



# Youth Ministry Academy

Youth Ministry Training

# 04

Biblical and Theological  
Foundations of Youth  
Ministry

# **Youth Ministry Training**

## **Lesson Four: Biblical and Theological Foundations of Youth Ministry**

### **Lesson Introduction**

#### **Session Overview**

- It is God's Ministry
- Consistent Ministry: Biblical Considerations
- Consistent Ministry: Creedal Considerations
- Holding Convictions Together: Your Personal Creed
- Pertinent: A Real-Life Youth Theology

#### **Learner Objectives**

At the end of this session you should:

- Understand the importance of Bible and theology in guiding youth ministry
- Relate the holistic nature of salvation in Christ to the holistic development of adolescence
- Reflect on the vital connection between youth and the church
- Relate missional direction of the church with the passion of youth

#### **Introduction**

To this point in we have focused on the nature of youth and their context. We now turn to understanding youth ministry from God's perspective. This session helps the youth worker understand and apply biblical and theological foundations to the practice of youth ministry.

### **Lesson Body**

#### **It is God's Ministry**

Youth ministry, to be Christian, must be God's ministry first... and our efforts second. Our efforts are important but we must look to God's ability as our source, to God's purposes as our goal, and to God's actions as our guide if we hope to offer authentic ministry. There are a number of important helping roles that adults might play in and through the lives of youth. Many different adults provide young people quality counseling, compassionate care, recreation, entertainment, and spiritual guidance. In any of these actions the Holy Spirit may well be at work implicitly or indirectly through these adults (and the youth). However, youth workers make sure God remains "up front" in our ministry and make sure that we represent God's passion and purpose. Youth workers need to name God's desire for youth, to discern God's direction for youth, and to witness to the power of God at work both with and for youth today.

When we accept this responsibility we expressly accept our role as theologians. The word theology might be defined as the "making God known" either through study, or witness, or just everyday life. Everyone reveals something of what they think or believe about God in everyday conversations and actions. However, workers remain dedicated to a disciplined understanding of God so that our actions and attitudes remain consistent with what we believe, coherent so people can understand them, and pertinent so people can see how God is at work in their lives as well.

There are a lot of places where we can begin this task, but we need to have a biblical and theological view of our ministry.

### **Consistent Ministry: Biblical Considerations**

When one turns to scripture for the motivation and direction for youth ministry, there are a number of considerations. First, scripture provides the basic story of God's gracious salvation for all of creation: beginning in the Old Testament with the creation and calling of the nation of Israel, focusing through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, continuing through the power of the Holy Spirit with the creation of the Church and culminating with Christ's return and the transformation of all creation at the end of the age. The Bible portrays the truth of God in a storied fashion, a magnificent narrative of God working in the lives of people through the centuries and, through Jesus Christ, providing the basic means for our salvation. The narrative power of scripture relates directly to the way youth understand their own lives as stories. Through reading scripture, youth can discover humanities' basic tendency toward sin and its consequences for people and nations. Young people also discover God's continuing love and Christ's redeeming power in the face of sinfulness, and our ability to receive salvation by grace through faith. Youth are challenged to live lives shaped by the message and example of Jesus, and to participate with God's ongoing missional work in transforming the world, seeking to bring about "Shalom" (a Hebrew word that describes total peace or a restoration of wholeness) among people and throughout creation. Participating with God's mission, discerning how Christ might shape whatever we do in life, allows us to discover our true meaning for life.

Second, with this large backdrop in mind, we turn to particular passages that give direction to ministry with youth. Young people need an opportunity to hear and respond to the Good News of Jesus and to learn to live within the Christian story so they can demonstrate holiness of heart and life. However, do young people have a role to play within the Gospels? Youth workers often turn to 1st Timothy 4:12 ("Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young") as motivation for ministry both to and with young people. However, the passage seems to have less influence after reading commentaries that argue Timothy must have been between thirty and thirty-five years of age when receiving this letter. In some cultures, and historical periods, thirty-five years of age was considered young, particularly for leadership. For youth workers working with adolescents half this age, such a claim can be difficult. Other youth workers turn to a "young" Jesus of Luke 2:52, as He "increased in wisdom and in stature (or years), and in divine and human favor." However, once again, Jesus' ministry begins much later when He is about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23).

So where do we turn to discover the role of youth in scripture? Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, in *The Godbearing Life*, argue that the beginning point might be Mary, the mother of Jesus as the "God bearer." Based on marriage custom in Jesus' day, Mary may well have been around sixteen years of age, yet she played a special role, bearing the Son of God. In addition, one might read about Samuel's anointing of David in 1 Samuel 16. David was not only the youngest (v. 11), but also the eighth son. In a culture which values the number seven, David was outside the expected order, a marginal son, whom Samuel anoints and who ultimately changes the destiny of Israel. David, like Joseph, Jeremiah, and even Samuel himself as a child, all seem like unlikely candidates to be given their callings so early in life. David, Mary, even Timothy

represent younger people on the edges of the social order, not those expected to be used of God to lead. Paul embraced a younger Timothy as part of his ministry because Paul also saw Timothy as an “agent” (not object) of God’s mission. This view reminds us that God is vitally involved with people that society might not consider “mature” enough or “ready” to represent the Kingdom of God, persons that often include many of the young people in our world, regardless of culture. Adults tend to view youth as “in-between” childhood and adulthood, unable to take responsibility, not quite ready. Yet God reaches into the lives of these young people and calls them forward, like David, Mary, and Timothy. Youth workers must guide, empower, and serve as advocates for young people awakening to what God might do through them.

The Bible reminds us that young people need to hear and embrace God’s love in their lives just like any other person. The Bible also reminds us that God may well use these young people to spread the “Good News” to their contemporaries and to the world at large. Ultimately Youth Ministry, if it is biblical, must accept its role in discipleship to both share and nurture young people in Christlikeness and also accept its role as shepherd and advocate as young people also share God’s grace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Consistent Ministry: Creedal Considerations**

While scripture provides a good beginning for the message and purpose behind youth ministry, the church has also looked to doctrine as another key resource. Beginning with the early church, Christians sought to ‘confess” their faith through concise statements that make up the core convictions of biblical faith and practice. One of the earliest versions, known as the Apostle’s Creed, has guided churches throughout the centuries.

#### *The Apostles’ Creed*

*I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.*

*And in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hades; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic (universal) Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen*

In a similar manner, the Church of the Nazarene ascribes to an “Agreed Statement of Belief” that is quite similar to the Apostle’s Creed. This Statement of Belief attempts to summarize the basics of the Christian faith within our tradition.

- We believe in one God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- We believe that the Old and New Testament Scriptures, given by plenary inspiration, contain all truth necessary to faith and Christian living.
- We believe that man is born with a fallen nature, and is, therefore, inclined to evil, and that continually.
- We believe that the finally impenitent are hopelessly and eternally lost.
- We believe that the atonement through Jesus Christ is for the whole human race; and that whosoever repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified and regenerated and saved from the dominion of sin.
- We believe that believers are to be sanctified wholly, subsequent to regeneration, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the new birth, and also to the entire sanctification of believers.
- We believe that our Lord will return, the dead will be raised, and the final judgment will take place.

In addition, the Church of the Nazarene developed sixteen Articles of Faith that elaborate on the Agreed Statement of Belief. The Articles provide the core convictions of our tradition about the nature of the Triune God, the person and mission of Jesus Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, salvation and holiness, the life of the church, the practice of the sacraments, and the return of Christ. Drawing from scripture, these doctrines try to summarize the nature of God and God’s purposes in the world. As a key resource, they guide the core message of the Christian faith.

### **Holding Convictions Together: Your Personal Creed**

Ultimately what we believe about the message of scripture, about the nature of the Christian faith, and about youth, must come together to provide a biblical and theological “creed” for Christian ministry. Creeds express what we believe God intends in our ministry for the sake of youth. Each of us must fashion our personal convictions into a coherent statement, but that creed must also relate to the message of the Bible and the doctrine of the Church. Each person must work out their own personal creed, one true to scripture and doctrine. As you read the sample creed offered, do you see some statements you believe true for you as well?

#### *A Sample Youth Ministry Creed:*

Youth Ministry is a part of the Church’s ministry, reflecting the Church’s call to model holiness of heart and life and pursue God’s mission to redeem creation. Creeds normally identify the Church within the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, this placement in the creed should not ignore the rest of the Trinity’s expression in the Church. The Church (and therefore youth ministry) was created by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). However, the purpose of that creation was to reveal God the Father’s grace as expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the power of the

Holy Spirit. Youth ministry finds its identity in God's redemptive activity through Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit's working through the communities of faith. No youth ministry (parish or parachurch) may be seen separate from the Church universal or from the Biblical account of authentic Christianity. Therefore, all youth ministry is connected to all other forms of ministry expressed by the Church at large, working cooperatively with other congregational ministries and accountable to biblical standards.

Youth Ministries (be they particular programs or persons such as youth workers, parents, youth themselves, or other ministers) do not save youth...only Christ does. God calls people in Youth Ministry to witness to the biblical story of Jesus Christ and by allowing the Holy Spirit to work through their actions to communicate grace (what John Wesley understood as becoming a Means of Grace). Relationships between youth workers and youth remain important as they model the relational love found between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such love never manipulates or coerces youth into relationships. Instead, youth workers allow God's love to flow through them to disciple youth, teaching them the basics of the faith, nurturing devotional practices, and empowering them for God's mission to the world.

What makes youth ministry distinct surfaces from ministry to people as they grow, including the period commonly known as youth or adolescence. Youth ministry seeks to redeem the contextual issues facing youth while encouraging youth to continue to grow in grace and thus "come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13-14). The goal being an ongoing growth into a life of holiness of heart and life and a missional heart to participate with God's redemptive plan for the whole world.

The church recognizes that all church members are in some way ministers (the priesthood of believers), INCLUDING YOUTH THEMSELVES. Just as God used young people strategically in Bible and through the history of the church, the Holy Spirit continues to empower and guide young people today to follow God's mission to redeem the world and build up the body of Christ, the Church. Empowered as members of the Kingdom of God, young people can live out the Kingdom of God, modeling holiness of heart and life, to the best of their ability. The church, however, also recognizes that some people are called of God to lead youth within the church, demonstrating "gifts and graces" bestowed by God. So, youth leaders are also called of God yet acknowledged by the community of faith.

### **Pertinent: A Real Life Theology of Youth Ministry**

When one turns to the nature of and purpose of Youth Ministry, the same doctrines remain available to guide our goals and actions. In addition, the Church of the Nazarene provides one other valuable resource that describes not only the essentials of our belief but also the nature of our practice in youth ministry. These "core values" speak directly to what we should consider important in youth ministry but they must manifest themselves in ways that speak directly into their lives. In many ways, the core values provide a broader biblical/doctrinal perspective under three core themes: Christian, Holiness, and Missional. Our responsibility remains taking these central beliefs and asking how they relate directly to the lives of youth but also reflect the basic shape of our youth ministry.

## *Core Values of the Church of the Nazarene (abbreviated)*

### *We Are a Christian People*

As members of the Church Universal, we join with all true believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in affirming the historic Trinitarian creeds and beliefs of the Christian faith. We value our Wesleyan-Holiness heritage and believe it to be a way of understanding the faith that is true to Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

### *We Are a Holiness People*

God, who is holy, calls us to a life of holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, called by various terms including "entire sanctification" and "baptism with the Holy Spirit"-cleansing us from all sin, renewing us in the image of God, empowering us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, and producing in us the character of Christ. Holiness in the life of believers is most clearly understood as Christlikeness.

### *We Are a Missional People*

We are a sent people, responding to the call of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world, witnessing to the Lordship of Christ and participating with God in the building of the Church and the extension of His kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Our mission (a) begins in worship, (b) ministers to the world in evangelism and compassion, (c) encourages believers toward Christian maturity through discipleship, and (d) prepares women and men for Christian service through Christian higher education.

As we review these basic assertions we also have to show how they relate directly to youth and youth ministry in our context. For instance:

### *Christian*

Obviously, the primary goal with youth ministry is to see Jesus as Lord of the life of every young person in our ministry. This vision shapes our desire for youth to accept Christ by grace through faith and live under the direction of the Holy Spirit. However, many youths in different cultures today actually respond best by first exploring and following Jesus' life and commandments before making an actual statement of faith. Many adults may be used to a process where we first "believe" the gospel, then "belong" to the church as the formula for salvation. They may be surprised as youth first attach themselves to the youth ministry, seek to live out the Kingdom of God, and ultimately respond to Christ by faith, allowing the Holy Spirit to fully direct their lives. The goal remains the Lordship of Jesus but the process may reflect a different approach that connects with the lives of youth.

Christian should also define our approach to youth ministry. No matter how entertaining, no matter how much numerical growth, each of our practices, programs and relationships need to

model Christlikeness first and foremost. Often youth workers use the term “incarnational” (incarnation means enfleshment as in Jesus’ taking on human form) to mean that our ministry must “embody” Christlikeness in all we do. Incarnational ministry does not mean youth workers “become” Jesus... a danger that leads to a messiah complex in some young workers ... but that Jesus is revealed in relationships with and among young people. We cannot abuse relationships for personal objectives, instead we must be willing to patiently work with youth to understand their struggles and be alert to how Christ might be at work in their lives. At best, we must make sure everything we do in our ministry remains a worthy witness to Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:22).

### *Holiness*

One primary distinctive of the Wesleyan tradition revolves around a deep appreciation of the depth of transformation available by the power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification describes a depth of relationship with God that Nazarenes believe remain available to all people. Holiness of heart and life defines this perspective, a life of total love expressed toward God and manifested in daily living toward other people. Young people often respond to the vision of holiness offered in the gospels. However, many times the developmental nature of youth presents particular challenges. While there may be moments of deep, experiential change, often young people find themselves on a journey into holiness, constantly growing in grace, moving toward that distinctive moment of entire sanctification. Premature pressure to force this issue often results in youth attempting to live the holy life in their own strength rather than yielding to the Holy Spirit’s direction. Young people can become discouraged and begin to doubt the very power available to them. With nurture and careful discipleship youth often find themselves ready to embrace all that God offers at the appropriate time.

Holiness also defines youth ministry. Holiness not only describes individual experience; the term also characterizes the nature of the community that seeks to be “set apart” to God. For youth workers, the challenge remains maintaining the same vision of holiness of heart and life within the ministry, resisting cultural temptations to be something less than what God desires. Often youth ministry faces social pressures to provide programming that merely repeats social values of materialism, entertainment or a surface spirituality. Instead youth workers must work to ensure that the practices and strategies they embrace resemble God’s direction. Whatever the cultural challenges, the values of the Kingdom of God must come first in youth ministry.

### *Missional*

Youth can embrace God’s missional call. Youth see the possibility of God being at work in the world, of God making a difference. Young people also need to be empowered through practices that shape missional living. If there is a danger, it may well be that the very idealism that empower youth to see what God can do, often makes young people impatient with the church. Young people, held captive to their own idealism, may reject the church if they feel left out or abandoned in their own efforts. Youth need to experience God’s missional call in worship, to ground their actions through faithful discipleship, and to explore their gifts through evangelism and compassionate care of others.

A missionally shaped youth ministry recognizes that youth remain a part of God's mission in the world. Youth workers will work to teach young people to be patient, but ministers will also stand as youth's advocate with the rest of the congregation. Ministers and youth workers need to make sure youth are part of the larger church, connected and serving within the congregation. Such integration allows youth the opportunity to see how God is at work in the church. At the same time, young people may also inspire and challenge the rest of the congregation. Historians often find young people at the forefront of any revival, taking the lead in calling the church to boldly follow the God's mission to engage and redeem the world. Youth ministry attending to missional concerns will work to see that both the youth and the rest of the congregation work together for the sake of Kingdom of God.

Youth workers remain challenged to reflect on how their biblical/theological doctrines speak directly to the lives of youth in order to transform them into Christlike disciples. As long as God's goals shape the ministry, youth will be transformed according to God's direction.

### **Application**

Identify key scriptures or doctrines that guide you in three important areas: 1) in youth receiving the Gospel, 2) in youth being empowered to live out the Gospel, and 3) in youth ministry reflecting authentic Christlikeness with youth.

Write out your own personal creed for ministry with youth. Which of the three challenges from the lessons remain the most difficult in developing your theology of ministry: Consistency (drawing from the sources of faith), Coherence (keeping key points organized) or Pertinent (keeping youth in mind)?

### **Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

*Identify key scriptures that guide your ministry with youth*

*Review the Apostle's Creed, the Agreed Statement of Belief and perhaps the Articles of Faith. Identify why certain statements prove crucial for young people today.*

*How are your statements about youth ministry:*

- *Consistent? (How do these statements draw directly from your understanding of the total message of the Bible and the solid doctrines of the Church?)*
- *Coherent? (How do the statements relate to each other and to what you currently do in youth ministry? Are they reasonable?)*
- *Pertinent? (How do the statements speak directly to the lives of young people today?)*



Nazarene Youth International