



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



ADVENTIST YOUTH MINISTRIES

SYL

SEMINAR 4

LEADERSHIP

MAY 6, 2022

ADVENTIST YOUTH MINISTRIES

Printed by Flying Wings Academy

LEADERSHIP

The Senior Youth Leader as Spiritual Leader, Mentor and Friend

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the key point to note: as a Christian who influences other Christians, the Youth Ministry Leader will lead not just through speech, but essentially through the whole life. In following the example of Jesus, he or she becomes an example to young followers. For a leader, this connection takes place in the concept of discipleship. We are all disciples of Christ. Besides Lord and Savior, He is our example. We are not called “Christians” by mere grammatical distinction. To be a Christian is to follow Christ. To be a Christian leader is, first and foremost, to follow the example of Christ so that those who follow us may be automatically following Christ. Paul’s invitation to his readers to be his imitators, just as he was an imitator of Christ (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1), gives us the exact dimension of the leader’s relationship with Christ. The Youth Ministry Leader needs to be a human language translation of what Jesus is.

2. SEMINAR OBJECTIVES

This module of study will look at the youth leader, first as a student and follower of Christ—the foundation of all Christian life and especially of leadership, then as a spiritual leader, mentor, and friend to the youth under the leader’s guidance. We will consider some parameters necessary to maintain both respect and compassionate friendship.

3. THE YOUTH LEADER AS SPIRITUAL LEADER

Youth leadership in a church setting does not include the classic, earthly concepts of leadership alone, but transcends these concepts, living out the biblical model of godly leadership as exemplified for us by Christ and by the human leaders He trained while He was here.

The first commitment of a youth leader, therefore, must be to Christ. Before we lead, we must follow. Every leader is a sheep of the supreme Pastor, following the guidance of the Great Shepherd. Yet we are also more than sheep. When we analyze all the beings created on planet earth, we find that general sociability is a relatively common feature of created beings, animals included. We as humans can be friends with people, and we can also love our pets.

However, spirituality is a distinctive feature of human beings. We can have relationship not only with created beings, but also with the Creator. Our pets may love us, but when we stop to pray, we will not find our pets praying. So, as Christian leaders we do not act like a feline leading a pack of other felines. In the words of God, “Not by force, nor by violence, but by my Spirit” (Zech. 4:6). We subordinate our social relationships to the biblical principles of Christian spirituality. And the Bible is very clear in determining that our spirituality is about our connection to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the leader must be a follower of Christ first. Fundamental commitment to Christianity must guide the life of the youth leader. Only then will we be able to develop leadership in the right context. A true Christian leader will naturally develop a Christ-like leadership style.

It is interesting to remember that when God established the Hebrews as a nation, He said that the Hebrews would be “a holy nation, a kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6). The apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 2:9, repeats this concept to Christians, calling us a “royal priesthood.” Paul recalls throughout his writings that this priesthood/ministry is “all believers.” It should be remembered that one of the functions of priests was, through the whole ritual of the sanctuary, to bring to human understanding the reality of God’s Plan of



Redemption. The priest translated into human language the realities of what God was doing for His people, thus revealing the character of God.

We do this translating in the context of wholeness as healthy human beings. Spirituality drives the rhythm and quality of our social interactions. We are human beings, and the Bible understands the human being as a total, complete being. A biblical approach to anthropology considers the human being holistically: we are physical, mental, and spiritual. All these layers of our being are interdependent. They do not function properly if they are not well equalized, supplied, and interconnected.

All of them are important, but there is an order of factors that changes the final product: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33). When Jesus spoke these words, He was establishing the supremacy of spirituality as fuel for all areas of our lives. The success of our spirituality is the ballast to the success of everything else. For a Christian leader, spirituality is the driving and regulating agent of all the other layers in our nature. They are the fruits of a balanced spirituality that will produce balanced relationships.

4. THE YOUTH LEADER AS MENTOR

However, it is not enough to be a Christian leader; you need to be aware of whom you are intending to lead. When we speak of the young, we are talking about those who are at the forefront of the greatest social changes today. It is the young who receive the greatest burden of influences different from those of the church. Whether it is in the university environment, in relationships, or in the work environment of the first job. Everywhere, a “brave new world” unfolds before their eyes. It is the privilege of the youth leader to be a guide for this phase of life. But this privilege brings with it a responsibility: to have a contextualized awareness of the needs of the young, providing them the opportunity to experience a real Christianity relevant to the time and context in which they live.

The youth leader needs to understand that providing a real and relevant experience does not mean falling into the trap of giving the youth only what they want. As the Bible and our own experience remind us, the human heart is not always trustworthy. It is necessary to provide what youth really need: a satisfying spiritual experience. We often turn youth groups into mere entertainment when we forget that helping the young to create real connections with God can only take place in a context of contagious spirituality.

THE YOUTH OF TODAY ARE CONSTANTLY SEARCHING FOR MODELS.

There are those who think that the greatest difficulty in leading youth lies in the fact that there is a natural challenge of youth to the proposed models. Indeed, since youth and young people represent the greatest expression of change in society, it is not surprising that in the context of an individualist, relativistic, postmodern society, in which any absolute imposed truth is questioned, the young tend to question everything and everyone. But whoever understands this understands that it is also a complete proof that the young are not willing to follow just any kind of leadership.

The basic fact is that young people are pragmatic, that is, they tend to believe not in what someone says to be true, not in what someone says works. They tend to credit what they see that works. Maybe this is the true issue. In fact, Adventist Christianity is very beautiful in theory, but only works in practice. The youth’s experience with the church must be permeated with something real, practical, and effective. Otherwise, mere theory (however beautiful, interesting, and logical) produces no change in life.

Let’s look at a culinary example: The youth leader can be seen as a “chef” in the kitchen. Imagine a chef in front of hungry clients. If he starts discoursing about the nutritional value of food, it will inform his clients, but it will not solve the hunger issue. If he tells a testament about when he has tasted a particular food, and how tasty that food was, he will surely create the desire for it in his customers, but it will not



satisfy their hunger. No matter how much you discourse, the reality is that the chef will only solve the hunger issue of his clients if he goes into action and prepares the proposed food.

So, it is with the leader. We need to materialize our concepts. Make your whole theory of leadership a practice that nurtures your followers. The young need to feel the real benefits of what the leader is proposing. If they realize that it works in the leader's life, they will believe that it can work in their lives. Be honest about the questions you had when you were their age, and the questions you still have now. Let them understand that God doesn't answer every single question, take away every doubt, or "fix" every situation. God's promise is to be here—to be God with Us, and to help, support, and strengthen us through every challenge. Help them to begin to look at the complex problems and challenges and excitements of this "brave new world" as possibilities in God's plan for their own personal lives. They need not either turn away from every new thing (as they sometimes see older folks do), nor run after it (as their friends might). They can stop and ask, "Is this a new thing God can use in my life and help me use to benefit the lives of others? And if so, how?" Take time with them, talking out the practicalities of the bright ideas they have.

THEY ARE ALSO WILLING TO FOLLOW LEADERS WHO ARE REAL

Now it is understood: For Christianity to be seen to function well in the life of the leader does not presuppose the perfection of the leader. One need not be perfect to be followed; as a matter of fact, young people are far less likely to follow someone who is supposedly perfect. They know very well that nobody is. Idealizing perfect leaders is idealizing the humanly impossible.

A leader who inspires a young person is not one absolutely immune to errors, failures, and misunderstandings. What inspires a young person is, rather, one who has the wisdom, resilience, and perseverance to learn from one's own mistakes, and find biblical solutions to practical issues. Sometimes the very fact of seeing a leader falter and then tell the truth about it, including asking forgiveness if necessary, is the turning point for a youth who is having trouble committing to Christ. It wasn't Peter's failure that qualified him to feed Jesus' lambs, but it was most assuredly his recognition of his failure, his sorrow over it, and his humble repentance. (See John 21.)

If you can succeed in modeling all of life—not every personal detail, just a well-rounded honesty in presenting all sides of human life with its struggles, dilemmas, and the solutions that the Bible proposes. If you can show that you are using what you are "selling," you will surely inspire the young to follow your example. Not because you are perfect, but because you are able to present, in genuine practice, a solution path to issues, dilemmas, and challenges that are common to all.

When the young can identify with the story of a leader, with the failures of a leader, with the struggles of a leader, with the dilemmas of a leader, they will identify with the solutions found by the leader. "Be my imitators as I am the imitator of Christ," said the apostle Paul, a royal leader of the early Church who never concealed the reality of his struggles, nor did he hide the way to his victory.

When we read Paul's affliction in Romans 7 ("The good that I want to do, I cannot do it, but the evil that I want to avoid, that, when I see, I have done it ..."), who is alive who cannot identify with this fight? But at the same time, when Paul states his conviction that he can do everything in the one who strengthens him (Phil. 4:13), when he says that which he used to consider valuable he now regards as rubbish compared to the sublimity of the knowledge of Christ (Phil. 3:8), when he says that he learned to be happy and satisfied in whatever situation he faced (Phil. 4:11-13), Paul inspires us all to the certainty that if he succeeded, we can succeed as well. Paul was a real leader. And real leaders inspire their followers. Young people will follow real leaders.



5. THE YOUTH LEADER AS FRIEND

It is true of all leaders that those whose followers see them as friends, also, will follow more willingly, but nowhere is this truer than among young people. Remember that (though they may not think so) they are still children in some important ways. Their brains are still developing, their judgment is still inconsistent, their attention spans are still shorter than they will be. A leader who is their friend will have far more influence over them.

However, this can enter some tricky territory. Some youth leaders, in an attempt to be a friend and to be liked, go far beyond true godly leadership, entering into youthful high spirits to a point that loses respect and does not give them the well-rounded example we have seen so clearly laid out above.

The young already know what constitutes a true friend. They know a friend who really cares, for instance, will not only refuse to join them in activities that are unwise, but will seek to prevent them from doing them, too. A true friend will not cover up or lie for a friend and will tell the truth in love in a way that superficial friends—or aloof leaders—never can. They are not seeking those who are in authority over them to be their “buddies.” But they are seeking loving friendship.

Ellen White has this to say:

“The true teacher can impart to his pupils few gifts so valuable as the gift of his own companionship. It is true of men and women, and how much more of youth and children, that only as we come in touch through sympathy can we understand them; and we need to understand in order most effectively to benefit. To strengthen the tie of sympathy between teacher and student there are few means that count so much as pleasant association together outside the schoolroom. In some schools the teacher is always with his pupils in their hours of recreation. He unites in their pursuits, accompanies them in their excursions, and seems to make himself one with them.

Well would it be for our schools were this practice more generally followed. The sacrifice demanded of the teacher would be great, but he would reap a rich reward. (ED 212; this is in the chapter, “Recreation,” which would be helpful to read in full).

Most youth programs include some form of recreation and activity, and those that do not, should. Any wholesome physical activity and recreation is good for youth, and good for strengthening the ties between them and their leaders. But best of all is a physical activity which is actually tied to the lesson at hand. Young people learn deep truths far more easily, and the lessons stay in their minds longer, when the lesson is attached to physical activity. This is the way to embody—literally, to put into the body—God’s truths.

Seek out their company, enter into their interests, learn what this particular group already enjoys. Recognize and honor differences in interests and seek to help them also learn to enter into each other’s interests. Then use these interests to embody the lessons you wish to impart. You can often find good resources online using keywords like “team building activities on [faith, or teamwork, or kindness, or whatever you wish to teach at the moment].”

Don’t forget one of your best resources is your youth themselves. Ask them what would be a good way to actively embody the lesson for the day or week. You will be surprised, not only at the creative ideas they come up with, but at how much you will learn from them.

One of the most important things we can learn from coming close to our youth is that they are each unique, very different from each other, and each require different treatment. Education, page 280, points out that the vacillating and ease-loving will need encouragement and assistance; the discouraged need sympathy and appreciation to create confidence. The stern (though never harsh) treatment that a strong-willed rebellious one needs would be seriously destructive to a timid one.



6. CONCLUSION

To summarize, a youth leader who has a strong commitment to Christ, who embraces and embodies biblical and spiritual disciplines, and who leads by clear and honest example will be a model that will inspire young followers to commit to Christ as well. This is the most effective form of leadership.

Practice these things and devote yourself to them so that your progress is seen by all. This was what Paul sought to convey as a principle of leadership to the young Timothy when he wrote: “Recommend and teach these things. Do not let anyone despise you for being young. But for those who believe, be an example in the manner of speech, in the way of acting, in love, in faith, and in purity. As you await my arrival, devote yourself to public reading of the Holy Scriptures, to the preaching of the gospel, and to Christian teaching. Do not neglect the gift that you have, which God gave you when the prophets of the Church spoke, and the group of elders put their hands on you. Take care of yourself and be careful what you teach. Keep doing this, for thus you will save both yourself and those who listen” (1 Timothy 4:11-16).

7. ACTIVITIES

INDIVIDUAL:

A. Write/Record down and keep the three things from this lesson that you find most helpful in your own situation.

GROUP:

B. Gather with three or four others and brainstorm ways to improve your local youth ministry using the principles outlined in this lesson.

8. RESOURCES

Visit our website: youth.adventist.org for mentoring, devotional, and other resources.

