A SPICY “NEW” PHILOSOPHY OF YOUTH MINISTRY (THAT’S 2,000 YEARS OLD)

GOSPELIZE

YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

GREG STIER

FOREWORD BY DOUG FIELDS

SAMPLE COPY

Not for Resale. Purchase the book at store.dare2share.org
“Greg Stier takes his infectious heart and razor-sharp mind and pours it into *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* in a way that is both inspiring and practical. Greg's commitment to an evangelism that invites ‘transformation from the inside out,’ especially as lived in and through teenagers, is what drives his ministry and grounds this helpful and detailed resource. What he makes clear from the first pages is that evangelism is not simply a programmatic option among many for youth ministry, but is rather the core reason and outcome of a healthy ministry. In *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*, Greg Stier provides the foundation, the plan, and the structure to ensure that the book of Acts lives on in and through your ministry.”

Chap Clark, PhD
Editor and contributor, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: 5 Views*
Professor of Youth, Family, and Culture, Fuller Theological Seminary

“With *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* Greg Stier has written a powerhouse book that, I’m convinced, can transform the way youth ministry is done in America (and maybe even across the world)! Based on timeless truths in the book of Acts and the latest evangelism research, this dynamic book unpacks principles that can transform any youth ministry from typical to transformational, from meeting driven to mission driven, from entertainment based to Gospel Advancing. I pray that you and your youth ministry team take the time to read this book slowly, unpack these principles thoughtfully and apply these truths passionately. If you do, both you and your youth ministry will forever be changed.”

Josh McDowell
Author, Speaker, Founder of Josh McDowell Ministry, a division of Cru

“I’ve given my life and ministry to the study of movements, in particular gospel movements. My friend, Greg Stier, gets movements better than most. Born in a movement, catalyst in others, and a student of gospel advancement, reading Greg’s book, *Gospelize*, is like drinking from a cool mountain stream after climbing a ‘14er’ like he talks about in the book. This book inspires, and we could use some gospel vision in the church today. But it does more: it equips, and it gives scores of examples of gospelicious movements in our time. Your student ministry needs this book. No, your whole church needs it. Actually, we all do. Read it and be changed. And, advance the gospel!”

Alvin L. Reid, PhD
Professor of Evangelism and Student Ministry/Bailey Smith Chair of Evangelism, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
“Here’s the thing. Too many youth ministry practices function comfortably without Jesus’ interference. A ‘gospelized’ youth ministry risks everything on the premise that Jesus still shows up with love, truth and power when we’re faithful. If you’re called by Jesus to work with kids, this book will urge you to get reacquainted with Jesus’ values for ministry, fix some broken patterns, quit messing around and join the Greatest Multiplication Strategy the world has ever seen. All for Jesus’ glory!!”

Dave Rahn
Senior Vice-President, Youth for Christ/USA

“If we don’t make disciples, we’ve MISSED the assignment! Greg’s new resource, *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*, will inspire you to follow your good intentions and to LIVE OUT a deep commitment to making the gospel core to who you are and how you lead your youth ministry. Thank you, Greg, for sharing these practical ‘how to’s’ and especially for being the most gospelized kingdom dude I know!”

Dr. Larry Acosta
Founder and CEO, Urban Youth Workers Institute

“*Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* comes from a heart, mind and life that understands the impact of evangelism on students like no one else. It is an indispensable read for anyone who aspires to have an impact in their youth ministry context. This book is rooted in the Scripture, practical in its application and balanced between the call for students to both ‘BE’ and ‘DO’ in their Christian life. Applying the principles of this book will revolutionize your youth ministry and could, in fact, focus the direction of student ministry for years to come.”

Kevin Turner, PhD
Professor of Youth Ministry and Theology, Colorado Christian University

“Stier’s *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* not only equips me, but inspires me to share my faith and live out the gospel message like the early believers did in the book of Acts.”

Jonathan McKee
Author of *Ministry by Teenagers and Real Conversations*

“Practical…biblical…inspirational…and very challenging! I’d highly encourage any leader to interact with *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*. You will gain new insight into biblical texts and practical strategies to move your ministry forward exponentially.”

Dann Spader
Founder, Sonlife and Global Youth Initiative
GOSPELIZE
YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY
A SPICY “NEW” PHILOSOPHY OF YOUTH MINISTRY (THAT’S 2,000 YEARS OLD)

GREG STIER
Dedication

To Jonathan Smith, who went to be with the Lord on July 12, 2015. His passion for God, love of His Word, and example of humility made a life-changing impact on me and countless others.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Don’t Just Stand There…Gospelize!</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Last Lost Chapter of Acts</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mexican Food and Youth Ministry</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pray First</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Start in Your Circle</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Follow the Leader</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Go Exponential</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Conquering Your “14er”</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Counting What <em>Really</em> Counts</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Program Your Priorities</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Beware the Party Poopers!</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Apostolic Resolve</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Notes</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Believe it or not evangelism is the one biblical purpose that, for the most part, we suck at. Most of us want to believe we’re passionate about evangelism, but if we are being honest we’d admit we’re unsure how to do it in a way that’s natural and effective…and because of that, we remain frustrated. I’ve invited Greg to help us not suck at evangelism.”

That’s how I first introduced Greg Stier to a room filled with hundreds of youth pastors.

A few of those pastors were more concerned over my choice of word (“suck”) than the fact that they were developing a bunch of teenagers who had no clue or passion for evangelism. Unfortunately, a similar mindset exists amongst youth leaders today—we’re often concerning ourselves over the wrong issues.

A decade ago, I wrote the book Purpose Driven Youth Ministry in an attempt to help leaders figure out how to balance the biblical purposes of (1) evangelism, (2) fellowship, (3) discipleship, (4) ministry and (5) worship. It was my life’s work—my magnum opus if you will. I’ve taught this material all over the world as the book has been translated into dozens of languages. Here’s what’s interesting to me, everywhere I speak about God’s purposes, regardless of the language and culture, the statement and questions are always the same.

Statement: “We do pretty good at four of the five biblical purposes, but we’re terrible at evangelism.”

Question: “How do we empower teenagers to care enough about their relationship with Jesus to share Him with others?”
Now, as a result of this book you’re holding, there is a thoughtful, biblical, practical, empowering and hopeful answer. It’s right here! My prayer is that it will send shockwaves throughout the youth ministry world and change the landscape of evangelism in youth ministry.

Let me be forthright and admit that I’m a big Greg Stier fan. Honestly, if he would have written an “average” book I would still tell people to read his stuff because he’s just a good dude. He’s an amazing communicator, he’s super smart, he’s really, really funny, he’s one of the most passionate people I know, and he’s just a great hang. But, this isn’t just an average book…it’s an excellent book! It’s the clearest articulation I’ve ever read of how evangelism meets youth ministry. Which means I’ll promote it everywhere I go.

_Gospelize_ is Greg’s magnum opus.

This book is the culmination of a life lived in pursuit of helping youth leaders mobilize teenagers to care for those who don’t know Jesus. If you study it, think deeply about, translate it with your current church culture in mind, it has the potential to change you and your youth ministry.

Greg’s ideas don’t come from random stories of exceptionally evangelistic youth leaders, instead he frames everything on the timeless values discovered in the Book of Acts. On every page you can feel Greg’s heart beating to live out these truths personally and help youth leaders embody them practically.

As I read the pages of this book I was reminded of why I felt God’s call into youth ministry so many years ago...because down deep inside, I truly believe that the Good News of Jesus can genuinely heal a broken generation with lasting hope. I’ve seen it play too many times in different youth ministry situations not to believe that a teenager’s life can be totally redirected as a result of Jesus. I’m guessing you believe the same to be true and that’s why you’re even
[at least] slightly interested to better understand youth ministry and evangelism.

Trust me, this book will refresh you, encourage you, and re-focus you on the original Jesus mission that got you into ministry. In addition, it will help you develop a plan of action that will transform the way you view and do youth ministry for the rest of your life. As you learn more about evangelism, I encourage you to think deeply about how evangelism connects with the other biblical purposes—it can deepen your discipleship efforts, ignite your ministry opportunities and enhance your fellowship. Apply these ideas with love, humility and consistency and you’ll find yourself and your teenagers engaging more fully in worship. God’s purposes are waiting to be lived-out in you and the youth ministry He has entrusted to you.

Let’s stop sucking at evangelism.

Thanks, Greg, for helping us do just that!

Doug Fields
Youth Pastor of 30+ years
Author of 50+ books
Co-founder of Downloadyouthministry.com
INTRODUCTION

I am the result of a Gospel Advancing Ministry.

The church that reached me and my entire family for Christ was a rare breed, indeed. It had a passionate, purposeful focus on reaching teenagers with the gospel. As a result, thousands—that's right, thousands—of teenagers across the Denver metropolitan area were transformed by the good news of Jesus.

Although Colorado Bible Church typically only had a few hundred adults attending on the average Sunday morning, at one point, it had over 800 teenagers in the youth group! Our group was called “Christian Youth Ranch.” While this strange moniker might sound more like a home for troubled teenagers, it was instead a vibrant, focused, massive sea of newly believing teenagers who had been radically transformed by the power of the gospel.

Ralph “Yankee” Arnold was the ring leader of this exciting gospel advancing circus. Technically, he was a church planter and a pastor, but down deep inside, he was just a youth leader in Senior Pastor clothing.

He’d initially come to Denver to reach teenagers for Jesus, and found that he had to start a church in order to fund his endeavor. So that’s exactly what he did.

Yankee’s daddy was a counterfeiter from the backwoods of Georgia who’d headed to the North when he was on the run from the law. When his baby boy was born in a Northern state, the father nicknamed the boy D*@# Yankee.

We just called him Yankee.

When he planted this church and started this youth ministry, it felt like an anomaly. Here was this Southern-twanged preacher
nicknamed “Yankee” with the swagger of an Elvis and the charisma of a Clooney, who planted his flag in the Denver suburb of Arvada. With his King James Version of the old *Scofield Reference Bible* and his passion for teenagers, he was ready to reach the city for Jesus—or die trying.

And he certainly could have.

Yankee would do anything to reach teenagers—and I mean anything. I remember once he challenged the teenagers to bring their friends out to youth group, and if they did, he would run “The Egg Gamut.” Yankee bought hundreds and hundreds of eggs, dressed himself up in thick clothing and armed a 100-yard long line of teenagers with all the eggs they could throw. When the whistle blew, Yankee ran the gamut from one end of the line to the other as teenagers threw the painful projectiles right at him. He looked like a smashed and mashed omelet mix, complete with egg shells stirred in, by the time he reached the end of the line.

But he didn’t care. Teenagers were there. They’d all go into the church auditorium and sing for a bit while he cleaned up. Then Yankee would come out and share the good news of Jesus with the crowd and give them an opportunity to say “yes” to Jesus.

Sometimes it was 100-foot banana split night. Other times, it was a movie night. That’s where I first saw *A Thief in the Night*—for those of you old enough to remember this so-bad-it’s-good rapture movie. It was fun. And it was focused on one thing… gospel advancement.

And Yankee took the gospel beyond Arvada. He reached into North Denver, where my rough-and-tumble family members ruled the streets. You see, I don’t come from a typical, pasty-white, church-going, hymn-singing, Bible-reading family. I come from a family full of body-building, tobacco-chewing, beer-drinking thugs (and that’s just the women)!
Seriously, three of my five uncles were bodybuilders, the fourth one was a power lifter who could bench press 500 pounds and the fifth one was a Golden Gloves boxer. All of them could fight. And most of them enjoyed it.

The Denver version of the mafia knew my uncles as “The Crazy Brothers.” So when the mafia thinks your family is dysfunctional, that’s bad news. And the baddest of the bad was my Uncle Jack.

Jack was ripped. His large biceps were covered in tattoos, like his cheeks were covered by his lamb chop sideburns. Jack had been in and out of jail for all sorts of violent acts, once for choking two cops.

Jack resisted arrest.

Jack resisted everything.

Until one day Yankee came into the picture and dared to reach into a rough, tough part of the city in order to engage in a gospel conversation with Jack. One of Jack’s friends, Bob Daly, had been going to Colorado Bible Church. Bob wanted Jack and his family to hear about Jesus, but he was too afraid to share the gospel with such a scary character. So he dared Yankee to do it.

Jack was scary tough, but Yankee was scary bold.

Yankee took the dare and won. After clearly presenting the gospel to Jack in a way that was understandable to him for the first time in his life, Yankee asked Jack if that made sense and if he wanted to trust in Jesus. All Jack could say was, “Hell, yeah!”

Now that’s a sinner’s prayer!

It didn’t take long for Jack to start spreading the news. The next day he shared the good news with “Thumper,” an Italian bodybuilder he worked with and worked out with. Thumper brought Jack to his house and made him tell his entire family about the message of grace—brothers, sisters, mother, dad—and all of them embraced Jesus’ free gift of grace.
I watched in awe as this message transformed Uncle Jack, Uncle Bob, Uncle Tommy, Uncle Dave and eventually, my own mother—the only sister in the group! And finally, after years of praying and pleading, even my ultra-resistant Uncle Richard said, “Hell, yeah!” to Jesus too.

As each one of my family members put their faith in Jesus, Yankee would bring them into the church, train them to share their faith and teach them to grow in Christ. Making disciples who made disciples was as natural to him as breathing. He lived it. He preached it. He programmed it. He chose leaders who modeled it.

Eventually, I became one of those leaders. Although I was only a teenager, I was put in charge of taking other teenagers out on Friday nights to share their faith. I was also given responsibility for my own bus route, which involved going door-to-door on Saturdays, encouraging parents to let us take their children on a bus to Sunday school the next day.

Core to Yankee’s strategy was getting as many teenagers as possible to spread the gospel to anyone and everyone.

Yankee trained us to do just that. We had to memorize seven sentences that clearly explained the good news, so that we could explain it to anyone, anywhere, anytime. We were equipped to use illustrations, opening questions and closing questions. We role-played talking to atheists, agnostics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and you-name-it, so that we were ready for anything and everything.

It worked. By the time I was in my early teen years, I could navigate just about any gospel conversation with any age group.

Because I was relentlessly inspired and equipped in faith sharing essentials, I could talk about Jesus naturally with both friends and strangers. As a result, I was able to reach my next door friend, Mike, for Jesus…and his two brothers…and Benji down the street…and
Carl and Renee across the street. I also had the privilege of leading Vince to Jesus, who then led Rodney to Jesus.

This all happened before I was in the 10th grade.

And I wasn’t that “one-of-a-kind” teenager, like you may be thinking. There was an entire core group of teenagers, many from the inner city just like me, who were transformed by the message and mission of Jesus. I think of Tim, who taught me to share my faith, and his brother Kenny, who taught me to preach. There were three sisters, Brenda, Cathy and Patty, all of whom shared Jesus and made disciples. I could go on and on…Rick, Scott, Art, Rich, Manual, Steve, Shelly, Teri, Kim, on and on and on and on and on…we were all advancing the good news effectively, long before we graduated from high school.

It was this causal—not to be confused with “casual”—form of Christianity that attracted us and kept us engaged. Yankee had given us a mission and a message. We had a camaraderie that went beyond sitting together in a youth room. We were in a foxhole together, waging war against Satan for the souls of our fellow teenagers, and it unleashed us to passionately live and give our faith long after we graduated and scattered.

And it all started with one hillbilly pastor who played the banjo, did the hambone (You Tube it) and was focused on using teenagers to reach teenagers with Jesus’ message of grace and hope.

Actually, it didn’t start there at all. It actually all started 2,000 years ago, when Jesus unleashed His disciples to “make disciples of all nations.”

Yankee just happened to be a follower of Christ who took that commission from Jesus seriously.

And he is not alone.

There are hundreds of youth leaders across North America and beyond today who are implementing these same ancient values
that are embedded in the New Testament. They are experiencing explosive spiritual and numeric growth as a result.

You can join the ranks of this causal, missional, Gospel Advancing Movement! You should join the ranks, because there is a better way to do youth ministry than what is happening in the typical youth room today. In the coming chapters, I’ll be laying out a picture of what building a Gospel Advancing Youth Ministry looks like.

Reading this book is the easy part. Implementing the biblical values in this book is the exciting and challenging part.

But if you’re willing to take this journey, you will be re-energized in your youth ministry passion. You will witness your students growing deeper in their relationship with Jesus, as they bring more teenagers into the kingdom.

A fully “gospelized” youth ministry will make every late night text from a struggling teenager, every painfully long church staff meeting and every “the pastor would like to see you now” pop-in from the church secretary because of the dodge-ball-game-gone-bad in the church auditorium well worth it.

Youth ministry is worth it, if you’re willing to do it right. And there’s no better template than how Jesus worked through the early disciples to build His church in the Gospels (Matthew 16:19) and throughout the book of Acts.

Let’s start there.
“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he [Jesus] said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” —Acts 1:8-11
Imagine that moment when Jesus gave His disciples the final charge to go into the world and spread the good news to everyone everywhere. You had just spent the last 40 days reveling in the shocking joy of Jesus’ resurrection from a horrific death, and now His pierced, beautiful feet are leaving the ground. Jesus starts floating upward, upward, upward. He goes higher and higher, finally disappearing into the gentle clouds that waft across the deep blue Judean sky.

Then a voice beside you awakens you from what feels like a dream. You turn to see two men dressed in white who’ve appeared out of nowhere. “Why do you stand here looking into the sky?” they ask. Their pointed question reminds you that Jesus has already given you the mission, the plan and the deadline. They are telling you, in essence, “Don’t just stand there…gospelize!”

It started in Jerusalem, and then stretched across Judea. It eventually spread to Samaria and Antioch, then on to Greece and Italy. Over the centuries, Jesus’ message and mission have crisscrossed the globe as more and more Jesus followers have embraced the call to do more than just stand there.

As followers of Christ, we have inherited that two millennia old message and mission. Until our Savior returns to planet earth on a cloud, we must be busy with the quest He has called us to accomplish.

The quest to make disciples.
The quest to spread the good news.
The quest to gospelize.

TRANSFORMATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT

I love that word “gospelize.” I first heard it while I was working out in my basement a few years ago. To be honest, I had purchased one of those infomercial workout DVD series and got tired of listening
to the trainer’s corny jokes at 6:00 in the morning! So I turned down the sound on the DVD and turned up the sound on my computer. What was I listening to when I heard the word for the first time? Someone reading a 100-something-year-old Charles Spurgeon sermon online. (Yes, I’m a theology nerd!)

Here’s what Spurgeon said:

I contend for this, that to gospelize a man is the greatest miracle in the world. All the other miracles are wrapped up in this one. To gospelize a man, or, in other words, to convert him, is a greater work than to open the eyes of the blind.¹

Spurgeon didn’t invent this word. It was an old English word that simply meant to “evangelize” someone.

Instantly, I was hooked. The word evangelism smacks of bullhorns and pointy fingers of judgment. But gospelize sounds like transformation from the inside out. And, as you well know, this is exactly what this culture of teenagers needs.

From self-harm, to suicide, to self-image challenges, to sexual temptation, this generation has been bombarded by the Evil One. Our young people live in the midst of a generation of walking wounded who are longing for hope and looking for answers.

And Jesus offers them both—and more!

But we are the vehicles that Jesus works through to download this good news to these teenagers. We are His hands, His feet and His mouth. So we must reach out, walk toward and speak up.

Just what does it mean to “gospelize” your youth ministry?

To gospelize your youth ministry is to build a context in which the good news of Jesus is moving both deeply into the souls of your teenagers, and outwardly through your teenagers to others. When you make the gospel central to everything you are doing, you are gospelizing your ministry.
Gospelizing your youth group is much, much more than simply getting your teenager to share the gospel with their peers. When you read through the book of Acts, evangelism was front and center. But the priority of evangelism wasn’t flying solo. The gospel-sharing efforts of the early followers of Jesus sprang out of a context of believers who loved God and loved others. Prayer was a huge emphasis, and so was a commitment to His Word. Converts were not just made, disciples were multiplied. These priorities, plus a few others, became the building blocks that formed the foundation of an ongoing advancement of the good news.

This forward movement of the life-changing message of Jesus was not primarily accomplished through techniques, strategies or methodologies, but in the moving of the Spirit’s power, first of all in the early disciples, and then through them to reach others.

So how do you create a context in which this happens on a consistent basis? Ahh, that’s what this book is about!

In Acts 1:8, Jesus called His disciples to pursue His mission by being His witnesses, starting where they were at and expanding outward. But led by the Spirit, they didn’t just make disciples, they multiplied them! This means life-on-life investment in those who had put their faith in Jesus, and implies training them to reach their spheres of influence. By the time you get to Acts 28 at the end of the book, you see that the gospel had advanced all the way to Rome. The result? Radical gospel transformation both inward and outward!

If you read the book of Acts closely, you can see this was an exciting, messy and dangerous process. But you also see the disciples learning and growing in their ability to advance the gospel, not just personally, but also through other believers.
THE RIGHT STUFF

The book of Acts provides a vibrant picture of what it looks like to gospelize our ministry efforts. Acts not only describes the kind of transformational impact we should be purposefully pursuing, it also points us toward the right ingredients for building a “Gospel Advancing Ministry.” What exactly do I mean by a “Gospel Advancing Ministry”? It’s a ministry that relentlessly pursues the mission of Jesus by relationally multiplying disciples, resulting in radical gospel transformation.

Let’s break down that definition, phrase by phrase, and see if it lines up with the ministry approach God gave us in the book of Acts…

Pursuing the Mission of Jesus

There was a sense of urgency in Acts 1 when the two men dressed in white (angels?), in essence, told the disciples, “Don’t just stand there…gospelize!” They were reminding the disciples and all their spiritual descendants—which includes us!—that there is a mission to accomplish, a plan to accomplish it and a deadline to accomplish it by.

Just weeks earlier on a mountain in Galilee, the disciples heard Jesus deliver what many call “The Great Commission” today. I actually prefer to call it “THE Cause,” because “The Great Commission” sounds like something a real estate agent came up with. But no matter the label we give it, it’s a grand call to an even grander mission!

*Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!*
Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:16-20).

I love this passage because it shows that, although the disciples worshipped Jesus, some still had their doubts. Why? Just days earlier they had seen Him mocked, mangled and murdered by Roman soldiers! And now He was before them, telling them He was giving them a job to do!

You may have your doubts too. It’s okay. Jesus will use us, doubts and all, if we have faith enough to obey His prime directive to make disciples.

And that’s what we’re here to do. Are you carrying out the primary mission of making and multiplying disciples through your youth ministry? Are you equipping your teenagers to do the same? Or are you defined more by meetings than by Christ’s mission?

Say I tell my son and daughter, Jeremy and Kailey, “I’m going to the store. Before I get back I want you to make your beds.” When I leave, I expect them to obey me while I’m gone. If I come back and ask, “Did you make your beds?” and they answer, “Well, no, Dad, but we talked about it with each other quite a bit,” or Jeremy says, “I wrote a song about it and taught it to Kailey…can we sing it for you, now?” or “We googled it and found some cool YouTube videos that we studied about the best ways to make a bed,” it will not be a happy day in the Stier house. Why? Because despite all the talk, creative talent expended and diligent study, they never actually got around to doing the task that I’d assigned them.

In the same way, Jesus left us with a simple mandate, not to make the bed, but to make disciples. When He returns and asks, “Did
you make disciples?” and we answer, “No, but we had a killer youth program,” or “Nope, but we sang a song about it,” or “Nah, but we googled some great teaching outlines on disciple making and taught them,” then we will have failed to accomplish the primary thing that He asked of us.

We see a relentless pursuit of this mission Jesus has given us to reach the lost and make disciples in every chapter of the book of Acts. We see it in…

- **Acts 1:** Jesus commissioned His disciples to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.
- **Acts 2:** Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and 3,000 were added to their number that day.
- **Acts 3:** Peter healed a crippled man and preached the gospel to another crowd.
- **Acts 4:** The entire church prayed, the building shook and they dispersed to share the good news.
- **Acts 5:** “Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” (Acts 5:14).
- **Acts 6:** The apostles devoted themselves to preaching and praying exclusively, so that the gospel was not hindered.
- **Acts 7:** Stephen stood up and gave a powerful gospel message and was stoned for it.
- **Acts 8:** Philip chased down a chariot and shared the good news with the Ethiopian Eunuch.
- **Acts 9:** Saul (a.k.a., Paul) got saved and started sharing the gospel with everyone.
- **Acts 10:** A whole group of God-fearing Gentiles, led by Cornelius, came to faith in Christ.
• **Acts 11:** A rogue group of believers started sharing the gospel with full-on non-synagogue-attending Greeks—unheard of up to that point—and many put their faith in Jesus.

• **Acts 12:** “But the word of God continued to increase and spread” (Acts 12:24).

• **Acts 13:** Paul and Barnabas were sent off to relentlessly pursue the mission of Jesus on their first missionary journey.

• **Acts 14:** Paul was stoned for preaching the gospel—and kept on preaching afterward!

• **Acts 15:** The preaching of the message of grace was attacked by legalistic Judaizers from within the church, but the gospel would not be held down!

• **Acts 16:** Timothy joined the traveling team of Paul and Silas, and they preached the good news in Philippi, where Paul and Silas were flogged, imprisoned and finally released.

• **Acts 17:** They preached the gospel in Thessalonica, Berea and to the philosophers of Athens.

• **Acts 18:** Paul camped out for a year and a half in Corinth, and saturated the region with the good news.

• **Acts 19:** Paul preached the gospel and trained the believers for two to three years in Ephesus, until a riot forced him to leave town.

• **Acts 20:** Paul recounted his commitment to relentlessly pursuing the mission of Jesus to the elders of Ephesus.

• **Acts 21:** Paul updated James and the elders of Jerusalem about all the Gospel Advancing Ministry that God had done through them on their missionary journeys. He was later arrested.
• **Acts 22**: Paul proclaimed the gospel to the crowd that had him arrested—and they freaked out, of course!

• **Acts 23**: God told Paul that, in spite of his arrest, he would share the gospel in Rome just like he had in Jerusalem.

• **Acts 24**: Paul explained the gospel to Felix, the Roman governor of the region.

• **Acts 25**: Paul stood trial before Festus for preaching the gospel.

• **Acts 26**: King Agrippa ripped Paul for trying to convert him by saying: “*Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?*” (Acts 26:28).

• **Acts 27**: Paul was sent to Rome to appear before Caesar for the “crime” of preaching the gospel.

• **Acts 28**: For two years under house arrest, Paul “proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (Acts 28:31).

From the first page to the last page of Acts, this book drips with the relentless pursuit of the mission of Jesus. It’s a blueprint for what it looks like to gospelize a community, a city, a country and a world.

How do the pages of your youth ministry read? Is your ministry story more about what you’re doing, or more about what is getting done when it comes to the gospel changing young lives?

It all starts by choosing to relentlessly pursue the mission of Jesus, but it continues by…

**Relationally Multiplying Disciples**

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem….” (Acts 6:7a, ESV).
Making disciples who make disciples gets talked about a lot in ministry circles, but is not actually done in far too many cases. Yet when it is actually carried out it is truly exciting.

I’ll never forget going to The Gathering for the first time. This extraordinary city-wide youth group meeting happens every month in Kenosha, Wisconsin—and this particular month it was being held at Immanuel Baptist Church. This town of 100,000 people is located roughly 45 minutes north of Chicago. Humanly speaking, it might seem like an unlikely place for God to be doing something groundbreaking with His church.

But I’m convinced that He is.

While at The Gathering, I met teenagers who’d been led to Jesus by other teenagers, who’d been led to Jesus by other teenagers. I also met a group of youth leaders who hailed from a variety of churches and denominations, but were united together by their obsessive focus on Jesus and His mission to reach the lost at any cost.

This dynamic youth leader network is known as the Kenosha Allies. These youth leaders—as well as a senior pastor or two thrown in for good measure—meet every week to pray for each other, for the youth in their groups and for their community. Their insatiable thirst for the mission of Jesus will not be quenched until every teenager in their city encounters Jesus Christ personally.

By the way, their meetings are about three hours long. During that time, they eat and pray together. When I visited their network meeting, it was the closest thing I’ve experienced to a band-of-brothers-type gathering.

They hold each other accountable. They support each other’s churches. If the smaller churches have a tough time affording an event they are doing together, like a camp, conference or retreat, the bigger churches with bigger budgets will help out financially.
And this is no theologically watered-down, let’s-all-just-sing-kumbya-type group. They unite together around the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you have a different gospel than faith alone in Christ alone, they will still love you, but you won’t get a ticket to become a leader in this city-wide Gospel Advancing Movement.

But once you become a part of this tight group of multi-flavored Jesus followers, be warned. They will ask you hard questions, pray specifically for the deepest needs of your life and ministry, and then boldly challenge you to get your teenagers reaching their peers for Jesus.

While they all run their own youth ministries in their own churches, they bring all their groups together once a month on a rotating basis at different churches for The Gathering. Right before these large group rallies, they do campus missionary classes for teenagers, including evangelism training. During their main meetings, hundreds of teenagers from the different youth groups represented gather to worship God, pray collectively and be challenged by God’s Word to advance Christ’s message across Kenosha one teenager at a time.

It’s the closest thing I’ve experienced to seeing the book of Acts lived out in a Western youth ministry context.

Led by twin ring leaders, Andy and Roger, the individual youth ministries represented by the Kenosha Allies are vibrant, real life examples of what Gospel Advancing Ministries can look like. But
the Kenosha Allies are also a practical demonstration of what a gospel advancing network of youth leaders can look like.

I’ll never forget meeting some of the teenagers in Andy’s youth group during my visit to The Gathering. While loud Christian music was pulsating across the room, scores of teenagers mingled about laughing and drinking Coke. I took the opportunity to informally interview a handful of teenagers about how they got plugged into the youth ministry. There I discovered that Austin heard the gospel from Alex, who’d been trained to share his faith by Andy. Okay, to be honest, I don’t remember the names. But I do remember meeting disciples, who were reached by disciples, who were trained by Andy. He and his crew of student and adult leaders were relationally multiplying disciples.

Andy’s youth group was a song-singing, pizza-eating, dodge-ball-dodging example of disciple multiplication. My mind couldn’t help but snap back to the book of Acts. It felt just like the early church, but with a better band. It brought to mind Christian rapper, Lecrae’s, *After the Music Stops,* where he says, “I’m out to take the Bible, create disciples, who make disciples, disciple-cycles…”²

When the Kenosha Allies bestowed on me the title of “Honorary Member,” it came as one of the greatest honors of my life, because I believe the model that God has built in Kenosha can multiply in youth groups and networks across the nation and across the world!

The work God is doing in Kenosha can be duplicated in your city and through your youth ministry. The same Holy Spirit that is fueling these youth leaders in Kenosha dwells inside of you and is longing to do a work in your community beyond your wildest dreams!

**Resulting in Radical Gospel Transformation**

When Jesus confronted and commissioned Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus, He laid out a brief description of what the powerful
message of the gospel would do to and for those who heard it. Jesus said:

“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16-18).

Packed in these couple verses are a few quick snapshots of the radical transformation that the gospel brings, not just to the Gentiles Paul would reach, but for the teenagers your student ministry is seeking to reach as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The gospel…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gives spiritual sight</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brings heavenly light</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rescues from Satan’s power</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grants God’s forgiveness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provides a holy community</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What’s true of the gospel Paul preached is true of the message we share, because IT’S THE SAME MESSAGE, after all! And THE SAME HOLY SPIRIT who worked through Paul works in us—and
our believing teenagers! So there’s no reason that this same gospel, working with the same Holy Spirit, shouldn’t have the same results!

But Satan whispers in our ears that it’s not the same, that Paul’s gospel was somehow infused with apostolic superpowers, and that our high-tech, Westernized teenagers are somehow immune to the power of the gospel. He tells us they’re too spoiled, too apathetic and too distracted for the gospel to get through to them.

Bologna.

The gospel is as powerful now as it was then, as it ever was, and as it ever will be. And so is the Holy Spirit. He works to convict, convince and convert the unreached to produce radical gospel transformation.

As 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 reminds us:

\[\text{But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.}\]

The power of the Spirit and the power of the gospel work together like nitrogen and glycerin to explosively ignite transformation in the lives of the bad, the broken, the bullied—and the bullies!

It did that for me, for my uncles and even for my mom.

**THE WOMAN AT THE WELL (WITH A BASEBALL BAT!)**

My mom was married at least four times, though we didn’t actually know that until after she died. We found four marriage licenses in her footlocker after her death. As for me, I was the result of a sexual tryst my mom had with a guy named Tony.

I never met Tony. He died long before I even knew that I was the result of little more than a one night stand. Years later, I discovered
my biological father was a Sergeant Major in the Army, a POW and the very last prisoner released after the Korean War.

Mom was tightlipped about my father. As a matter of fact, it wasn’t until I was 12 years old that I found out anything about Tony at all. Up until then, I just assumed my older brother’s dad—who never lived with us, either—was my dad.

But one day, Grandma told me everything.

She told me that after my mom found out she was pregnant with another child that she couldn’t afford to raise by herself, she drove from Denver to Boston on the pretense of hanging out with some family members. But her real plan was to have an illegal abortion (this was before Roe vs. Wade), and pretend as if nothing had ever happened.

But the family members she was staying with in Boston got a hold of my grandparents who told my mom, “Come back to Denver, and we’ll help you raise that baby.”

I was that baby.

For years, I wondered why my mom would frequently burst into tears when she looked at me. I wondered why she would cry almost every night, begging my brother and me not to turn into a “bum” like her. I wondered why she was so full of rage. I once witnessed her taking a baseball bat to the brand new car of her soon-to-be-ex-husband. When he tried to stop her from destroying the car, she turned the baseball bat on him.

So when my grandma told me that my mom almost ended my life in an abortion, I knew immediately that her internal mixture of rage and guilt was a cocktail that would destroy her unless Jesus intervened.

At this point, I was a Christian. And while I was still coming to terms with my father abandoning me/us, I knew I had a heavenly
Father who would never leave me or forsake me. And I knew that the same message that had transformed me could transform her.

So I tried again and again to share the gospel with my mom. But when I told her how Jesus paid the price for her sins on the cross, she would always respond the same way by saying, “You don’t know the things I’ve done wrong.”

But I did, because of good old Grandma.

I’d say, “It doesn’t matter, Mom. Jesus paid the price for all your sins.”

She would always shrug it off, muttering about how God could never forgive her. But one night, while she was smoking her Benson and Hedges Gold cigarettes (filtered, please), I shared the good news one more time. By this time I was fifteen years of age, and had been sharing the message of the gospel with her for years.

She said, “You mean to tell me that Jesus paid for all my sins? Even the really bad ones?”

I said, “Yes, Ma.”

She took a drag on her cigarette, thought for a moment and said, “I’m in!”

Mom put her faith in Jesus right there and then. She had her eyes opened, and she went “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.” She received God’s forgiveness and a place among God’s people. My mom experienced radical gospel transformation.

And so did I…because God used me—a fifteen-year-old, dirt poor teenager—to rescue my mom from a life of guilt and sin. From that point forward, I watched the gospel message transform her from the inside out. I witnessed her boldness in sharing her faith with her coworkers, our neighbors and complete strangers. She wanted to make sure that she shared this same good news with everyone she could.
It’s been over a decade ago since I sat by her bed in hospice and watched my mom die. Even then, with her body decimated by stage four lung cancer, her soul was alive with hope. Nurse after nurse heard the good news, because my mom would whisper to them, “My son has something to tell you,” which was code for me to share the gospel with them.

Radical gospel transformation is something very personal to me. The message transformed me from a scared, scarred, fatherless kid from the city, into a bold witness who knew God was his Daddy. It transformed my mom from a guilt-ridden, fist-clenching rage-aholic, into the most authentic, generous and blunt witness for Jesus you could ever imagine. I watched my once violent family metamorphosed into a family that became a shining light of hope to a community steeped in crime and brokenness.

And it all started because a Gospel Advancing Ministry in Arvada, Colorado, reached out to the inner city to bring the good news to my family and me. They were relentless in their pursuit of the mission of Jesus, and we were reached as a result. They relationally multiplied disciples, and I was one of them...and I got to reach my mom, and she reached countless others! The result? Radical gospel transformation in our lives, family and community!

What we read in the dusty pages of Acts needs to be dusted off and done again today in our 21st century postmodern context. Why? Because the mission is clear, and the deadline is near. Like it says in Acts 1:11, He will be coming back!

So don’t just stand there...gospelize!
1. Do you think we are currently more of a “standing around looking up at the sky” type of youth group, or a “step out and gospelize” type of youth group?

2. On a scale of one to ten, where do you think our youth ministry currently falls in terms of our effectiveness in advancing the gospel? Why do you think that?

3. Discuss Greg’s definition of a Gospel Advancing Ministry as one that “relentlessly pursues the mission of Jesus by relationally multiplying disciples, resulting in radical gospel transformation.” Is there anything about this definition that you would change?

4. Let’s talk about each phrase of this definition. On a scale of one to ten, how do you think our youth ministry is currently doing at “pursuing the mission of Jesus”? Why do you think that?

5. What impact did Greg’s rundown of the relentless pursuit of the lost in every chapter of the book of Acts have on you personally? Did it make you feel motivated, guilty, bored, knowledgeable or something else?

6. On a scale of one to ten, where do you think we currently fall in terms of making and multiplying disciples?

7. Is our ministry currently more effective at advancing the gospel in our students, or through our students? Discuss the difference between the two.

8. What did you think of Greg’s contention that “there’s no reason that this same gospel, working with the same Holy Spirit, shouldn’t have the same results!”?

9. Have you ever personally led someone to faith in Jesus? Did it have the kind of effect of transforming both them and you that Greg talked about experiencing with his mom?

10. At this point, do the concepts being presented in this book seem intriguing or overwhelming or both?
Have you ever read the book of Acts, and then gone to church right afterward? Let’s be honest, if you attend a typical church, the comparison between the two generally translates into a huge disappointment.

Why? Because as you read the book of Acts, you can actually feel the pulsating heart of the early church! There is an overwhelming sense of mission, excitement, risk and even danger. And over all of these new believers, there was a warm blanket of inescapable love—love for God and love for others.

This love demonstrated itself in a generosity that was so deep and rich that the 1st century
believers selflessly shared their possessions. You see this powerfully demonstrated in Acts 2. Many of these newly converted Jewish believers in Jesus had traveled from great distances to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, also known as the Festival of Shavu’ot or the Feast of Weeks. This was the second of three major festivals that every able-bodied Jewish male was required to attend (Exodus 23:16).

Think about the planning required to attend this feast. You would bring enough food and money for the trip, though probably not much more than the bare minimum. But if you were one of the 3,000 Jewish men who put their faith in Jesus when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:41, you very likely wouldn’t want to leave the party. Because of your newfound faith, you’d want to stay extra weeks, maybe even months, to learn more about Jesus.

So the selflessness of the early believers kicked into full gear. They dug deep into their own pockets to give you extra money for food, lodging and expenses. These self-sacrificing Jewish believers made it possible for you to stay longer and grow deeper in your faith, before you shuttled back to your own hometown, taking the good news with you! And when you returned home, you’d be fully equipped to spread the gospel in your own community!

Maybe that’s one reason why there was already a firmly established church in Italy when Paul arrived there under Roman guard on his final trip to Rome in Acts 28:14-15. What is highly intriguing about the final chapter of Acts is that it leaves you dangling, like a cliffhanger. Acts 28:30-31 simply says:

*For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!*
Okay.

That's it?

What about Paul's execution? What about the church's spread beyond Italy? What about the great persecution under Nero?

Nada.

It just leaves us hanging there.

Personally, I think there's a divine reason for this incomplete story. The Holy Spirit is writing a script through the pen of Luke that is meant to feel unfinished because, in a sense, it is. We are the continuation of the book of Acts!

Look at what the good Dr. Luke wrote at the very beginning of this amazing book:

\[
\text{In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-2).}
\]

As the classic expositor Alexander MacLaren wrote:

Is not the natural inference that the latter treatise will tell us what Jesus continued ‘to do and teach’ after He was taken up? I think so. And thus the writer sets forth at once, for those that have eyes to see, what he means to do, and what he thinks his book is going to be about.¹

Though Luke put his pen down at the end of Acts 28, the Holy Spirit is still writing a story in and through us! Although it's not part of the canon of Scripture, and cannot be found on any human parchment, it is the story of church history that continues on today!

And you and your youth group are part of it!
After all, the book of Acts is really not just the Acts of the early church. It’s actually the Acts of Jesus through His Holy Spirit working through the church! And He is still working today! His plan is to advance His kingdom deeply into the hearts of your teenagers, and deeply into the heart of your community.

Colossians 1:6 puts it like this:

...In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace.

And just like it did in the church of Colossae, the gospel will produce fruit in your teenagers and through your teenagers, as they take the good news message to their peers.

So, if the book of Acts, in a sense, is still being written, how do you get that same dynamic, enthusiastic spirit of gospel advancement infused into your youth group? Well, in a very theological way, that same Holy Spirit is infused in the hearts of all of your believing teenagers! And that same gospel that the early disciples proclaimed, your teenagers are called to share! And when your teenagers begin to spread this good news, something very surprising begins to happen; they begin to grow in their faith in ways you never expected.

**BOMB DEFUSING CLASS**

Imagine that I talked with your church leadership, and they agreed that if you wanted to keep your job you had to sit through a six week, 12-hour-a-day bomb defusing class led by a team of bomb disposal experts. You didn’t have to pass the class to keep your job, but you did have to sit through it. Most likely, after the awe of realizing you were in a bomb defusing class wore off, you’d start to realize how many math, chemistry and engineering principles you
were going to have to listen to. At that point, you’d probably begin to lose interest. Soon, you’d be checking your Twitter feed, texting friends, playing games on your phone or doodling—anything but tuning into this boring class on bombs!

Now, let’s say we change the scenario a bit. Let’s say that at the beginning of the class I told you that after six weeks of training you were going to go over to the Middle East and defuse bombs for the United States Army. How well do you think you would listen then? Of course, you’d pay close attention, take copious notes and stay after class to ask questions of the bomb defusing experts. “Was it the red wire or green wire we cut in that scenario?” Why? Because you knew you would soon be in the hurt locker and could die if you weren’t trained and ready!

Without the prospect of getting plunged into the danger, the six week class would have been just a boring exercise in chemistry, mathematics and wire cutting. But with the prospect of actually needing this knowledge to accomplish your life or death mission, everything changes.

In the same way, many of your teenagers feel like they’re stuck in a six week long, boring Bible class when they go to youth group. For many of them, it can sound like an exercise in dusty theology and ancient Bible studies. But if they know that you are going to lovingly, but relentlessly, challenge them to share the gospel with their peers—the Christian version of bomb defusing—there’s a good chance they are going to study the Bible extra hard and pray even harder! And all of this will help them grow deeper in their relationship with God.

**MY BIG AHA!**

I’ve talked to thousands of youth leaders about mobilizing their teenagers to share the gospel. I often get a response that goes
something like this: “Of course, I’d love for my teenagers to share Jesus with their peers, but they’re not quite ready yet.”

I usually respond by asking, “So you’re saying they need more theology, more small group lessons and more Sunday school teaching?”

“Yeah, they need more spiritual growth before they’re ready to share their faith,” these youth leaders confirm, as they nod in agreement.

Then I ask this simple question: “How’s that worked out for the adults in your church?”

There’s typically a dramatic pause before they offer up a sheepish nod, as the lights go on and they get my point.

If teaching, training, theology, Sunday school, small groups and ministry meetings resulted in a lifestyle of evangelism, our churches would be filled with evangelizing adults. But, sadly, they’re not.

I believe it’s significant that the first act of a new believer in the early church was water baptism. You see this in Acts 2, when 3,000 put their faith in Jesus and were baptized as a result of hearing Peter’s Pentecost sermon. In their day, the act of water baptism was no private ritual. Because there were no church buildings in the 1st century, baptisms happened in very public places like rivers, lakes or maybe even the southern steps of the temple where ceremonial Jewish baths are carved into the rock to this day. In other words, your unbelieving family, friends, coworkers and countrymen would most likely be witnesses to your public declaration of your newfound faith—and this was in an era where many considered Christianity some kind of cult.

In light of this reality, Romans 10:9 takes on newfound significance when it says: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
Here’s how the text notes of The NIV Study Bible (1985 edition) puts it:

**Jesus is Lord.** The earliest Christian confession of faith (cf. 1 Co 12:30), probably used at baptisms. In view of the fact that “Lord” (Greek *kyrios*) is used over 6,000 times in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) to translate the name of Israel’s god (Yahweh), it is clear that Paul, when using this word of Jesus is ascribing deity to him.²

To recognize the Lordship of Jesus was to recognize Him as God in the flesh. To verbally proclaim, “Jesus is Lord” was considered blasphemous by the Jews and treasonous by the Romans. Because Jews were monotheistic—meaning they believed in only one God—and because they had no concept of the Trinity, many Jews viewed this simple three word description of Jesus as heresy to the highest degree.

Because Romans viewed the Emperor as Lord—as deity—they sometimes tried to force early Christians to say, “Caesar is Lord.” If these Christians refused, they would either be mutilated or murdered. This was the case with Polycarp, a disciple of St. John. Under intense pressure, he refused to say, “Caesar is Lord,” because he believed only Jesus was Lord. At the age of 86, he was burned at the stake because of his convictions.

In the early church, the phrase, “Jesus is Lord,” was powerfully catalytic in the culture, and potentially catastrophic for the Christian. If you lived at this time and proclaimed, “Jesus is Lord,” at a minimum you could be put out of your social circle, and at the maximum, you could be put out of existence.

The very act of being baptized was a declaration that “Jesus is Lord.” Imagine the gospel advancing impact it had! When new believers were baptized, their verbal affirmation of the deity of Jesus became a huge evangelistic opportunity. I wonder how many believers we
will meet in heaven who converted to Christianity as a result of witnessing someone else’s baptism, triggered by the proclamation, “Jesus is Lord”?

Imagine the spiritual courage it would take for a new believer to make such a bold statement in front of potentially antagonistic strangers and friends, while standing in the water about to get baptized. This proclamation could get them killed. But it also steeled and sealed their newfound faith in a very powerful way.

My big aha is that when teenagers declare to their pluralistic, “mix-and-match,” postmodern peers that “Jesus is Lord,” it will do more to accelerate their spiritual growth than ten years worth of Bible lessons. It causes them to put skin in the game, because they risk losing their social status. And it is this very risk that is the core to the call of discipleship.

I am convinced from the whole of the New Testament AND from personal experience, that injecting a gospel advancing philosophy into a youth group will accelerate the discipleship process faster than just about anything else. Why? Because it shifts the perspective from “my needs” to “God’s call.” Plus, on a personal level, it challenges teenagers to risk their relationships for something of eternal significance, it drives them toward reliance on the Spirit and it pushes them to obey God.

RISKING RELATIONSHIPS

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God (John 12:42-43).

Here’s an example of some early believers who had put their faith in Jesus, but refused to publicly acknowledge it. Why? Because
they didn’t want to risk their relationships with other leaders and their status in the community!

While some may say these were not true believers, I would remind you that the Holy Spirit’s commentary on their hearts is that they had believed, but weren’t willing to go that next step. In the same way, many believing teenagers in your youth group have never taken the next step of sharing their faith with their peers because “they loved the praise of man more than the praise of God.”

But central to the call of discipleship is the call to relational risk. Jesus told His own disciples in Matthew 10:37-39:

> “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

What’s striking about this passage is that it specifically comes in the context of Jesus unleashing His followers on an evangelistic campaign (Matthew 10:1-7). As He sends the twelve out, Jesus is reminding them that following Him involves sacrifice, including risking even their closest, most important relationships. He’s calling them to take up their cross, and willingly die a social death—and perhaps even a physical one—for His sake!

In some situations, sharing Jesus’ message may offend father, mother, sister, brother and friend. It may even fracture relationships. But the very act of embracing this kind of social risk will yield an incalculable reward—true, abundant life with deep significance—a life of growing, maturing and thriving in Christ!

**THE “MY STORY” MOVEMENT**

I lead a ministry called Dare 2 Share (D2S) that provides gospel
advancing training for youth leaders and teens all across the country.

After I speak at a D2S teen training conference, I get hungry. And this particular night, I was famished. As you know, speaking to teenagers is an exhausting and exhilarating undertaking. Unlike adults, they won’t just nod their heads and pretend like they are enjoying your talk. They will get up and leave, or just start texting and talking with those around them if they find you boring.

This can be nerve-wracking on communicators like me who speak to tens of thousands of teenagers every year. Usually I don’t eat much before I speak, but I go out and eat way too much after. The nervousness and pressure that comes with preaching to teenagers generally makes my stomach nauseous beforehand and famished afterward.

One particular night in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, I was headed to a local Ruby Tuesday. I had invited my good friend, Dave, to go out with me. He was the missions pastor at a local church and embodied a gospel advancing lifestyle more consistently than anybody I had ever met.

While we were there getting ready to order, his daughter called and asked if she and a few friends could come by. They had been at the Dare 2 Share conference too.

Soon, about eight teenagers crashed our party. All of these students, most of whom were star athletes at Eden Prairie High School, were fired up about reaching their school for Jesus. Dave had been coaching them in relational evangelism, and they were praying for their friends and sharing their faith. Gospel conversations were happening everywhere. And now they were working on a plan to pray for every student on campus by name, initiate even more spiritual conversations and close out the school year with a major outreach event. This event would be called “My Story,” because a
few of the Christian student leaders would be sharing their faith at the event in a very public and powerful way.

Dave had helped line up some special guests—a few Minnesota Vikings football players and a former gangsta rapper who was now rapping for Jesus. But the real stars of the “My Story” program would be the teenagers. These high school athletes were putting their reputations on the line, not only when they stood to share their story in front of their peers, but in the many gospel conversations they’d have leading up to the event and after it!

Today the “My Story” movement is gaining momentum as more and more teenagers at more and more schools are standing in front of their peers to share their story of salvation. This year they not only packed out the Eden Prairie High School auditorium (where 106 students indicated a decision to put their trust in Jesus!), but they did four other events in the Twin Cities area where many more became believers in Jesus!

It’s their prayer that the movement will spread to campuses across the country. And the exciting thing is that it’s not about any one church or organization. It is a kingdom initiative which is all about Jesus. Students are sharing their faith story with their peers so they can engage in spiritual conversations and share the gospel.

But in addition to the many who have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus through these events, something else more subtle, but just as powerful, has been taking place. The faith of the teenagers driving these conversations is growing deeper and richer. They are seeing the lives of their friends transformed. They are, in some cases, experiencing a mild form of persecution which deepens their faith even more. They are witnessing firsthand the power of the Spirit. For these students, Christianity has moved from theoretical Sunday school lessons, to hardcore, life-giving reality.
CULTIVATING RELIANCE ON GOD

I’ll never forget when Tim Keller tweeted this: “Teenagers have more information about God than they have experiences of him. Get them in places where they have to rely on God.”

Maybe that’s why Jesus sent His disciples out on their first solo evangelistic campaign without anything else to rely on but the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 10:9-10, Jesus said: “Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.”

So they had no extra money to bank on, no extra clothes to put on and no walking stick to lean on or use as a defense if they were attacked by wild animals along the way! They only had the Holy Spirit. And a little later in this same passage, Jesus again instructed them to rely fully on the Spirit by telling them: “At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:19-20).

In the same way, when you put your teenagers in a position of having to trust God, their theological information about God is activated, as their spiritual dependence on Him is accelerated. If you’ve ever taken your teenagers on a mission trip to a foreign country, especially in the developing world, you’ve probably seen this clearly demonstrated.

But, in a very real sense, your teenagers go on a mission trip every day when they walk into their schools. And, for many of them, this is a scarier trip than traveling hundreds or thousands of miles to some dangerous, foreign country.

If you give teenagers a choice between going on a mission trip to the Amazon where they might have to fight off jaguars and pythons while building a mud hut for an obscure Indian tribe, or going into their school cafeteria to sit with a group of their peers
and try to bring the gospel up, I’m convinced most would choose the Amazon. Why? Because the majority of teenagers I’ve met would rather risk getting choked by a python, than risk getting choked out of their social circle! The very thought of sharing Jesus with their classmates, teammates and friends triggers a palpating heart and knocking knees.

But knocking knees are more likely to bend to God in prayerful reliance.

I’ve seen this demonstrated again and again at the Dare 2 Share conferences across America. After we train teenagers to share the good news, we have them hold their cell phones up high into the air. And then we have them call or text their friends and initiate a gospel conversation. Many of them give me that “Are you serious?” look as it begins to sink in that I’m actually asking them to do this totally out of their comfort zone thing. That look quickly turns into a “Holy crap, you are serious!” look.

But before I have them call or text their friends, we pray. And you can feel the prayers going up, because for many of these teenagers, this is the first time they’ve been put in a position of risk. As a result, many of these teenagers are praying like they haven’t prayed in a long time.

When’s the last time you, like Jesus, put His followers in your youth group in a position to risk? Like Tim Keller said, they have plenty of information about God. It’s time we put them in a position where they have to trust in Him. Relational evangelism does just that!

*Knocking knees are more likely to bend to God in prayerful reliance.*
THE CALL TO OBEY

In the 21st century version of Westernized Christianity, discipleship is a flash drive. We insert said truth into the minds of our teenagers, download it and move on. It’s almost as though we think that Jesus’ directive to His disciples in Matthew 28:19 was, “teaching them everything I commanded you…” instead of “teaching them to obey everything I commanded you….”

We tend to have a knowledge-based, instead of a heart-based and action-based version of discipling teenagers—and adults for that matter! As a result, we think that all we must do is teach them more and more. If they get more theology and Bible and Christian worldview, then everything will be fine.

While all these truths are vitally important, they must not just be understood on a head level. They must be rigorously applied to their hearts and lives. They must be embraced and obeyed.

And when our teenagers embrace God’s call and obey Him, especially in the face of personal loss, the discipleship process is accelerated in a way no Bible study can replicate.

Consider the example of Abraham’s obedience and sacrifice in Old Testament times:

> Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did (James 2:21-22).

What’s interesting about this passage is that James is writing about an incident that took place twenty plus years after “Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Decades after Abraham was justified (declared righteous) spiritually, he was declared righteous in a different way. Because he was willing to obey God by sacrificing what meant most to
him on the altar—his son Isaac—he was declared righteous *practically*.

The first declaration of righteousness in Genesis 15 meant he was saved. The second declaration of righteousness in Genesis 22 meant he had spiritually matured to the point where the “angel of the Lord”—most likely the pre-incarnate Christ—said: *“Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son”* (Genesis 22:12).

The first declaration of righteousness was because Abraham believed the promise of God in Genesis 15:16. The second declaration of righteousness was because Abraham believed and backed it up with obedience, by demonstrating his willingness to sacrifice what meant most to him on the altar.

As a result, Abraham’s own spiritual maturity was accelerated. *“His faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete (‘matured’) by what he did.”*

So how does this crash course in the Old Testament story of Abraham help make a case for the infusion of a gospel advancing focus being a powerful discipleship accelerator? If Abraham’s faith was matured by his willingness to sacrifice what meant most to him on the altar, then the same is true of your teenagers! When they, like Abraham, obey God by being willing to risk a friendship if need be, because they are passionate about sharing the gospel with their peers, their faith and their actions work together, so that their faith is matured in a deep and lasting way.

The reality of a potential loss of friendship or social status looms over a teenager about to share their faith like loss loomed over Abraham on Mt. Moriah that day so long ago. But it is the very possibility of loss that can result in young people taking an Abrahamic step of faith and obedience. This is when their
faith becomes more than just lip service. It becomes faith that will sanctify them more quickly. That’s why a gospel advancing focus—especially when they’re sharing the gospel with their friends, family, classmates and teammates—accelerates the spiritual maturity process in your teenagers faster than just about anything.

**BRING ACTS BACK!**

You and your believing teenagers have the same Holy Spirit that the apostles did. In fact, you could make the case that you even have more than they did, because you have the complete canon of Scripture and 2,000 years of church history to learn from—both good and bad.

What if you decided that through God’s power you were going to prayerfully lead the way for Acts-like, gospel advancing transformation in your church and community? What if you decided that you’re tired of reading about revivals of the past, and wanted to be a part of one here and now? What if you led the way for carrying on what the early disciples started, and you pushed to complete the task before Jesus returns?

Now is the time, and you are the leader! Your teenagers are waiting for someone to lead them toward a life of significance, and you are the person God has strategically placed in their lives to challenge, encourage and equip them to get there!

When you choose to do this and decide, by God’s grace, to lead your teenagers to be Jesus-focused, gospel advancing, disciple-multiplying believers, they will spiritually grow beyond your wildest imagination!

Don’t wait for “when they’re ready,” because they will grow as they go…and so will you! And the final result will be a walking,
talking, living, breathing, Spirit-infused atmosphere of Acts in your youth group, in your teenagers and in your community! And years from now, if someone chronicles the transformation of your city, they may write of your youth group: “And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).
1. Do you agree with Greg that the church today has lost much of the passion for the gospel that the early church displayed in the book of Acts? Why or why not?

2. Is our youth ministry currently driven by a sense of mission, excitement and risk? Why do you think that?

3. Is there a “warm blanket of inescapable love—love for God and love for others” encircling our youth ministry?

4. What did you think of the bomb defusing class illustration?

5. Do you agree or disagree that taking relational risks for the sake of Jesus triggers spiritual growth?

6. When’s the last time you personally put yourself in a position of social risk for Jesus’ sake?

7. When’s the last time we, like Jesus, challenged the students in our youth group to take a social risk for Jesus’ sake?

8. Discuss Tim Keller’s quote: “Teenagers have more information about God than they have experiences of him. Get them in places where they have to rely on God.”

9. What are the implications for our youth group of Greg’s statement: “It’s almost as though we think that Jesus’ directive to His disciples in Matthew 28:19 was, “teaching them everything I commanded you…,” instead of “teaching them to obey everything I commanded you….””

10. How does relational evangelism give teenagers a taste of “Abrahamic-type faith”?
End of Sample.

Get this book at store.dare2share.org
PUT SOME “KICK” IN YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

The strong and spicy heat of the gospel is the secret to effective and exciting ministry—just look at the early church! Gospel advancement was at the heart of the early believers’ discipleship, and the book of Acts gives us a vibrant picture of God’s plan to use us to build His kingdom.

Greg Stier unpacks the model found in the book of Acts, unveiling the key ingredients present within the early Church, and shows how you can blend them together today to create a gospelized youth ministry that results in dynamic kingdom growth.

So if you are looking to spice up your ministry…gospelize it! Discover the joy, excitement and transformation you’ve been longing to see—and that Jesus promised!

But beware, once you get a taste, nothing else will satisfy.

“Greg Stier takes his infectious heart and razor-sharp mind and pours it into “Gospelize Your Youth Ministry” in a way that is both inspiring and practical. He makes it clear that evangelism is not simply a programmatic option among many for youth ministry, but is rather the core reason and outcome of a healthy ministry. This book provides the foundation, the plan and the structure to ensure that the book of Acts lives on in and through your ministry.”

—Chap Clark, PhD, Professor of Youth, Family, and Culture Fuller Theological Seminary

DARE 2 SHARE

SAMPLE COPY

Not for Resale. Purchase the book at store.dare2share.org