

# **Walking the line: Dangers as a Youth Worker**



**Session 1:  
Pitfalls and Discouragement in Ministry (Group Time)**

**Session 2:  
Come Thirsty...Filling Your Cup for Ministry (Personal Time)**

## Session 1: The Overwhelmed Servant

### Three personal pitfalls:

1. The Need to Prove Self
2. The Need to be Hyper-Responsible
3. The Need to Please People

The three pitfalls listed above are typical traps we find ourselves in as Pastors, Youth Ministers and Volunteer Youth Workers that can lead us to discouragement or burnout.

Take time as a group to review the Three Pitfalls and talk about the reasons why they would be considered pitfalls instead of requirements to ministry.

1. The Need to Prove Self
2. The Need to be Hyper-Responsible
3. The Need to Please People

### **Personal Reflection on the Three Pitfalls**

***Need to Prove Myself*** – whether it is the need to prove to others that I am suitable for the job that I am doing or proving to others that my job is invaluable it is an illusion and near tragedy. You can never satisfy this “monster” if you are constantly trying to feed it. There is always the next person that questions why there is a need for a youth staff person or someone to fill a spot on a trip roster with a warm body. You can prove yourself worthy to work with students one day and the next day you have to start all over again. **Instead: Maybe we are to ask God each day what He has in store for us. How we can serve Him today.**

***The Need to be Hyper-Responsible*** – We all want to feel needed and we all want to put our “stamp” on a project, an event or a ministry and say...“It’s Mine!”. The problem with an attitude like this is that it typically leads to Hyper-Responsibility. Everything has to be done my way and I am the only person that can do it. What’s ironic is that the person that does the work and wants the recognition rarely does; at least not to the level they were expecting. And maybe we should recognize that the glory really needs to go somewhere else. **Instead: Maybe we are to ask God who do we get to serve with.**

***The Need to Please People*** – You’ve heard the saying. You can please some of the people some of the time, but you can’t please all the people all the time. In fact you can rarely please anyone it seems this day. I catch myself trying to find a way to please everyone knowing full well that it is impossible. Expectations are so high these days. I’m not of the “Just good enough” generation. I’m of the Walt Disney everything has to be just perfect, do everything with excellence generation. And I am setting myself up for instant failure each time. This isn’t a plea to change the culture and do everything with a half hearted mentality. Instead maybe we need to narrow down who we want to please. **Instead: Maybe we are to ask God what would please Him.**

## Discouragement

Sometimes it is the outside factors that lead to discouragement *or* the inevitable question: “Am I really called to be in ministry?” Maybe you have heard things recently through the “grapevine” or felt discouraged because of a lack of support. Maybe there has been a misunderstanding or the fact that others don’t understand. Whatever the cause of your discouragement take some time as a group to add to the list below and discuss how these make you feel.

***Discouraging words...or phrases:*** *Lack of respect, conflict, too many emails to return, lack of sleep, something damaged at church and the youth are blamed, conflicting expectations, verbal abuse, pastor doesn’t support you, financial struggles, failure to please everyone, failure to please anyone, a failed program or event, that student that is hard to love, no support from parents...*

### **Warning signs**

So if you were the most honest person in the world...how would you answer the question: “How are you doing?” Many of the signs of discouragement also fit in the column of Depression. BE CAREFUL! A sign or two like: Irritability, sadness, exhaustion, low self-image, destructive self-criticism, loss of pleasure and fulfillment may creep in when feeling discouraged, but when many of these symptoms are experienced for more than a month you will want to consult a professional counselor.

**To Discuss:** Where do you find yourself most easily discouraged in youth ministry? What are some of your signs?

### **Help is on the Way**

There are a few things to think about when Discouragement and Distractions come. Here are some helpful things to remember when confronted with Discouragement:

1. *You are not alone* – You’re not the only one struggling with your issue, whatever it is. It might be painful but it’s not unique to you, your church or to youth ministry.
2. *Find a Mentor* – Someone who is in the ministry or understands it. Spend time together and be upfront with what your expectations are for each others time.
3. *Find an Accountability Partner* – This person needs to be apart from the ministry. Your life doesn’t have to be ministry 24/7. Find someone you can confide in when problems arise but also someone you can spend dinner with, watch TV or do “normal” stuff.
4. *Quiet Time and Time Away* – You must realize that other things are going on outside the Youth Ministry. You need personal time to do things away and at home and most important is your time with God.
5. *Clear Away the Clutter* - an overwhelmed work space can lead to an overwhelmed spirit. For most of us we can’t think when there is so much “stuff” around us. It’s a distraction. Find some time to clear out the magazines and mailers from 2004.
6. *Get some sleep* – Stop trying to burn the candle at both ends.
7. *Begin a Journal* – A very PRIVATE journal that allows you to voice your frustration. It is also a good barometer on how you are doing, and it may even be good to look back on and HOPEFULLY laugh at a few things.
8. *Affirmation Box* – Save the thank you letters and cards. It is a great pick-me-up when you are down. These compliments will help balance the complaints.

**To Discuss:** How does God best help you in your times of discouragement? What is **one thing** you will take on to help you through your times of discouragement?

## Session 2: Spiritual Needs

For a moment let's set aside all the responsibilities we have as a Youth Worker. All of the programming, the extra curricular obligations, the FCA meetings, the hospital visits, and look deep into our own spiritual condition. Those of us called into ministry have a hard time ministering to ourselves. It is like the old adage that doctors are the worst patients. Hopefully we aren't that bad but honestly some of us may not be that far off. We preach quiet time and study but how much do we do ourselves. How thirsty are our souls?

As Max Lucado puts it: "If you deprive your soul of spiritual water, your soul will tell you. Dehydrated hearts send desperate messages. Waves of worry. Growling mastodons of guilt and fear...Hopelessness. Sleeplessness. Loneliness. Resentment. Irritability. Insecurity. These are warnings. Symptoms of a dryness deep within."

Being connected to God on a daily basis is more important than any youth ministry seminar you attend or any book you read. Jesus said, "Abide in me and I'll abide in you, but apart from me you can do nothing."

There are some strong signs to look for when wondering if your feeling a little disconnect in our spiritual life: Loss of passion, physical fatigue, prayer vacuum (it's been a long time since you've experienced meaningful prayer), life is too easy (you are in a rut or on cruise control), life is too hard (trying to do everything on your own), spiritual skimming (personal and professional teaching on the same level), relational conflicts and loss of awe.

What can we do to prevent disconnect or to reconnect. Here are a few helpful hints to think on:

1. Do you have a consistent time with God? (Matthew 6:6)
2. Get a Prayer Partner or Study Partner
3. Return to the basics. Remember the joy and exhilaration when you first began to walk with God
4. Bring in Variety to your personal time. Join in with your study partner on a scheduled reading but do other things like meditate on a single verse or phrase. Pray through a passage, Sing, Journal about a meaningful passage, Seek Solitude, Listen to a Christian CD and really listen to the lyrics, write them out and meditate on them. The list could go on forever.

"Good youth ministry starts with you and God. Without God's active presence in your life, you're nothing more than an activities director for teenagers. God is concerned about your heart – it's the single most important gift you can offer him, your church and your students."

-Doug Fields

# Come Thirsty

So maybe we are feeling a little thirsty today. Maybe we aren't at critical stage 4 Dehydration but we are starting to feel it in our personal time and in our relationships with our youth, family and friends. Maybe our hearts are at critical mass. Remember to guard it. "Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do." - Proverbs 4:23

So let's take a moment to quench our thirst. Treat your soul as you would treat your thirst. Take a gulp. Imbibe moisture. Flood your heart with a good swallow of water.

Get out your Bibles (hopefully you have one; we are always reminding our youth). Let's start by reading: **John 7:14-39**

How does Jesus explain his extraordinary teaching? (v.16-18)

Reread it here: <sup>16</sup>Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. <sup>17</sup>If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. <sup>18</sup>He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him."

I find it amazing that we feel personally responsible for our lessons and studies. We really do look too much to ourselves for these teachings when even Jesus himself said his teaching comes from God and is not his own. Don't you feel a little bit more at ease, a little relieved? Sure the reading still needs to get done and the pen needs to hit the paper (or fingers hit the keys for the more tech advanced.) But the words, the power, the passion is from God. We just get to deliver it.

Even more important in this lesson is the need to come thirsty. Take a look at v. 37-38

<sup>37</sup>On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as<sup>1</sup> the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

How do you "come" to Jesus and "drink"?

What connection does Jesus make between believing in him and living water?

As a swimmer I am surrounded by water. I move through it immerse myself to flow through it. I love the quietness it provides as it blocks out all other noises. I love the peace it give me. The moments of "rest" even during a workout. But there is still one thing a swimmer needs to do even when surrounded by all this water...we still need to drink water or fluids to stay hydrated. Isn't that funny that you can be surrounded by something and still not be quenched by it. You MUST take it in to get the full effects. How true it is in ministry that we can be surrounded by Jesus....but we MUST fully take him in to get the full effects.

Like water the Spirit of Jesus threads down the throat of your soul, flushing fears and dislodging regrets. He does for your soul what water does for your body, and thankfully we don't have to give him direction. May his peace be with you today!

### **Final responses...**

1. What would you add to these sessions?
2. Make sure you spend a moment with Margaret Freeman or another staff person letting them know the one thing you will remember from each of these sessions.

### **Additional Reading**

1. ***Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry*** (Doug Fields). Even if you are on your 20<sup>th</sup> year and you haven't read it...read it.
2. ***Come Thirsty*** (Max Lucado)
3. ***What Matters Most*** (Doug Fields).
4. ***The Overwhelmed Servant*** (Bob Rausch, PhD.)