WEB

Let's dig deeper into planning. Some people believe if you have faith you do not need to plan, but planning is essential. In fact, it is proof of our faith, because we believe that God has given us the tool of planning to carry out His will. A lack of planning is not "walking by faith" but walking blindly.

Why do I focus so much on planning? Too often I have been subjected to others' lack of planning, which revealed their irresponsibility. This lack of planning does not glorify God at all. Instead, those who work with disorganized youth leaders are forced to reorganize their own schedules.

A man for whom I had much respect (he is with his Savior now) because he expressed meekness, organization and kindness, had put this quote in his office:

"Do not let your lack of organization dictate my schedule!"

I have long repeated this quote to myself to remind me that our God is a God of order and He requires order. Note that planning does not guarantee success because success comes from God. However, failing to plan is planning to fail. True, sometimes people manage to succeed without planning but I attribute that to the grace of God. Indeed, His grace abounds, but we are not supposed to abuse it. So, let's look at some key principles of planning:

THE WORD OF GOD ON PLANNING

1. God requires order — 1 Corinthians 14:40
2. Planning is essential, as God is a God of order.
3. Jesus taught planning — Luke 14:28-33
4. God encourages planning — Psalm 37:23
5. God has a plan for us, and we must plan to properly do what He has for us. — Isaiah 3:8

You must make planning a priority. Not doing so will doom you to mediocracy. In order for you to succeed, you may have to plan in phases.

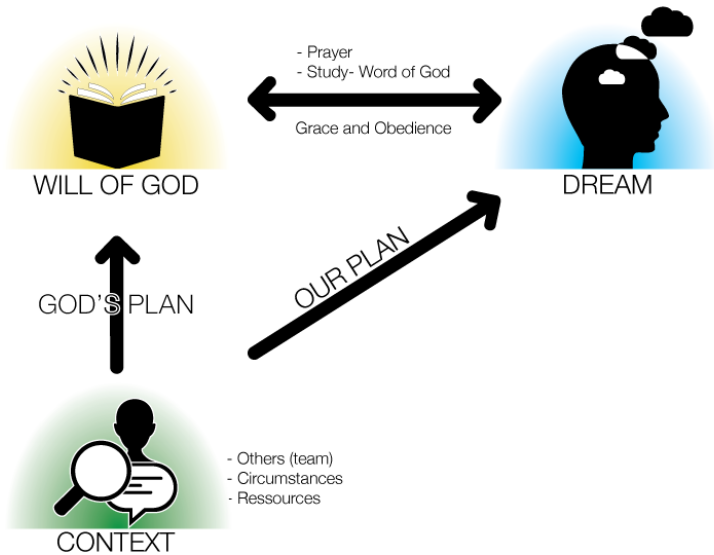
Here are some recommendations for planning as a team:

- Designate a leader. When no one is in charge, no one takes responsibility.
- Run a kick-off/annual meeting, including calendars from the church, schools, and community events.
- Make sure everyone attends the planning meeting and brings an agenda.
- Invite your pastors and/or elders to attend.
- Plan far ahead so that all your leaders can attend.
- Organize a fellowship meal or a weekend retreat to help make the work easier.

These points are only suggestions, as there are many books already written on the subject. For the sake of efficiency, I cannot cover all the aspects of planning, but I hope to have encouraged you to develop this aspect of your ministry, if you have not already. As we have already seen, evangelism and discipleship are part of God's plan for mankind; you need to include them in your own plan. You will determine exactly how they are developed and how they will fit together. Again, no matter how you apply them, evangelism and discipleship remain essential; you must include them in your plan. Only then can your youth be encouraged in spiritual growth in harmony with their environment, that is: God, parents, church, other youths and the world.

CONNECTING OUR PLAN: MY PLAN AND HIS GRAND PLAN

The relationship between God's plan and our plan is based on two key points: grace and obedience. I will attempt to explore these key concepts as they apply to the Christian life, our sanctification, and our service.



In the figure above, there are two different plans with two different goals. The first plan is God's plan. Being a divine and eternal plan, it is the only true source of human happiness. It is orderly and follows a flawless logic.

The second plan is man's plan. It aims to fulfill its own dreams, its own goals, and its own objectives.

Here I would like to clarify my position regarding different doctrines which are presented to us in the Christian world.

What I am presenting in this book is based on a doctrine that teaches the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. I will not touch on God's sovereignty nullifying or fully controlling man's free will, which leads toward exaggerated views about the predestination. In this manner, I will neither present nor support theologies which teach double predestination and similar teachings which in fact deny free will.

I will not name any particular theology so as to avoid pointless disputes which do not glorify God but rather man. Too often, such conflicts only end up polarizing opposing camps that make accusations, rather than aim to peace as their goal. As an example, "Calvinists" see everyone else as "vulgar arminians" while "liberals" see everyone else as "vulgar calvinists". I am using the word "vulgar" to indicate the disdain each group shows for the other. While I am only pointing out this particular case, there are countless others in Christianity because it is so much simpler to reject other views than to seek unity.

I believe and teach that God is entirely sovereign and that nothing can escape Him. Ultimately, He knows everything; nothing is beyond His omniscience. Nothing or nobody can direct or limit God's will, except God Himself.

Likewise, I believe and will teach that God has given free will to man, leaving us to make our own choices, including the most important of them all – to accept or to refuse God. This freedom is not controlled. It is a full freedom; we are fully responsible for our choices and their consequences.

Who are we to question these two clear Biblical principles of God's total sovereignty and man's free will? If we do, is it because we do not understand them. These principles are in fact irreconcilable and incomprehensible to us. These mysteries can only be accepted by faith. God has done some things that I cannot understand but that I must accept by faith.

As I return to the subject of Youth ministry, I hope you see that my goal is to find common ground of service, in peace, with others who serve God. And doing this without stripping God and his Word of their authority and relying on the human intellect – mine included. Indeed, the freedom that God gives to man is as sure as the freedom found in Jesus:

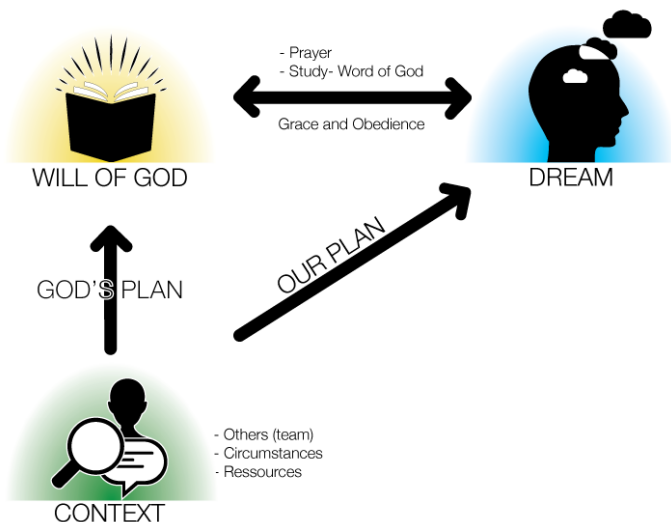
“If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”
John 8:36 - WEB

We find, then, two different plans and directions, and both begin within the same context: our current context. Some may be wondering why we should take time to work on our own plan, when God’s plan is the better, holier one. Because that is how God wants man to progress in his sanctification.

We have sought out dreams and guidance in hopes of finding God’s will, which will bring our plan closer to His plan, so that they become one plan.

We find that God lets us follow a plan that diverges from His own, with the condition that our influence does not change His plan, which we are not capable of doing.

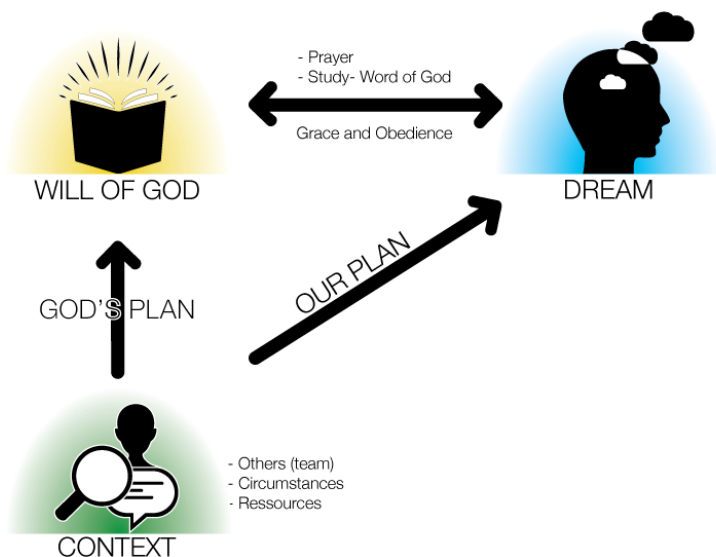
Our sin and depravity separate us from His perfect plan. So why does God allow evil? Why does God let the wicked grow in wickedness? This question pops up frequently in the Psalms.



Yes, God does allow the wicked to prosper. They use their God-given freedom to kill and destroy. God allows the wicked to sin and even allows creation to suffer from it. Such wickedness exposes the true state of their hearts and stores up a punishment proportional to their wickedness.

However, as we have seen earlier, man does not have freedom to counteract God's plan. God expects that repentance and faith will bring us back to His perfect plan. He will not force us unless our will interferes with other people's lives, His creation or our testimony as children of God. We call this discipline, being corrected by God.

In this manner, a child of God will seek out his Father's will and plan; such is the burden from God. How can the will of God then be found? Through studying and meditating on the Word of God and through prayer.



Let us look at the figure again. Obedience brings us closer to God's plan while sin drags us away. Through obedience, the believers will submit to the Holy Spirit's work in their life. Let me show you another concept that I still fail to understand but remains true: the grace of God. We have seen that our plan comes closer to God's plan through obedience and submission in faith. Likewise, the arrow on the right (our plan) will move closer to the arrow on the left (God's plan). Sometimes, however, the left arrow will move toward the right arrow. "Wait a minute, Serge, you mean to tell me that God is bringing His plan toward mine?" Yes. Such is grace in action. God's grace demonstrates His love, which is beyond comprehension. Here's an example: I, a sinner, have rejected God and deserve eternal damnation. There is no good reason why I should be punished. I deserve nothing less. "Yes, but Serge, Jesus ransomed us!" This grace is an undeserved and incomprehensible gift from God. It fulfills the Law and demonstrates the love of God. Grace is the message we preach:

“But we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to Greeks...”

1 Corinthians 1:23 - WEB

That is what I mean by Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross being incomprehensible to us, a stumbling block and foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). He gave Himself for me because of His grace.

Why am I going into such detail about God’s plan? If you want to serve God, whether in your youth ministry or anywhere else, you will need to submit and obey the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, submission is simply accepting God’s grace towards you and your youth group. You need to understand and live out these concepts, so you can explain them to your youth who live in a world trying to seduce and destroy them. You cannot afford to say one thing and do another, because youth are good at sniffing out fakes.

So, let’s start planning! God has graciously given us intelligence, free will, and most importantly, the Holy Spirit. In return, He expects me to draw up a plan, flawed as it may be, with the goal of bringing it to the likeness of His own. That is how I can express my love for Him which He desires so strongly. Thank you, God, for your love.

CHAPTER

05

The Program



CHAPTER FIVE

Time to focus on the program. When I say “the program” I mean all the organized actions and activities we use to reach our goals.

Many ministries offer structures to help us. The problem is that these ministries have particular goals in mind. We will also call these ministry plans “programs.” A few examples are the Word of Life program, the AWANA program, and the Christian Scouts program. Churches often find it easiest to adopt these programs for their Youth ministry.

However, these ministries offer extensive programs that can meet a Youth group’s needs. The believers who serve in these ministries are equally filled with the Holy Spirit and have worked hard to build the best tools they can. In fact, that is what these ministries are: tools.

As shown in the example below, we commonly use a tool, such as a saw, to cut a piece of wood. There is a right and a wrong way to use a tool. Workers must have the training and experience to properly use each tool. Sometimes, a talented carpenter will work with such skill that they are asked to be a seller of these tools that they know so well!

Object

Means

Tool

ex. Wood <-----> Saw



Here is my analogy:

- The “raw material” that God gives us to work with is our youth.
- The tools are the ministries that God gives to those with the qualities we have already covered, such as passion, burden, dreams, gifts, talent, and environment.
- The means to use the tools to form beautiful and useful “furniture” for God’s glory, are the relationships they will establish. This relationship will shape the raw material in two ways: evangelism* and discipleship.

Object

Means

Tool

Youth <-----> Leader/ministries



Note: I cannot recommend you a better tool, to develop evangelism in your youth group, than the ministry Dare2Share www.dare2share.org/ They have a simple approach, biblical principles, a motivating training which encourage our young people in an activity that, sometime scares us but is the main objective of our life as a believer.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH — THE PREFERRED METHOD

BEING ABLE TO APPROACH YOUTH:

- Asking them deeper questions about life and their salvation;
- Gaining their trust and receiving an honest answer;
- Bringing them the necessary help and Biblical teaching.

HELPING THEM TO GROW AND HAVE PEACE WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT:

- God
- Their parents
- Church
- Other youth
- The world

THE KEY QUESTIONS:

- Are they saved?
- Are they following the Lord?

DO YOU KNOW YOUR YOUTH'S TESTIMONY?

- How was I before?
- What happened?
- What has changed since?

DO THEY KNOW YOUR TESTIMONY?

With time, leaders will develop knowledge and experience from doing God's work that will enable them to become teachers and experts on youth ministry in the future. Some ministries end up recruiting these leaders to teach in their programs and benefitting from them.

Some may complain that these ministries are sapping the local church's resources by using Youth ministry experts for their particular ministry. It is true that some churches are so big that they need workers and experts to develop their very large Youth ministry. However, I believe that in most churches, workers and experts may have a greater impact if they can make their knowledge accessible to many churches. So, some workers may continue to serve in a single church, but the majority should help multiple churches through Youth ministry, while not forgetting the need to remain faithful to their own church, which is a must.

As previously mentioned, many ministries offer programs and tools to help local churches minister to their youth. So, I encourage you to find the best tool for your church. In fact, you must find the right tool for the right job. Otherwise you would be hurting both your ministry and the tool.

I will expand on my analogy of the saw and the wood by adding a hammer to the mix. When you cut a piece of wood, you need a saw, not a hammer. Likewise, when you drive a nail into wood, you use a hammer, not a saw! You can probably use a saw to hammer your nail, but you would not be efficient and only end up breaking the tool.

So it is with any ministry. Too often, I have heard of ministries that are criticized and damaged, or "spoiled" as they say in Africa, for the simple reason that the tool in question is not the one the church needed. Not because it is a bad tool but it is not efficient for achieving the church's goals and plans, with their particular need and context. And it is also the responsibility of the tool, the ministry, to present well its capacity and usefulness and help the local church understand its true needs.

I often remind this to myself while I am serving in a local church: "Serge, you and your ministry are not the only solution to all the problems of all the churches. Be wise while helping to not hurt with your tool, your ministry!"

Now it is your turn to create or choose a program in light of the goals and objective that you have set.

You will need to go back to your dreams from chapter 2 page 18.

Copy the three sentences you used to describe your dreams:

You can also look back at to the three points you and your leadership team chose to develop over the next year (chapter 3 page 35). Write them down here:

- 1- _____
- 2- _____
- 3- _____

Warning! Not everything can or should be done in the first year. You will need patience, a topic we will soon cover. God is patient with us, and so must we be patient with one another.

We have dreams and goals to achieve as well as aspects of our context to work on. So, we must dig deeper to find a program or a plan that will take us from our context to our goals. Through the years I have witnessed different approaches to Youth ministry.

Here are some simple examples as well as my own observations:

1. A PROGRAM BUILT AROUND ACTIVITIES AND FUN

This is the type of program that tries to attract youth by appealing to their worldly interests instead of spiritual things, because spiritual things are “unpopular”.

Several years ago, a parent came to see me to ask me if we could offer more activities, because their youth thought we didn't have enough outdoor activities and didn't want to participate much longer. I quickly understood what they were really asking. I told them that we would keep on trying to offer interesting youth activities, but that we wouldn't quite go in that direction. Eventually, the family left for another church which ran more outdoor activities. As it turned out, the parents in question began leading youth activities in the other church. This surprised me, as they hadn't previously offered to help with our youth group. Naturally, I was disappointed, but I kept on with things as they were. Sometime later, I ran into one of the parents and I asked them how the Youth ministry was doing. They told me they had dropped out of leading youth a while ago! They tried running activities for a year but ended up burnt out. They couldn't keep up with the activities they were running; each game had to be bigger and better than the last. It came as no surprise, then, that they were burnt out. Lesson learned: when all the emphasis is on games, and the games do not get more and more fun, you end up losing the youth.

If you try to keep your youth's attention by satisfying the flesh, you are setting yourself up for failure. I must unfortunately say that we cannot measure up to the world's attractions, because whatever the world has to offer is much more interesting to the flesh than what we have.

Another parent asked me one day to take the youth to a Christian concert. I wasn't particularly interested, having already heard the group and disliked their music. It wasn't my cup of tea. As it turned out, the parents brought their youth to the show. The next morning, a Sunday, no one from the

group came to church, because the concert ended too late that night – or rather, too early that morning! The following Sunday, I asked the parents how it all went. They answered, “It was great, our kids loved it!” “Good,” I said, hardly surprised. I later asked the youth what they really thought of the show, because I had a good relationship with them.

The parents didn’t even attend. Rather than have their ears bleed at the concert, they went for coffee nearby until the end of the show. As for the show itself? One of the youths who had been to several “secular” concerts told me that he’d never seen so many drugs before! They didn’t learn much about the Word of God, but they definitely learned about integrity, or a lack thereof in some Christians. Needless to say, the parents knew nothing about what happened during the show, because they weren’t there and their kids didn’t tell them about it!

What about activities? They have their place, but if they become the main concern, the program will fail. Word of Life had a good quote: “Some youth programs give youth what they want, then what they need. At Word of Life, we give them what they need, then what they want.” I have always liked this perspective and have tried applying it in my youth groups.

2. YOUTH IN CHARGE OF THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In this view, the assumption is that youth know their own needs and how to meet them better than anyone else. This is a mistake. Teenagers are not adults; they are still in the process of finding themselves. They are trying to find their place in society and are not terribly interested in how others are growing. I am not trying to demean them. This stage is normal. They are children on their way to adulthood, facing pressures from the world and themselves. Youth that can tell their own needs from others' needs are rare indeed.

To thrive in this type of program, they need knowledge, experience, detachment, and passion for others. All this will come with time, but they cannot be expected to already have it. As a result, they will face failure and criticism, instead of growing from it. Even experienced and mature adults can fail to overcome trials. They will be criticized by their peers, and youth tend to be nasty in their criticism!

However, youth do understand their environment well, and you must use this knowledge to better understand your youth group. Bring them in as helpers and associates, lead them towards responsibility, but remain in control of your Youth group. This is not a power move. You have maturity and experience and can handle criticism and pressure and "dirty tricks". In doing so, you can spare them the trials they will soon be facing themselves. When they will, they would have had the opportunity to have seen your reactions and heard your wisdom. This will help them when they become youth leaders. And I can guarantee that there will be criticism to face. I will touch on this in chapter eight. Your youth will also have great ideas for you to filter and channel.

3. THE PROGRAM-IN-A-BOX

In this case, the program is based on material, usually expensive material to produce.

When we depend on material, we find it hard to resist the pressure to constantly make a fancier, shinier, and better program.

Churches looking for these kinds of programs feel the pressure to find a newer, better gem of a program. This is usually the case in North America and some parts of Europe, because in other missionary fields access to programs is so limited that anything is better than nothing.

A ministry that develops a program-in-a-box will always be pressured to create better material and hopefully for free. Christians usually ask for “free” and they can be very demanding. In order to put out quality at a low cost, sales have to be high. In a world as competitive as it is now, with new free programs available online, the “big sales” philosophy is bound to fail.

Church Youth groups are the winners here, as they force programs to compete to keep their clients and survive. Ultimately, they will be let down, because if everything hinges on cost and shininess, quality is left out of the equation.

*“... For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”
1 Samuel 16:7 - NKJV*

Are we looking at what strikes the eyes, or are we looking at the content and the quality of the material? With all the free and eye-catching programs available online, finding good content is a struggle. Many Christians do not evaluate their material and end up frustrated with the content or following false teachings. If you find a program that has a sound doctrine and honours God, I encourage you to keep using it even if it is less popular than others.

4. EVERYONE GETS A TURN!

This style of program is disappointing to youth, because the ministry is seen as a chore! No one really wants to lead the Youth group, seeing it as too demanding.

Let me tell you what I think of this mentality. I have been working with youth since 1986 (I was 29 then... time flies!), and I have never found it hard or disappointing. In my opinion, youth are: frank, direct, not yet corrupted or jaded by time, willing to believe, hopeful, wanting to help, etc. You did not see that in your youth? Look deeper, overcome the superficial look and see what they do not want to show you but is there. They need us, as we need them. This has the double effect of rejuvenating the old and growing the young in maturity!

At the risk of offending some, I find it much harder to work with adults who come to church and sit in the same old pew every Sunday. They say “yes” but do “no”. They are so used to living with a mask that they no longer realize they have it on and cannot remove it. Obviously, I have a bias toward Youth ministry and will not denigrate other ministries which are just as important, but don’t dare tell me that Youth ministry is harder than the others!

When a new season of Youth group rolls around and a call is made for Youth Leaders, people in such churches shy away, hoping that someone else will bite the bullet. When someone finally steps up to volunteer, everyone breathes a sigh of relief. This brave soul, possibly a bit crazy in the eyes of the congregation, does his best to hold on through the year. Naturally, it is hard to survive, let alone flourish, in that kind of environment. Youth are not easily fooled; they can tell when their ministry is seen as a chore. If the group realizes that the leader is only there to fill the gap and is not fully engaged, they will make the leader’s life miserable in the aim of proving them right. Statistically, youth leaders last only 3 years, because:

- In the first year, they think they can change everything.
- In the second, they give themselves a second chance after an initial flop.
- By the third, they are barely keeping afloat, more out of duty than desire.
- At last, they drop out, leaving the church to find someone else to do the chore.

5. US FOUR & NO MORE

This is the perfect program for a tiny, close-knit group where the leaders and/or parents are usually quite legalistic. Newcomers are not welcome to the circle, because newness is seen as dangerous. Anyone who could influence their youth is a threat. How can they protect their youth? By guarding them from any outside influences. This results in a lack of evangelism. Friends who could bring in new ideas are not invited – they are seen as a risk. The leaders of such programs are so insecure that they become controlling. Out of self-defence, such Youth groups lose their opportunity to grow.

6. A PROGRAM BUILT AROUND THE MAIN YOUTH LEADER

Here is a program that can be interesting if the Youth leader has the right approach. Unfortunately, this model of the main Youth Leader being a rockstar is the same model as churches with one pastor as the head honcho and only leader. In this star-centered model, many leaders consider their Youth group as a springboard to go from Youth Pastor to “real” pastor. They secretly think, “Given my success, why would I stay here when I could do better?”

Clearly, I am unimpressed by this type of program that only ends up hurting and disappointing a Youth group. The Rockstar leader will eventually move on and leave a gaping hole behind him. In my experience, such a Youth Leader will rarely disciple their successors. They focus on building their success rather than the Youth group’s success and longevity.

What happens to the youth? They will have become attached to the Rockstar leader, for obvious reasons. Such leaders have charismatic personalities and some legitimate qualities. In a way, I understand why the leader would move toward bigger and better opportunities – why not bless more people with the gifts God has given them?

Again, I see things differently. A ministry is a calling from God, not just a job, as we mentioned in the chapter on burdens. If God calls me, I cannot change my path unless His new calling is clear to me and to others. In that case, He will provide someone to take my place, because He is a God of order. Otherwise, the new calling is not from God.

I have seen ministry changes like this carried out well, but to my great disappointment, they are the exception, not the norm. I would like to tell you otherwise, but too often I have watched people switch ministries to pursue money or fame. Is it sad? Of course, but no reason to give up ministry. God will give you hope if youth are your burden.

7. THE GOD WILL PROVIDE METHOD

I have little to say about this program, which is not really a program. It is the sort of principle I have already mentioned, where the mind-set is, “the Bible says nothing about youth groups”! According to this paradigm, turning a blind eye to needs is in fact a step of faith. It says to the suffering, the hungry and the needy: “God will provide. God is good. God is in control. You just need more faith.”

This is not a youth group program, but rather a means to justify inaction by disqualifying Youth ministry as a legitimate ministry. It pains me to even think about such a mindset.

8. THE NEW WAY

Often, newcomers who have little to no experience try to prove themselves by coming up with something different. Out with the old, in with the new. They claim that everything that used to be done no longer applies to the next generation. These Youth ministry “gurus” will show you how things should be done in the modern world.

They have failed to consider these words in Ecclesiastes:

“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.” Ecclesiastes 1:9-11 - NKJV

After having thrown the old method out the window and changed everything, they are surprised to realize that the new way does not work. The question is not about whether the method is new or old but about the underlying biblical principles. Afraid to own up to failure, such revivalists will typically blame others for stunting their initiatives.

These are the people who will try to convince you that the new generation never gets involved in anything. For years, people have insisted to me that I should not ask anyone to commit for more than two years, since the new generation lives only in the present. I like to try to understand different generations, each with their strengths and weaknesses, so I can better serve them and bring them hope. However, I do not believe that we should encourage them to not commit. In fact, we must show them the importance of getting involved. Remember that, if the new generation fails to commit to anything, the previous generation (my generation) is to blame. Our own lack of faithfulness has discouraged them from commitment. Studying their problems could be easier than admitting I am the problem and that I need to change my ways.

Indeed, I am not convinced that youth are unable to commit in the long term. In my experience, those who insist on that point cannot properly answer this simple challenge. What should they tell God who is asking for their life, their whole life? Can they tell God, who has given me His Son and who reaches out with His mighty hand of salvation: "God, I will commit for a couple of years at best, because my generation doesn't do long-term commitment!" So much for that theory.

Of course, we must improve and adapt. We must understand the need to change, but the basic principles are immutable, built on solid foundations that stand securely on the Word of God, profitable to all generations in all places at all times.

Ironically, the leaders who promote change are usually the least flexible and least understand the importance of adaptation. They are asking for flexibility in others. A flexibility that they are unable to provide, because they have not learned it. And now, again, it is probably the result of the mistakes of my generation, which was lacking at that task. So again, let's work together, young and old, all placing our common construction on the good foundation that is the Word of God. Let's try together to know it better.

CONCLUSION

Naturally, no ministry would admit of being in any of the above categories. Besides, asking them is pointless, as it should usually be fairly obvious: if the shoe fits ...

So which program should you choose? And, not to influence you, I will avoid recommending a particular ministry, but here some key points to look for:

- The local church is at the heart of the program. Recently, there has been a return to local church ministry.
- Evangelism and discipleship must be the priority.
- Serious biblical teaching.
- An unquenchable passion for Youth ministry
- Humility within the leadership. People are more important than things.

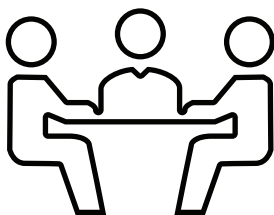
Now that we have chosen our program, let's look at the course of a meeting. The Youth Night!

Some programs will suggest the course of the meeting. If you have chosen a program, it would be better to respect their suggestion. But, if nothing is suggested, here are the important elements to consider.

CHAPTER

06

The Youth Night



CHAPTER SIX

Since the goal of this book is to discuss the basic principles of Youth ministry, we need to talk about the Youth group meeting itself. Of course, there are many ways to run such a meeting according to the needs and the context of the group. Sometimes, particular situations require the meeting to be reorganized. In some cases, the leaders have time to adapt, but other times they have to improvise. In all cases, it is important to understand some simple but crucial principles that affect how a meeting is run. Once we understand them, we can adapt much easier to change without straying from the ultimate goal.

We must understand that principles and structures do not exist to hold us back, as some may think, but rather to free us. Obedience does not enslave us; it frees us.

Time to review the underlying principles of youth meetings.

TYPICAL MEETING STRUCTURE

- Icebreaker (5-10 minutes) – suited to the Youth group
- Prayer & Sharing (15-20 minutes)
- Music & Worship (5-10 minutes)
- Bible Study (20-30 minutes)
- Small Groups (20-30 minutes)
- Games & Activities (30+ minutes) - optional
- Refreshments (10-20 minutes)

A typical night may last between 1:15 to 2 hours, not counting time reserved for games and activities.

ICEBREAKER

In any meeting, everyone has different limits with regards to communication. Youth in particular struggle with communication, as they are transitioning from childhood to adulthood.

You may or may not remember those days if you are a bit further along in life, but youth often say things that are a bit clumsy, and so their peers judge them. While it would be wonderful if youth had compassion on each other as they learn and adapt to a new world, teenagers often show little grace. Their easy solution is therefore to shut down and shut up to avoid looking like a fool.

An icebreaker is one way to make youth feel at home and lead them to let down their guard in a free and safe environment... or rather, almost free! It should only be a short fun time to lead into the rest of the meeting, not to set the tone for it. The goal is a better atmosphere for openness and discussion.

Be careful, though! Youth leaders must watch their limits and try not to be too cool. I say that because I have witnessed poorly led Icebreakers run off the rails as the leaders lost control.

Conversely, the Icebreaker may become redundant if the mood is already set, and you must pay attention to that. If it makes no sense in context but rather ends up feeling forced, it may have the opposite effect. If interactions are needlessly coerced, discussion will be stifled. Be careful about handling Icebreaker time well.

While these are the basic principles of an Icebreaker, you have to adapt it to your particular situation. For example, when I led youth groups in Africa, I quickly learned that they do not “break the ice”, but rather do a “warmup”. Given the weather in Africa, that makes more sense!

PRAYER & SHARING

Once the ice is broken and trust is built, it becomes easier for the youth to share what is on their hearts. Prayer and sharing can be crucial to the meeting's atmosphere. If this time is well handled, youth will open their hearts and minds to the Word of God and the wisdom within; if not, they will not listen and even lose their trust.

I have always taken sharing and prayer time seriously, and I encourage my youth to take it seriously and stay respectful. As a leader, I do my best to earn my youth's attention and I cannot afford to let anything or anyone interfere with it.

Likewise, everyone should feel free to share, without anyone dominating the discussion. No doubt you have been to a sharing and prayer time where one or a few people took up all the time. Their attitude reflects self-centeredness, or more precisely, pride. The desire to attract attention will transform in a reaction of rejection by others. Everyone else gets frustrated because there is no room for them to share, and they begin to resent whoever is doing all the talking. While it feels wrong to interrupt them, simply letting them go on and on will actually harm them in the long run.

Instead, everyone should be free to share, no matter the size of the group, with the aim of aligning their thoughts with Jesus, the center of their lives.

The next step after sharing burdens is bringing them before God in prayer.

Why is sharing and prayer time so important? Our spirits are weighed down by everything that happens around us. When we share our burdens with those around us and bring them before God, we become free to listen to Him through the teaching of the Word.

MUSIC & WORSHIP

Music and songs have a peculiar way of opening hearts. Indeed, a healthy time of praise singing can make a worshipper ready for the precious Word of God. Since the message should speak to the heart, not just to the mind, music and worship must open the heart to receive teaching.

With the goals for a time of worship in mind, you must make sure these goals are achieved. Indeed, music and singing are not:

- The most important part of the meeting. That would be the Word of God!
- A talent show. Yes, God gives His people talents so that they may use them, but He must be at the heart of the worship. All praise and glory belong to Him, not to people.
- A dreaded weekly obligation. If the group's musical resources are inadequate, it may be better to worship along with a backing track or even to skip the time altogether.
- A stumbling block. Different musical styles may distract some from worshipping God wholeheartedly.

Although music has the power to open hearts, it can also be a source of conflict in a group, as musical artistry is so personal. Personally, I enjoy just about anything; I lack a sense of tune anyway! I have to count on my wife to tell me whether someone sings tunelessly or not. On the other hand, the Word of God tells me (Gal. 5:13-14, 1 Cor. 8:9) to respect others, and so I have to be cautious about different methods of musical expression during our time of worship. Yes, art comes from the wellsprings of the heart, but the heart must nonetheless show discernment.

BIBLE STUDY

Having opened our hearts in worship, we are ready to receive the Word of God. If well executed, this time of teaching is suited to larger groups, as everyone in attendance can learn from it.

Teaching must be clear, simple, and applicable for all. Illustrations should be contextualized and culturally adapted to help listeners understand the truth in the message. Jesus Himself often used illustrations, parables, and stories to get His point across; we should do the same. That said, we are not bound to use the exact same illustrations as Jesus did. His teachings are perfect, and we must understand the truth in all of them. However, we should go beyond simply repeating His words by learning His way of teaching and applying it to our own messages.

True Biblical teaching is sharing an unchanging truth to changing people in a changing audience. Those who teach are charged with understanding their message, but they must also know their audience, such that the former may be effective for the latter, as I said earlier in this book (chapter three). Theologians and scholars point to the importance of understanding the context of the Scriptures but, ironically, they sometimes fail to understand the context of their audience! I could go into much more detail on the topic of contextualization, but that is not my goal here. I simply want to be clear on how important it is to deliver Biblical truth in a clear manner to our youth.

Moreover, teachers must be mindful of having the right goal. Bible study is not a context for showing off your knowledge, but rather to help the listener understand and apply the truth (James 1:22-25). One main idea is enough for a message in a Youth group context. Audiences will easily “tune out” and ignore everything if the teaching has too many points to apply. It should only take 20 to 30 minutes to effectively get one main point across.

SMALL GROUPS

Small group time is certainly one of the most important parts of the meeting, because it provides a platform for everyone to share what they've learned from the message and how God has spoken to them.

In order to better understand and discuss the teaching, the Youth group can split off into smaller groups. Generally, groups are split according to age group (12 -13, 14 -15, 16 +), where:

- Everyone can express themselves freely, without feeling judged by anyone else from a different age group with different challenges.
- Problems and needs specific to a certain age group are easier to discuss.

However, groups can also be determined by particular interests, age, gender, etc. and can vary from time to time according to needs and goals.

In addition, having a couple of leaders assigned to each group, at least for the year but ideally for the long run, is an effective way to continually follow up with a small group. Better yet, a couple may have experience or a passion for a particular age group. Why a couple? They are well suited to answer questions and meet the needs of boys and girls alike.

Of course, a married couple works best in this case, in part to offer the couple a ministry together, and in part to avoid tension should members of different couples be assigned together. You cannot afford to put your leaders where the enemy may attack their reputation and integrity, ruining their relationship with the youth.

Whoever is teaching the Bible study that week should provide each small group leader with a copy or an outline of the message ahead of time, so that the leaders can prepare relevant questions for their particular groups.

GAMES & ACTIVITIES

Although they are optional, games and activities are sometimes the main attraction of a youth group for a teenager. To think that youth – even those from Christian backgrounds – are only attracted to the spiritual part of the event is frankly foolish!

Games and activities often make youth group more attractive to non-believers and provide a platform for youth to invite their friends.

I say games are optional, but I highly recommend them. I have always used them as part of a youth group meeting, but I have never advertised them unless there was a cost involved. Whenever Youth group would ask me about next week's activity, I would always reply: "You'll have to come and see! All I can say is that we'll be studying the Word of God. Everything else is a surprise." I did not want them to come only for the games.

Whatever you organize does not have to be particularly expensive or elaborate. Sometimes, the easiest activities to set up are also the best, so long as they do not exhaust you. Naturally, you will need to use your imagination.

REFRESHMENTS

As the evening wraps up, everyone had fun, everyone is sweaty because of the game, and now everyone is hungry. Youths are always hungry. If my Greek is correct, “teenager” means “stomach with two feet”! ;-)

Naturally, your context and your budget will play into your choices for snack options. In Quebec, we tend to put quantity before quality. I know of a Youth Leader who gave his Youth group two choices: 1- carrots, celery and other veggies, cheese, and juice; 2- chips and soft drinks. Clever he was, though, he bought a lot more of option 1 than option 2, so most people went for option 1!

I will leave it to you to dream up whatever you want, as long as it fits your budget. You can even get parents involved in providing refreshments on a rotating schedule. As a result, some parents will become particularly popular with the group!

MEETING EVALUATION

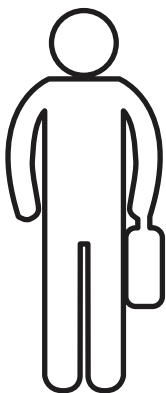
Regularly going through the different aspects of youth meetings is crucial. I have included a table below with some additional elements to cover. Start by going through the list and rating each point on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “to improve” and 5 being “perfect”. Once you have rated each point, write down comments that will help you improve your existing structure or add new ideas to it.

Evaluation Survey of your Youth ministry					
PROGRAM ELEMENTS	EVALUATION				
Ice-breaker	1	2	3	4	5
Sharing/ praying	1	2	3	4	5
Music and songs of worship	1	2	3	4	5
Biblical study	1	2	3	4	5
Small groups	1	2	3	4	5
Games/activities	1	2	3	4	5
Refreshments	1	2	3	4	5
Decoration	1	2	3	4	5
General participation	1	2	3	4	5
Presence of visitors	1	2	3	4	5
Participation of the youth in small groups	1	2	3	4	5
Participation of the youth in personal devotion	1	2	3	4	5
Participation of the youth in the service	1	2	3	4	5
Monthly social meetings/rallies	1	2	3	4	5
Participation des animateurs aux formations	1	2	3	4	5
Participation des animateurs aux petits groupes	1	2	3	4	5
Participation of the leadership during the formation	1	2	3	4	5
Participation of the leadership to small groups	1	2	3	4	5
Leadership's planning meetings	1	2	3	4	5
Communication with the pastor/the elders	1	2	3	4	5
Evangelization ministry	1	2	3	4	5
Disciple formation ministry	1	2	3	4	5
Youth commitment in the church	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
COMMENTS					

CHAPTER

07

The Workers



CHAPTER SEVEN

Who are the servants that God uses to fulfill His plan for mankind? Youth workers often go by different titles: Youth Pastor, Youth Leader, Youth Director, and so on. Whatever their title, we must understand what the Bible requires of them. Here is my summary of the underlying principles of Youth ministry.

WHO ARE YOUTH GROUP LEADERS?

What is leadership in the first place? Dictionaries and encyclopedias usually refer to dominance, bosses, representatives, or generally whoever is in charge. They have certain qualities and talents that touch on both “being” and “doing”. What does the Bible have to say about leadership?

“Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.”

Luke 22.24 - NKJV

In other words, the disciples asked Jesus, “Which one of us should be the leader?”

“And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For

who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. “ Luke 22.25-27 - NKJV

The LORD speaks of shepherds leading their flocks in the Old Testament:

“And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Jeremiah 3.15 -NKJV

“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: “You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,” says the Lord. “ Jeremiah 23.1-2 – NKJV

“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”’ Ezekiel 34.2 -NKJV

God gives us a few warnings about our leaders:

- He raises them up according to His will.
- He gives them knowledge and understanding.
- Woe to those who destroy and scatter the flock, instead of preserving and gathering it!
- Woe to those who put themselves first!

Are you a leader according to His will? Is everyone suited to leadership? How can we know? Here are some questions to help you better understand where your motivations lie:

ARE OTHERS ASKING YOU TO LEAD? (OTHERS' WILL)

History tells us that mankind tends to establish leaders. In Old Testament times, Israel desired a king and crowned Saul, effectively rejecting God as their King (1 Sam. 8:6-8). Moses, the most patient man, was likewise pressured by his people to lead them (Exodus 18, Numbers 11, Numbers 12:3).

Much to the apostle Paul's disgust, some believers were rejecting his leadership and protection, instead subjecting themselves to the yoke of oppressive leaders.

"For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face." 2 Corinthians 11:20 ESV

DO YOU WANT TO LEAD? (YOUR WILL)

Our wills can sometimes play against us. Are we looking to nurture our own pride instead of serving Him who knows us better than we know ourselves, including our strengths and weaknesses?

Be careful here. Misjudging others' wills and our own wills is a dangerous path toward a failed ministry. It will lead us to being chewed up and sometimes to burnout, or turning into an oppressive, dictator type of leader.

IS GOD ASKING YOU TO LEAD? (GOD'S WILL)

Of course, the best way is to follow God's will, not man's – your own included.

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13 ESV

We must keep in mind that since we are predestined to salvation, we are also predestined to His service:

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.” Ephesians 1.11-12 ESV

He will indeed give us knowledge and understanding, as He says in Jeremiah 3:15. However, there still lies the danger of destroying and scattering the flock (Jeremiah 23:1-2). Note that destroying and scattering is the opposite of protecting and gathering, which is God’s commandment to His people:

“Then He said to them: Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4.19 NKJV

“Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28.19-20 NKJV

Fishers of men and makers of disciples: this is His call for us.*

Moreover, we must avoid becoming self-serving. I regularly have to check in with my own self as to why I am serving in ministry. Am I hiding behind a façade of good works, trying to satisfy my own desires?

“These are hidden rocky reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you, shepherds who without fear feed themselves; ...” Jude 1.12a -WEB

* Dann Spader, Dann, 4 Chair Discippling: What He Calls Us to Do, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2019, 160 p.

We must pray for our workers, who are often put on pedestals by their peers. Praise and appreciation are a temptation, if not a stumbling block, for God's servants. Why am I in ministry? Because I want to or because God wants me to? To serve myself or to serve God? To avoid looking like a failure? To save face? Or to be an example for others, laying down my life to protect and gather Jesus's disciples?

Let us take a closer look at what kind of leader serves the church.

God has given different titles to different positions for His servants:

- **Elders** – “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching.” 1 Timothy 5.17 - ASV
- **Bishops** – “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach...” 1 Timothy 3.1-2 NKJV
- **Pastors and Teachers** – “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Ephesians 4.11-12 NKJV

SHOULD WE CALL OURSELVES LEADERS?

In Matthew 23:10, Jesus says: “And do not be called ...” The Greek word, hegeomai, refers to a leader or a director. Other related meanings include: to drive, to go forward, to be a chief, to direct, to command, to have authority, prince, royalty, governor, elder, representative, spokesperson. Is Jesus saying that we should never be leaders? Or is He cautioning us against selfish leadership? As you may have gathered from what I shared earlier, I believe Jesus is calling us not to seek first place. He calls us instead to follow His example and to put others before ourselves.

Personally, I can accept that in our generation and our culture we use the term leader, especially in Quebec. But it must be the title of those who are a Role-model (being an example by their actions, like Paul) Protector (those who spend their life and protect others by their lives) and Shepherd/ Pastor (those who give the formation and bring unity in Christ’s disciples).

WHAT ARE YOUTH LEADERS?

What criterias must a youth leader have?

A HEART FOR THE YOUTH : An interest in relation to youth and a burden to reach the youth with the Gospel.

I should add that age doesn't influence the fact of having, or not, a burden for the youth. In fact, the majority of the people I have seen committed to this ministry with the most passion were often people not very young.

It's a mistake to believe que the youth Leader must be young. Many think that a young person will know the youth better because that person was like them not long ago. It can even be an obstacle to be too close in age with the young people we serve, because such a leader most often doesn't have the distance to have a proper view. Their apparent closeness to the new generation may make them think they know it well, not realizing the fast way a generation grows, not realizing they are already "old".

In our actual world, everything is faster than before, and generations are no exception. Thus, assuming this too easily can become more an obstacle than a winning card.

Nevertheless, a young leader with a good attitude could do amazing things. This said, I repeat that having a heart for the youth is the necessity, whatever the age. Like we mentioned since the very beginning of this book, the burden comes before the abilities. Following this the context may be considered. The age or the abilities of the youth Leader can be part of the basis to choose, but only as one of many elements to consider and not a reason for exclusion. The real obstacle, if there is one, is regarding the attitude which can be a problem at any age.

Like any given missionary that works in a particular culture, we must learn to really know this culture (the youth) in order to better serve them. Young and older people each have positive points to reach the goal. By working together, young and old, we will be able to exchange our knowledge and experiences.

Again, the key is a real heart for the youth, to help try to understand them better in order to be efficient in reaching them. I know I've talked more about this subject, because I consider it the most important and essential point, a cornerstone.

EVIDENCE OF GROWTH AND TEACHABILITY : A flexible, mature disciple who wants to learn more.

These are people who actively seeks to grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ; someone who is mature enough to know there is always more to learn. Instead of taking pride in their knowledge, they humble themselves and accurately discern their strengths and weaknesses in order to serve God and serve others.

A SERVANT HEART : Leaders must serve! They are not there to be served and obeyed, but to listen to others in order to better serve them.

Maybe you will be surprised, but I have often seen people who want to be in charge just so that people would listen to them. I once asked a young adult to serve with our youth ministry, and he told me that while he was interested, he did not have enough time to devote to serving. He was willing to teach, however, because he felt he had a lot to say to the group. I decided not to give him a position as a "teacher only", and he never got involved with the youth group. A few years later, he left the faith entirely. Naturally, few would openly admit to being so selfish, as did this young man, but we must have the shrewdness to spot wolves that prey on the flock rather than laying down their lives for them. Indeed, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, a perfect example for us (John 13:12-14; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27).

WILLINGNESS TO BE ACCOUNTABLE : to the church, to parents, to their youth, and to everyone else.

Accountability is more than reporting to someone else; it is being responsible for one's words and actions. As we will see in the next chapter, the Youth Leader is accountable to many different parties. They must therefore have an attitude of responsibility towards those who have authority over them. Moreover, because God holds them accountable for everything they do, they must choose trustworthy mentors who will help them grow, and to whom they can submit.

A TEAM SPIRIT : willingness to work alongside others toward a common goal.

Can anyone do God's work alone? God gives His servants different gifts, talents, characters, strengths, and weaknesses so that they might work together. Indeed, He wants us to work together. If I cannot work with a team, I cannot serve the Lord! It is that simple. There is no room for one-man shows in Christian service. Even Paul, gifted as he was, freely admitted he needed to work alongside others. Sadly, we encounter this type of people in the Christian world. If Jesus would appear now, they would tell Him to sit down and watch them work! Of course, I am being facetious – but not that much. You probably know someone like that. Do not bring these self-sufficient people in your team, but you must also make sure no one-man shows infiltrate your youth leadership team!

COMMITMENT : doing whatever it takes for effective Youth ministry.

You must seek people willing to give their all for the sake of their ministry, rather than people who count the cost of everything they do.

WHAT IS THE YOUTH LEADER'S TESTIMONY?

WHO IS THE YOUTH LEADER IN QUESTION?

- A valuable resource for youth in their spiritual growth
- A positive influence for transformation
- Up to date with world trends and social media
- Knowledgeable about the youth group
- Available to youth, adults, parents, and elders
- An older brother or sister
- A tool in God's hands
- A servant
- A trustworthy figure for youth
- A discussion leader
- A model of service, humility, imperfection, and discipline
- A friendship builder
- Etc.

All of these qualities are to be expected of Youth Leaders, but how can a church be sure that a prospective servant will indeed be an appropriate model for their youth? Indeed, Youth Leaders must carefully watch their testimony.

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" Ephesians 5:15-17 NKJV

THEIR TESTIMONY - WHAT PERSONAL DISCIPLINE DO THEY HAVE?

Let me suggest a few key points that were important in my life. My testimony includes self-discipline, which is in fact God's plan for my life! I have previously covered passions, dreams, context, plans, and programs, all of which are necessary for a youth program, but they are just as important for your own life.

Here is a personal story which I believe best illustrates how this book's first few chapters can apply to an individual:

Kevin, my nephew, came to live with Michèle and I when we were living in France. He had a hard life, fueled by years of being bullied in school, followed by drug and alcohol abuse. He wanted to turn his life around by moving to a different country and starting over. After about a month, he told me he was struggling with alcohol abuse and that he had had enough. As we had heart-to-heart conversations, I could feel the pain in his soul as he wrestled with his past and faced a bleak future. He had no hopes, no dreams. Why should he have hope when his whole life was marked by failure?

I decided to show him the same plan I have shown you: passions, dreams, context, plans, programs. Quickly, he noticed he had no passion, because he had been wounded before. He could not dream, because he could not imagine happiness. He could not see his context, because to him it was a series of failures. Naturally, he had no plan for his life, except for some wishful thinking that inevitably collapsed, dragging him down further than ever.

After some further discussion, he began to share his passions and even dare to dream. We reminded him of the fine young man he had been, and he began to see his strengths and weaknesses. He then laid out a plan and a program for his life. His life was radically transformed, and he even opened his heart to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Was

he made perfect in the blink of an eye? No. Did he still stumble? Yes, but he essentially stayed sober for the rest of his life and began to plan for the future.

Why “the rest of his life”? Kevin came to live with us in August 2017, became sober as of October 2017, gave his life to God in December 2017, was diagnosed with cancer in April 2018, and died of a severe bacterial infection on July 8th, 2018. In the face of impending trials and broken dreams, however, his faith in Jesus remained secure.

Why am I talking about Kevin when you have likely never met him? Firstly, because I am dedicating this book to Kevin, and also, I want to testify to what God has done in his life. I want to go beyond simply asking for God’s help, by recognizing what He does for us. Kevin’s life and death are a monument to God’s love.

Secondly, to remind you that you need these base principles in your life before you can apply them to a ministry. You must prepare a plan for your life, because God has a plan for your life too! I sincerely hope your own life is part of your passions, and that you are taking the time to dream about what you can do with your life. Of course, to reach your goals, you must understand your context – that is, your life. However, it may be that your childhood dreams have been broken, and, as a result, you are now afraid to dream.

With the principles in place, you can lead youth to grow and to dream for God’s glory. In this way, your youth will become disciples. After all, discipleship is simply training others to be what we have already become. If we have not grown, we cannot show others how to grow.

I have included an example of self-discipline in Appendix A . This is my “battle plan”, my life program. Do what you will with it, rewrite it if you want, but you must work on your life program.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR OWN TESTIMONY?

You will find a sample testimony in Appendix B. As a leader, if you are going to ask your youth to share their testimony, you had better be prepared to give your own. What is your testimony? What do you tell people who ask you about your faith?

HOW DO YOU TRAIN A LEADER?

Are you ready to lead? How do you become a leader, anyway? More specifically, how do you become the leader God wants you to be? Hundreds if not thousands of books have been written about leadership; every one of them has its own suggestions. Let me share mine, which I have gathered from my life experience. In particular, I will point out essential three qualities related to being (Humility, Patience, Forgiveness) and three related to doing (Vision, Planning, Communication).

Quality 1 – Humility

- Do the best you can with what God has given you. He is the Master and He gives skills according to His will. (Matthew 25:14-30)
- Learn from John the Baptist. According to Jesus, there was no one born of woman greater than he! (Matthew 11:11)

Quality 2 – Patience

- Patience takes a lifetime to develop... there is no such thing as a weekend course in patience!
- Learn from Moses. He was the most patient man on Earth in his time! (Numbers 12:3)

Quality 3 – Forgiveness

- Part of leadership is going through different trials which will involve being hurt.
- You must learn to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. Failure to do so leads to failure in ministry.

Skill 1 – Vision

- Develop your passion
- Learn to dream
- Share your vision
- Stay on course

Skill 2 – Planning

- Plan with others
- Everyone fits, one way or another, in God's plan
- Find your place

Skill 3 – Communication

- Communicate clearly
- Communicate promptly
- Prioritise communication (Priority - Encouragement and Reproduction)

As a leader, do not seek first place; rather, lay down your life for others. In a way, all believers should answer to their leaders, as they are role models, protecting their flock even to the point of giving their life. Think of a mother – when she teaches, protects, and takes care of her children, is she not a leader?

WHAT ABOUT THE LEADER'S FAMILY?

Speaking of mothers, I thought it appropriate to talk about the family. As a worker, your first “mission field” is your family. You should not have to sacrifice your family on the altar of ministry; to do that is to twist the Scriptures. Yes, God comes first – before my wife, my children, my parents, my friends. However, by no means will he ask me to sacrifice them! He loves them even more than I can; He gave them to me so that I would take care of them. Let me be clear: if you lose your family by neglecting it, you lose your qualifications for ministry.

“one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” 1 Timothy 3.4-5 NKJV

Moreover, those of you who lead a family know that running a home is not about carrying a rod of punishment, but instead loving your family to the point of giving your life. With that in mind, I have a few questions for you about your family.

HOW IS YOUR FAMILY?

Do you aspire to ministry as a leader, pastor, missionary, etc.?

Do not forget your family – how do you reconcile ministry and family?

I truly hope you know how important it is to take care of your family. Remember: you lose your family = you lose your ministry. How will you commit to your family throughout your ministry?

I know it seems personal, but you should seek out the answer to this question. What do your spouse and children think? Do they see you in Youth ministry? Why or why not? Are they on board with you to enter Youth ministry?

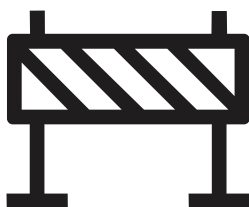
You may or may not have children, but you are definitely someone's child and therefore have different family experiences. Share some difficult situations in your family that you have been in, and how you can avoid them.

A warning here: taking care of your family is not synonymous with neglecting your ministry, either. In fact, there is a way to link the two so that they grow together. However, I do not have enough space here to dig into it, so I will write about it in a future volume.

CHAPTER

08

The Obstacles



CHAPTER EIGHT

This chapter may be the last one, but it is not the least. After all, if you cannot overcome the obstacles in your race, everything else you may have learned from this book will be in vain. You may run, but will you finish the race?

“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4.5-8 - NKJV

Before you run the race, you must remember:

- There will be obstacles. John 17:13-23
- There will be opposition, including from within. 1 John 2:18-19
- God does not send obstacles, but He does allow them. James 1:13-15; 1 Corinthians 11:13-14

Different things and people can hinder you from running the race that is your youth ministry. We need to understand these obstacles. There are essentially three possible obstacles: Environment, myself and others. In other words, anything that is not a person, me and any person besides me. Let us look at these three in further detail.

THE ENVIRONMENT

No one is free from the fallout of this broken world. Every worker faces challenges in their ministry, and challenges are generally unpredictable. Of course, I cannot control every aspect of the environment, but I can plan ahead to avoid some effects of this environment. Cancer and accidents are one thing; disease stemming from gluttony and lack of discipline are another. God has given you a body, so take care of it. I am not saying you should become a bodybuilder, but you need to take care of yourself in order to serve God for as long as your health allows. Yes, your environment brings difficult situations, but we can avoid many of them simply by planning ahead.

I hope to work as if it were all on me and that I would trust God as if it were all on Him. However, His sovereignty is no excuse to neglect my planning and my work.

I often say that God still works miracles, one of which is that He has given me a brain! I must use it the best I can to plan my work properly. Once I have done so, I can turn to Him for more miracles. When I will face these “impossible moments”, I will kneel and ask for His deliverance or the capacity to accept the consequences of these challenges.

YOURSELF

You may be your ministry’s worst enemy: sin and a lack of integrity will destroy your testimony. Integrity is, in essence, living up to your words. And let me warn you from experience: youth can smell lack of integrity from afar. Remember this as you deal with your youth:

“Actions speak louder than words!”

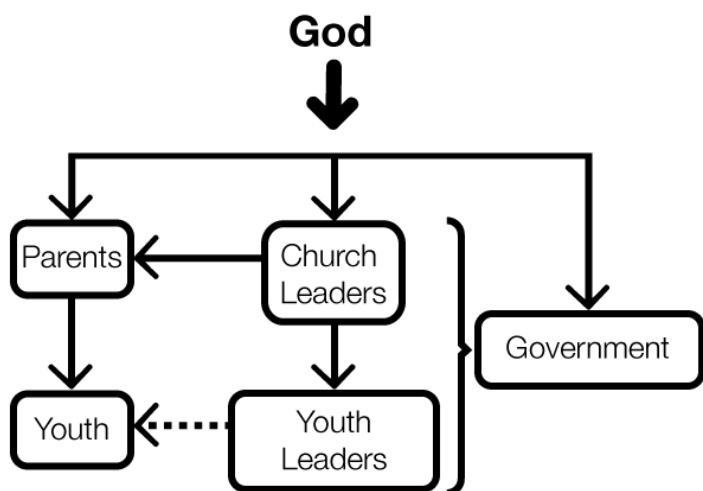
How can you live out your faith when sin will always be there to make you stumble? Apart from self-discipline, which we have already covered, there are precious few answers to this age-old problem.

Take care, however, that you do not fall into the sort of “self-discipline” that gives you an illusion of personal self-control. This attitude, which is sadly present in Christian circles, reeks of pride instead of humility. After all, you are a disciple under the authority of your Master, who asks you to submit to Him, not merely to discipline yourself. That said, if you are indeed under your Master’s authority, self-discipline is a sign of responsibility for action, not control of consequences.

OTHERS

Here is the obstacle that represents those around you. As a leader, you must learn to accept authority and submit to others.

So, who is responsible for Youth Leaders, anyway? The chart below describes the relationships between different authorities.



Authority structures are one of the greatest challenges in Youth ministry; navigating in them successfully is a sign of maturity. In the end, Youth Leaders answer to just about everyone! Let me explain:

PARENTS

A Youth Leader's passion is to see their youth grow. However, as we saw when we discussed God's plan, His program is the model of the family. God has made parents responsible for their children's growth, and they answer to Him for how they raise their children.

A Youth Leader's role in the family model is to come alongside and support parents in their duties. I often say that youth leaders are not there to be heroes to their youth, but rather to help parents be heroes to their children.

In case you have yet to raise teenagers, let me tell you this: Raising teenagers can be incredibly difficult at times. Teenage years are transitional years wherein a dependent child grows into an independent adult.

While this transition period is easier for some, the fact is that teenagers undergo a ton of physical, hormonal, emotional, and economical changes, to name only a few. When a child is born, we naturally and rightly marvel at the transformations it undergoes after it exits the womb. Likewise, adolescent years are a complex series of changes, all included in God's plan for each and every one of us.

All of us adults have gone through puberty and adolescence; few of us would care to relive it. Given that we have experienced the growing pains of teenage years, it bewilders me that we so often lack compassion for today's youth who are facing the same challenges as we did!

Therefore, if you can help parents restore their relationship with their children and help them reclaim their status as their children's heroes, do so; they will be eternally thankful. I can tell you that parents want to be their children's heroes, and children would like to see their parents as heroes. Unfortunately, the adolescence stage upsets the family dynamic. Yes, parents do make mistakes, and so do children, but parenthood is not synonymous with perfection!

If you remember only one thing from this section, remember this: You should NEVER replace parents or override their authority over their children.

WORKSHOP : PARENTS

Youth leadership is at least partly self-explanatory: leading, or taking care of youth. God gives authority to leaders in the church, who in turn give authority to youth leaders to fulfill their mission. Youth leaders are called to respect parents' authority over their children's lives, but they must "borrow" some authority from parents to better minister to their youth.

Think through the above statement and elaborate on it, using relevant passages from the Scriptures.

*Some references to get you started —
Deuteronomy 6: 4-9; Proverbs 1: 8-9; Ephesians 6.*

GOVERNMENTS

I could say a lot about governments and their weaknesses, their rebellion against God, and so on. Nevertheless, God asks us to submit to earthly authorities. Yes, sometimes, integrity in the face of God will not permit me to obey some government's decisions. However, if I cannot obey government, I will do so by joyfully accepting the consequence of my decision before God. But never will this disobedience imply a bad attitude or injustice on my part and actions that are dishonoring God. I cannot fight evil with evil. I have provided you with another workshop, this time regarding governments.

WORKSHOP: GOVERNMENTS OVER US

Submission to government

Romans 13:1-8; Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25

Reaction to Authority

Matthew 23:1-3; James 1:2; Acts 16:23-25; 1 Peter 5:8-9

Dangers of Authority

Matthew 23:23; James 3:13-18

Modern Government

CHURCH LEADERS

As parents are responsible for their children, and as the church is responsible for its members, also shepherds are responsible for their sheep.

In your Youth ministry, you will encounter conflicts with parents and church members. They are under the church's authority, not yours, and you must be careful not to take any authority which is not yours.

Look again at the flow chart from a few pages ago. You can see that Youth Leaders answer to almost everyone. Youth leadership requires a profound understanding of humility, submission, and obedience; it is one of the most practical ways to apply these three qualities. Allow me to dig deeper into each one, as they are all crucial to your ministry.

Humility — Submission — Obedience

Our rebellious world is quick to demonize any and all forms of authority.

Governmental figures – politicians, ministers, deputies, presidents, prime ministers, police officers, soldiers, prison wardens – are all distrusted. Families too; father figures are typically negatively portrayed, and elders are cast aside.

In other words, God has given us earthly authorities in order that we might understand His authority, but these authorities are under attack from the enemy.

But, you may ask, why? Keep in mind that behind any social and political movement, the enemy is prowling, seeking to tarnish the very notion of authority, so that we may lose our trust in God, the Supreme Authority.

Jesus Himself points us to John the Baptist:

*"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."
Matthew 11:11 - NKJV*

In John the Baptist's words:

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. (HUMILITY) He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (SUBMISSION) But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him." (OBEDIENCE) Matthew 3:11-15 NKJV

Humility – an **attitude**. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry." John the Baptist is keenly aware of his place in God's plan; he is from here below, and only One is from above: Jesus Christ.

Humility warrants an exposition much deeper than what we can do here, but for our purposes, suffice it to say that we are lowly and unworthy even to serve God. He is from above and He came down to Earth to give His life for us. In fact, He is the only one who can truly humble Himself.

Submission — a **position** (or place). “And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” In other words, John is willing to accept a lower position.

Submission simply means to put oneself “under” another. John the Baptist may have been older, but he still put himself under Jesus’s authority.

Obedience — an **action**. “But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.” Here we put in action what was said before!

Obedience is simply following a master’s command. Mankind still has trouble with obedience. Why? It involves swallowing pride. And this is the key to effective ministry.

Having studied John the Baptist’s attitude towards authority, try answering the following hard questions about your reaction to authority. Which of these more accurately fits you: humility or pride?

WORKSHOP : HUMILITY VS PRIDE

HUMILITY — PRIDE

Which of these two words reflects what your friends and family think of you?

How can you work on your humility?

“A submissive man (or woman)”. Is that how people talk about you?”

How can you adopt a more submissive attitude?

Can you take orders? Maybe your supervisors are afraid to ask you to do anything because they know you lack the maturity to handle orders and obey.

How can you work on obedience along with a mentor?

While these three qualities – humility, submission, and obedience – are essential, you must also settle arguments. Are you living in conflict with your church leadership (pastors, elders, deacons, parents, etc.) or within your youth leadership team? In a later work, I will deal with how to settle arguments and work towards restoring relationships. After all, resolving conflict only goes so far, and you are better off preventing it entirely. Therefore, you must learn to discern whatever can cause conflict and learn to avoid it, because conflict is truly toxic for ministry. Too many missions and ministries dissolve because of unsettled arguments. May God spare us from this.

GOD

Now for the most important authority of them all: God. I have kept Him for the end. Naturally, I would like for God to be foremost on your mind as we reach the end. When all is said and done, may we see more clearly than ever that all things are done through Him and for Him. He is the Supreme Authority above all others – you and I included. He will take care of me, no matter what may come against me.

A few years ago, I had a miserable year I have since deemed the “Year of Destruction”. Everything I had crumbled around me. Many people I trusted ended up rejecting me; those I considered to be my closest friends abandoned me. My house was contaminated by mold and I was forced to evacuate it. I thought everything in my life had been uprooted, except my faithful companion, my wife Mimi. I constantly cried out to God. I felt I had hit rock bottom and I wasn’t far from making choices of the worst kind!

I’m not saying this because I want you to pity me, but rather so that you may behold God’s Grace. As it turns out, my “Year of Destruction” became the most constructive year of my life! I wouldn’t say that God heard me then, because that would imply that God doesn’t always listen. In fact, I heard His message for me, a message of love. He had to discipline me, but His discipline was in love.

“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” Hebrews 12:5-6 - NKJV

At that time, I was looking for affirmation. Any form of rejection was painful to me. I allowed the measure of my joy to be determined by the friends I had chosen. Consequently, God had to show me that even if everything else were to crumble, He is still there for me, He deserves to be first in my life, and I must trust Him to understand priorities in relationships.

After humbling me, God picked me up. I clearly needed this "Year of Destruction" to understand the depth of His love and to see how I worshipped idols instead of the One true God. To tell you the truth, if I could start over, I wouldn't skip through the hard times, because they shaped me into who I am now by helping me establish better priorities.

So that it may have any value, my relationship with God must be my first priority. It would be foolish of me to close this work without sharing what has become a key tool in my Christian walk: a daily time with God, or "quiet time" as some call it. Let me tell you, I would be nothing if I did not study His Word, meditate upon it, and learn how to apply it, day after day.

For some time now, I have taught a course, "Alone with God: Daily Quiet Time", or, for short, the "Quiet Time" course. This course was the first installment in a series of lectures about youth ministry at a Bible institute in Quebec. I always concluded my Quiet Time course with this thought: "If you fail this course and pass the rest of your Bible school courses, well, you'll fail your whole life. But! If you pass this course, even if you fail all the others, God will raise you up and grow your ministry because, I tell you, nothing is more important than a daily time alone with God!"

How can you know when you have learned this lesson?

I have two answers for you:

1. On a daily basis, you realize just how important your quiet time has become.
2. At the end of your life, He will return and call you “good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21,23)

Indeed, too many Christians forget that life is meaningless without surrendering it to God daily. At some point, every believer has prayed to God: “Lord, I am lost, I deserve only eternal punishment. Thank You for Your victory on the cross! Thank You for salvation! I am lost without You.”

While this is an excellent prayer, it must evolve into a daily prayer from the heart: “Lord, I am lost without You. Without You, this day is worthless. Come, rescue me. Purify my heart and teach me! I need You.”

Too many Christians say instead: “Lord, thank you for the gift of salvation. Now just sit here and watch, I will do everything for You.”

They would not dare admit it, but their attitude speaks volumes. Somehow, they are surprised when everything crumbles around them. When God is in control of your life, you can never burn out, because HE never burns out. That said, if you know someone who is going through a burnout, this is not the best time to have a conversation with them on the topic, as burnout tends to cloud judgment. However, you must learn this before you experience burnout by trying to carry God’s burden yourself. You must confide in Him and surrender every day to Him, a day at a time, to the end of your life.

Here is a summary of my course on quiet time. I will revisit the topic in a later publication, but I hope this will help you grow in this crucial element of the Christian life.

ALONE WITH GOD: DAILY QUIET TIME

WHAT IS QUIET TIME EXACTLY? (PSALM 143:8-11)

Quiet time is time intentionally spent alone with God, in which you deliberately establish a:

Time : Regular, set and private (Psalm 5:4)

Place : Set, quiet and private (Luke 5:16)

Goal: Listening to God, talking with God and being fed by God (Jeremiah 15:16)

WHY DO I NEED QUIET TIME?

To survive! – If you do not eat, you will die (Matthew 4:4)

For relationship! – God wants to have communion with us (John 4:23)

As a priority! – You must see quiet time as a priority

HOW DO I DO QUIET TIME?

Preparation

- Yourself (lay down your burdens)
- Bible
- Notebook and writing instrument, or electronic device
- Quiet place
- Set time

Methodology

- Open your heart in prayer (Psalm 51 :1 2)
- Read the passage for the day (1 Timothy 4:13)
- Meditate on the passage and listen to what God has to say to you. I call it the “WOW” moment, where you think, “I feel like this passage was written for me!”
- Find a way you can apply the truths in the passage (James 1:22) and set a goal that is:

Practical – Concrete and measurable

Personal – Meant for you and not for others

Possible – Achievable today

- Take the time to pray (1 Timothy 2:1)
- Share what you have learned with someone (Hebrews 3:13)

Conclusion

In this work on Youth ministry, I have tried to focus on the fundamentals of a Youth program. You should be equipped to launch and follow through with your ministry as you serve your Youth group. If you have already started out and faced challenges, however, I hope to have helped you re-establish the base principles of Youth ministry so that you can re-evaluate your program and ultimately bring glory to God.

I have also gone through some cautionary tales and warning signs to keep you from stumbling as you begin your ministry. No matter what, there will always be trouble, but if you can anticipate it and avoid it, your ministry will be all the better prepared for it.

Indeed, my goal with this book is to bring you toward Godly success. Everything comes from Him and is for Him. He asks you to plan as if you were responsible for your success. Your mind is a miracle from God, and He gave it to you so that you would use it for His glory! As for everything else, **you must trust God, as everything comes from Him.**

Am i the only one to teach the principles I brought here? Certainly not (Ec. 1.9-11), but I wanted to present them in an orderly manner, as clearly as possible, sharing my experiences from all those years I have been serving Youth leaders. This work is the fruit of all those years of collaboration.

Here are these elements in order:

- Finding a passion to fuel your inspiration.
- Identifying a dream or a goal to reach.
- Understanding your context and environment.
- Establishing a plan, based on your context, to reach your goal.
- Finding a program to help you apply your plan.
- Working on potential obstacles.

I am convinced that this process is a natural way to follow the desires God has placed in your heart. It contains crucial steps to make your dreams come true as you reach your goals.

My own dream is to see Youth ministries thrive within the context of the local churches. My burden is for Youth ministry be contextualized to different cultures according to their needs.

I hope to have shared enough about building an effective youth ministry, but there is so much more to be said. I will therefore work on another publication, that will touch on the finer aspects of Youth ministry, among which:

Communication

- Evangelism*
- Teaching
- Internet/social networks/new technology

Influencing and Relationship

- Relationships with youth (understanding and influencing)
- Relationships with other leaders (exterior influence, where's my place)

*As mentioned before, I cannot recommend a better tool to develop evangelization in your youth group than the ministry of Dare2Share www.dare2share.org/. Their approach is simple, based on biblical principles and with a motivating approach encouraging our youth in actions that may scare us, the older believers, but remain the main objective in the life of every believer.

Leadership

- Discipleship
- The leader – his testimony and integrity
- Daily quiet time (to be expanded)

Youth ministry

- Context and history
- Understanding different generations
- Mission

Again, as I have mentioned in the foreword, I would love to have your feedback, as most of this book and its principles come from youth leaders like you.

Thanks to your feedback, I can update this work regularly. Modern technology has made it easier than ever to put out new versions, so I will capitalize on this to better serve you as you live out your passion for Youth ministry.

You can connect with me on Facebook, Twitter or follow me on

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Appendix

APPENDIX A

A PLAN FOR GOD'S WORKERS

Establishing Base Values

Four Priorities for Discipleship

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| God – | truly knowing Him |
| Personal – | honoring God in your words and deeds |
| Family – | building strong relationships with your spouse and children |
| Ministry – | growing a Biblical ministry to reach people and make disciples |

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER):

- Evangelizing
- Fasting
- Keeping a diary
- Praying
- Reading, meditating, and memorizing the Word
- Serving (both with time and money)
- Silence and solitude
- Studying the Word of God
- Worshiping

AND PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE:

You must take care of the body God has given you, not out of pride, but rather to serve God for as long as you can. Yes, your body will eventually pass away, like the earth, but I like to say: “All will be destroyed someday, but He will destroy it, not I. May I avoid sinning by destroying His creation before the appointed time.”

God designated Adam as creation’s caretaker. Adam’s sin did not remove his obligation, but rather highlighted his inability to keep it without God. This world is groaning under the weight of our sin, so we must take care of it – including our bodies, which we use to serve Him.

Find Accountability Partners with the Goal of:

- Establishing credibility with those around you, including youth
- Teaching Biblically
- Building your testimony and integrity
- Being transparent
- Working on discipline
- Improving your attitude
- Becoming a trustworthy resource

APPENDIX B

MY WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Purpose:

- To have something to say when asked to give your testimony on the spot
- To think and pray ahead of time about what to include in it
- To stay focused on the narrative and avoid rabbit trails

Key Points:

- A summary of your life before Jesus
- Your encounter with Jesus as Lord and Savior
- Your current life goals as a result of your salvation
- A personally meaningful verse about the assurance of your salvation

Name _____

Address _____

Why I received Jesus as Lord and Savior:

How I encountered Jesus (including circumstances leading up to the encounter):

How my life has changed since my encounter with Jesus:

A verse about the assurance of my salvation:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Serge was born in 1957 and married Michèle in 1980. They have two daughters, Marie-Hélène and Elizabeth, and now four wonderful grandchildren, Maverick, Ella, Killian and Liv. Serge is of Canadian by birth and France nationality through his parents.

Serge loved and practice sports all his life, from Volleyball, Basketball, High Jump (1977 junior Canadian champion) to a black belt in Aikido, up to recently.

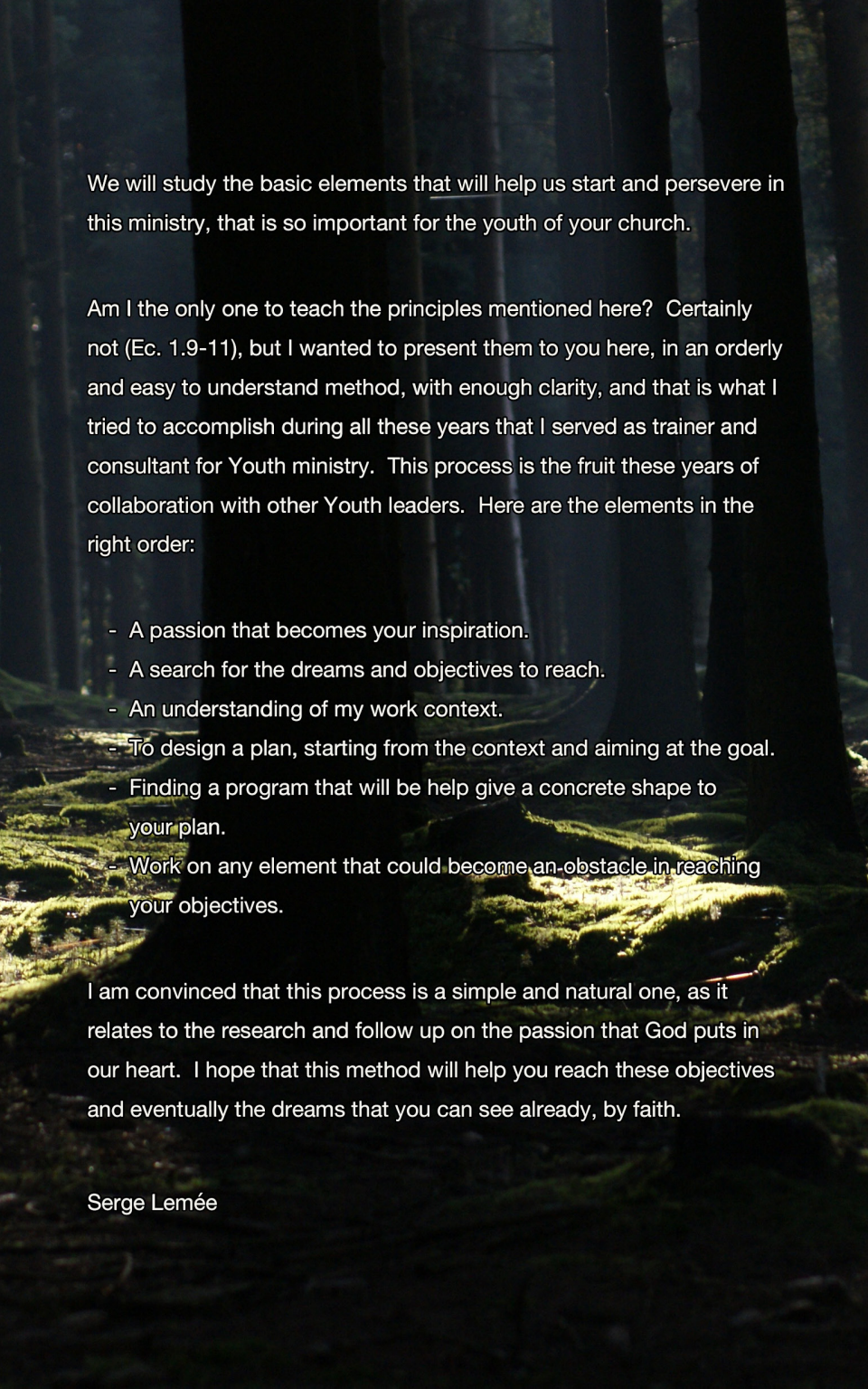


After getting a Highschool diploma in Québec in 1975, and studying in various areas as Physics, Neurophysiology and administration, he graduated in Physical Education from the University of Montreal (BSc in 1982) and in Theology from Acadia University (MA in 2017).

After Serge and Michèle accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior in 1980, serving the church was their passion, in the following ways: 11 years as Church leader/pastor, 24 years as Youth pastor, 21 years as Missionary for Youth Local church ministry in Quebec, where he as also organized more then 50 major events or youth mission trips as well as speaking in Youth camps, and finally serving 13 years as International missionary and trainer (with training experience in 13 different countries), and more than 20 years in teaching youth ministry in Bible institutes. Of course, all this could not have happened without Michèle's support.

Serge and Michèle's desire is to help young people grow as disciple of Christ and use their experience to help and support others now that want to continue in the fantastic ministry among young people that have so many needs, and so few leader desiring to sincerely help and support them. So, you can contact them any time for the purpose.

Serge Lemée
International Trainer and Consultant
French Africa ministry coordinator



We will study the basic elements that will help us start and persevere in this ministry, that is so important for the youth of your church.

Am I the only one to teach the principles mentioned here? Certainly not (Ec. 1.9-11), but I wanted to present them to you here, in an orderly and easy to understand method, with enough clarity, and that is what I tried to accomplish during all these years that I served as trainer and consultant for Youth ministry. This process is the fruit these years of collaboration with other Youth leaders. Here are the elements in the right order:

- A passion that becomes your inspiration.
- A search for the dreams and objectives to reach.
- An understanding of my work context.
- To design a plan, starting from the context and aiming at the goal.
- Finding a program that will help give a concrete shape to your plan.
- Work on any element that could become an obstacle in reaching your objectives.

I am convinced that this process is a simple and natural one, as it relates to the research and follow up on the passion that God puts in our heart. I hope that this method will help you reach these objectives and eventually the dreams that you can see already, by faith.

Serge Lemée