

Our mandate is to “go and bear fruit-fruit that will last” (**John 15: 16**). Just as a gardener carefully nurtures the vines and a builder carefully constructs the tower, so must we in ministry give serious thought to how we build what the Designer intends. The apostle Paul underlines this mandate when he writes, “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care” (**1 Corinthians 3: 10**).

To build the kind of youth ministry program that will result in long-term disciples, serious consideration needs to be given to the blueprint. When building efforts are based on the wrong blueprint-even if they're done with great skill-the result is going to be unusable structures. One way to begin thinking about the blueprint of your ministry is to take this short informal survey. Answer yes or no to the questions below.

1. The Smorgasbord Approach

- Is a full youth calendar one of the main criteria by which you or your leadership team evaluate the ministry?
- Is great care taken to make certain there's a broad menu of programs offered on a weekly basis?
- Is the main concern of the leadership to keep the kids “active”?

A yes answer to any of these three questions indicates that your ministry may be offering lots of selections on the menu, but no real plan for nutrition and disciple-building. It's an approach that begins with the premise that kids are consumers and that if we want them to consume our youth program, we must offer a wide variety of spiritual and recreational products.

Nowhere in Scripture is there an emphasis on activity. The emphasis in Scripture is always on *productivity*. None of us yearns for more

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activity. What we yearn for, what we pray for, what we're called to, is *productivity*.

2. The Bright Light Approach

- Is your program based around a young, athletic, hip Pied Piper whom “the kids really like”?
- Has this charismatic leader been slow to raise up and train other adult leaders so the program will have continuity if and when he or she leaves?
- Do people in leadership ever say something like this: “Okay, granted, our youth leader may lack vision, experience, and spiritual maturity. But he plays guitar; he's got an outrageous sense of humor and massive facial hair; and you wouldn't believe what the guy can do with his iPad”?

Yes answers to the above questions are a sure sign of an approach based on the notion that the brightest light attracts the most bugs. And since we want kids to swarm our church

property, it stands to reason that we need to find our own resident “bright light.”

Perhaps the biggest concern with this approach is that it tends to balance the ministry on the shoulders of one person-which is kind of risky, unless that one person is Jesus. The Bright Light Approach to programming tends to breed mavericks and lone rangers-individuals who tend to shine better and brighter when working alone. Without the diversity and cooperation of a team approach, a youth program will be severely limited in the type and number of students it can expect to draw.

A program that's built on a personality can fall quickly when that personality is no longer present to prop it up.

3. The Bigger Is Better Approach

- Do you find yourself eliminating portions of the program that might have deeper spiritual impact because they don't seem to “get as many kids out”?
- Do you find yourself asking, “How many?” more often than you ask, “How deep?”

- Would you honestly say that some of your programming choices are driven by competition with other youth ministries in town?
- Is your ultimate dream to have youth group meet in the Civic Center?

If this sounds like your youth group, you may be basing your program on the belief that the more kids we have under the roof of our church building or on the roll of our ministry, the more effective our youth program must be.

If youth ministry is only about numbers, then why not go all out and plan an evangelistic kegger? We've already seen that, in Scripture, the emphasis is far less on addition and far more on multiplication. When it comes to setting youth ministry goals, quality always takes precedence over quantity.

That's not to say that numbers are unimportant or that large numbers are bad. This is not an argument between big and little; it's an

argument between deep and wide. On one occasion after I'd shared this concept during a seminar, a woman raised her hand to say how encouraged she was by all this “because we've really seen our numbers drop over the last six months.” That's when I realized she hadn't really heard what I was saying. I'd intended to make the point that our goal is to grow the group deep and that, in time, that depth would also grow the group wide. She basically walked out of my seminar thinking, “Well, we don't have very many kids coming, so we must be doing something right!”

The fact is that some youth groups are small in quantity because they are low in quality. Sometimes our groups are small because we're doing youth ministry badly! This is not a plea that we reach fewer kids. This is a plea that we don't get so obsessed with reaching many kids that we neglect to nurture and equip the “few faithful” kids we have. (See **2 Timothy 2**.) Bigger isn't better, and smaller isn't better. Better is better.