

YOUTH MINISTRY FOR THE **LONGER HAUL**

PUBLISHED BY YM360



YOUTH MINISTRY FOR THE **LONGER HAUL**



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FOREWORD BY SHANE PRUITT

YOUTH MINISTRY FOR THE LONGER HAUL A FIELD GUIDE FOR LONGEVITY

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Published by youthministry360 in the United States of America.

ISBN 13: 9781954429130

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TO MY MENTORS

Mom
Dad
Jim Manuel
Mike Cook
Mike Parker
Billy Savage
Bob Dean
Lynn Christie
Dorman Mitchell
Steve Chappell
Chuck Gartman
Allen Jackson
Scott Kindig
My Fellow Georgia Baptist Youth Pastors
Grady Cook
Bryant Wright
& My CLC Brothers

Thanks for the investment you have made in my life over the years.

YOUTH MINISTRY FOR THE LONGER HAUL



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FOREWORD

Literally, as I am typing this foreword, I have just finished preaching a Generate Camp by YM360, where a student pastor received a legacy award for serving an incredible twenty-six years in youth ministry – all at one church. Through tears, he pointed out teenager after teenager with him at camp this summer who were the children of former students who had been in his ministry.

Do you know what that is called? Longevity!

Imagine impacting generations who will last well beyond your years here on earth because, as a leader, you committed to being “all in” with the Lord, with a people, and with a location for the longer haul. Basically, it’s putting in time somewhere long enough to build trust, which ultimately builds the Kingdom.

You can tell when this is being done in a ministry and when it isn’t. I’ve been doing itinerant preaching long enough to have been around thousands of different ministries. I can quickly tell when young people have had one youth pastor for years or if they’ve had one youth pastor after another, year after year. The ones who have had a long-tenured youth pastor are more trusting of leadership and authority. The ones who have had a new youth pastor every eighteen months to two years are a lot less trusting because they think there is no point in listening to you and learning from you. After all, you’ll be gone soon anyway, and then there will be another leader with a different vision for you to follow. Just wait it out, and they’ll eventually leave too.

Think about it – we’ve all heard the stats of youth pastors serving at one place for an average of eighteen months to two years. That means that a sixth-grader entering a youth ministry could possibly have three to four different youth pastors by the time they graduate out of the ministry.

That is why this book by Chris Trent is so incredibly important. When he asked me to write the foreword, I didn’t hesitate for a second to jump at the opportunity to be a part of this. This book is a timely, relevant, and much-needed help to shift the paradigm. Let’s dig in. Let’s stay. Let’s experience longevity. Let’s impact the generations for the glory of God! And there is no one better leader than Chris to write this book. It’s not theory for him; it’s practice. He did it, he lived it, and he can teach others to do the same thing.

Now, I know what some readers will think. There are many circumstances that cause leaders to leave certain ministries and situations. I get it; I do. Some are healthy reasons, and some are not. Sometimes, the Lord says, “Go. I have another assignment for you”; and, other times, for the health of you and your family, you need to get out of certain situations. I’ve been there, done that. However, there are other times when we’re thinking about leaving that we could and should actually stay and invest in a people, a church, and a community for the longer haul.

So, it begs the question, “How do you do that?”

Hopefully, asking that question has led you to pick up this book. Let my friend, Chris, help you navigate how to stay in youth ministry for the longer haul and how to have a long healthy tenure in that same ministry. I pray that you will approach this book with an open Bible, open journal, open mind, open heart, and open hands, saying, “Lord, here am I. Through Your power, let me be faithful where You would have me for as long as You’ll have me there.”

Shane Pruitt

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A WORD FROM CHRIS

Little did I realize when I wrote the first edition of *Youth Ministry For The Longer Haul* in 2016 (formerly titled *Consider This*) that I would have the opportunity to update that edition years later. I'm thankful that you've picked up this little book, and I'm incredibly grateful that you're trusting me with your time. I don't take that lightly. So, let me begin this updated edition with a special and a very heartfelt thank you to each of you.

As this updated version of *Youth Ministry For The Longer Haul* is released, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the seismic impact that the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020 and 2021 has had on the longevity of ministers across all denominations throughout our nation. It has proven especially significant in the longevity of youth pastors. The pandemic, combined with the major shift in our culture to a post-Christian society, has created what I believe to be one of the most challenging times to serve in ministry in decades. As a result, we see more and more unfilled ministry positions in the local church. There are simply not enough ministers available or willing to fill all the openings that churches have for senior pastors, worship pastors, youth pastors, children's pastors, etc. This growing shortage in youth pastors, in particular, is why I wholeheartedly believe that a conversation about experiencing longevity in youth ministry is more important than ever before.

—Chris

INTRODUCTION

I am the product of mentors.

When Jim asked me to go to youth camp during that summer of 1987, I had no idea that I was about to start a journey that would lead to me becoming a youth pastor for life. Truthfully, I didn't even know that being a youth pastor was a job! Even though I had grown up unchurched, I said yes to church camp and trusted Jesus at that camp between my 11th and 12th grade years. My life has never been the same.

I'M A PRODUCT OF BEING MENTORED

My parents divorced while I was in middle school, and I had plenty of time to hang out with Jim. I didn't realize it at the time, but Jim had started mentoring me for a life of ministry. It was through those early conversations that I began to sense a call to ministry, even though I wasn't fully aware of what that meant. Those early days of stopping by the church office after school or going over to Jim and Vicki's on the weekend showed me the way God could use a youth pastor in a young person's life. I soon realized that I wanted to do that for the rest of my life.

That mentorship continued as I volunteered as an "adult" youth worker for every youth camp, youth mission trip, and youth outing possible. Jim never turned me down and modeled for me what it meant to be a youth pastor. As a result, I believe Jim now has a hand in every student I have the opportunity of sharing the love of Jesus with. That's how mentoring works.

Looking back, I see how my relationship with Jim was my first Paul/Timothy experience. Although it wasn't anything formal, my youth pastor had decided to be my Paul and make me his Timothy. Being mentored continued to be part of my life through my first internship, my part-time church gigs, and eventually, my work as a full-time youth pastor. God blessed me in all of these jobs with individuals who were patient yet determined to teach me how to do ministry and live life. He has also blessed me with the opportunity to be a mentor to others as well.

PAUL MENTORED TIMOTHY

Do You know that part in Star Wars where Qui-Gon Jinn discovers Anakin Skywalker? Paul's discovery of Timothy was a bit like that . . . minus the whole pod race scene. We see in Acts 16 that early in Paul's ministry, he discovered Timothy, who was a faithful believer that other Christ-followers spoke well of. Paul must have also believed in Timothy's

potential, because he decided to take Timothy along on his journey to spread the good news of Jesus.

Paul didn't just take Timothy along to carry his luggage and clean the youth closet, though. We see in 1 and 2 Timothy how Paul continued to pour into Timothy as he trusted him to be an extension of his ministry—even to the point of sending Timothy to settle problems in Corinth and lead the church in Ephesus.

I can tell you that there have been a lot of days when I've needed a Paul in my life. I've needed someone to lead the way through example and intentional conversations. I've needed someone I could trust to share my most intimate struggles and doubts. I've needed someone I could share my crazy ideas with.

There have also been days that I've needed to be a Paul to some people as well. They've needed me to be honest, listen to them, share learned wisdom and allow them to learn from mistakes and successes. Jesus mentored His disciples. Jesus understood the importance of mentoring others more than anyone else. Of all the ways Jesus could have started the Church, He decided to allow 12 men to learn from Him and spread the good news of the Gospel. When I read their stories, they sure do seem like a ragtag bunch of fellas. So why did Jesus choose to bring them along on His ministry journey? Couldn't He have accomplished His ministry with the larger group of followers and not allowed 12 to be so close? Jesus must have felt it was important to show His 12 disciples how to live life. Yes, He was revealing the Kingdom to them, but He also showed them how to live and minister to people.

JESUS . . .
AFFIRMED THE CALLING ON THEIR LIVES
MATTHEW 4:18-22

TAUGHT THEM SPIRITUAL THINGS
MATTHEW 5:1-2

HELPED THEM THROUGH THEIR STORMS
MATTHEW 8:23-27

TAUGHT THEM COMPASSION
MATTHEW 9:1-3

SHOWED THEM HOW TO LOVE ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE
MATTHEW 9:9-13; MATTHEW 15:21-28

SHOWED THEM HOW NOT TO BE RELIGIOUS,
BUT TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM
MATTHEW 9:14-15

ASKED THEM TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT HIM
MATTHEW 9:35-38

GAVE HIS DISCIPLES PRIORITY IN HIS LIFE
MATTHEW 12:46-50

WAS REAL WITH THEM
MATTHEW 14:13

SHOWED THEM HIS NEED FOR GOD
MATTHEW 14:22-23

ASKED THEM TO WALK ON WATER
AND WAS THERE WHEN PETER FELL
MATTHEW 14:28-32

WARNED THEM ABOUT THOSE WHO WOULD TEACH THEM LIES
MATTHEW 16:5-12

TAUGHT THEM ABOUT THE COST OF FOLLOWING HIM
MATTHEW 16:24-26

ENCOURAGED THEIR CHILDLIKENESS
MATTHEW 18:1-4

ALLOWED THEM TO ASK HARD QUESTIONS
MATTHEW 19:10

MODELED FOR THEM HOW TO PLACE OTHERS FIRST
MATTHEW 20:20-28

More than anything, Jesus lived life with them.

So, what about you?

My hope is that this book will serve as a guide for you during your years of youth ministry. Some of the lessons you'll read about have been taught to me by some of my mentors; some have been learned through experience. And truthfully, some are still being learned.

So jump in! Wrestle with these ideas by yourself or with a friend. My prayer is that you will be the next youth pastor committed to the longer haul.

CHAPTER 1

LIVE A LIFE OF SIMPLICITY



“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth and rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
- Jesus (Matt. 6:19-21).

“SIMPLICITY IS FREEDOM.”
- Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline

My grey 1991 Chevrolet Geo Prizm was the best car I had ever owned, up to the point I had to sell it. I loved that car. The idea of getting rid of it never crossed my mind, until one bright Sunday morning.

At first, the morning started off just like any other Sunday. Wendy and I were still newlyweds attending Wedgwood Baptist Church while we lived in Fort Worth, Texas, where I attended seminary. Money was really tight that first year as she worked in a private school, and I had a part-time job at a bookstore. Like many young married couples, we made our share of mistakes during those first years.

One mistake was accumulating credit card debt. I brought into the marriage some minor credit card debt, but during that first year, we added to it. And although some of that debt was out of necessity, truthfully, we could have gone without so many visits to Chili's. (Their chips and salsa are addictive.)

Another mistake was buying a new car when Wendy was in a small accident that totaled her car. We already had the expense of living in a two-bedroom apartment (the lap of luxury compared to seminary housing) along with the previously mentioned credit card debt and basic living expenses.

So there we were, sitting in a young married Sunday School class together, and God spoke to each of us. I can't tell you for sure what the lesson was about, but afterward, we both felt as if God had gotten our attention. We realized that with some small schedule changes, we could easily sell my car, become a one-car couple, and pay off our credit card debt. In other words, bye-bye 1991 grey Geo Prizm. (I still miss her.)

And so, we sold it and paid off our credit card debt. God taught us a lot during those days, and we quickly realized that if we were going to stay in ministry, we'd have to commit to living a life of simplicity.

Now, all of these years later, we're still living a life of simplicity. Simplicity looks different now, and honestly, it's not quite as "simple" as it was back then. Yet compared to other couples with the same education at the same stage of life, believe me—it's simple. But here's the secret . . . we're happy. Really happy.

So here are some things to consider about how you too might choose to live a life of simplicity:

YOU'LL NEVER MAKE A KILLIN'

I know what you're saying right now. "Hold up. You mean I didn't get into ministry for the money?" I know you kind of already know this one. But

have you really thought through the fact that not only do you not make much now, but even as an educated minister with 10+ years of experience, you'll never make a lot compared to other people your age? This might mean that you'll always drive older cars, live in cheaper neighborhoods, eat out less frequently, and praise God for youth ministry t-shirts because they mean you won't have to spend as much on a wardrobe. Let me encourage you; you can still be happy and content. Very much so. The more you commit to living a life of simplicity, the more you'll realize that you don't need all the "stuff" that Satan might try to make you believe will make you happy. You'll be surprised at how well you can live on what others think is so little. There's a great peace that comes from following your calling, no matter what the cost.

This doesn't mean that you don't hope for appropriate raises and salaries. It doesn't even mean that you have to grovel and accept whatever mediocre pay the deacons approve. It simply means that you have to approach your salary with a humble heart and always keep this area of your life bathed in prayer.

TITHE

It has always seemed a little funny to me to get my paycheck from the church and then turn around and give 10% right back. I'm thankful to be able to say, though, that Wendy and I have, to the best of our knowledge, always been faithful in this area right from the start. And let me tell you, if we hadn't tithed on what we made as 20-somethings, it would be super difficult to tithe on what we make in our 50s.

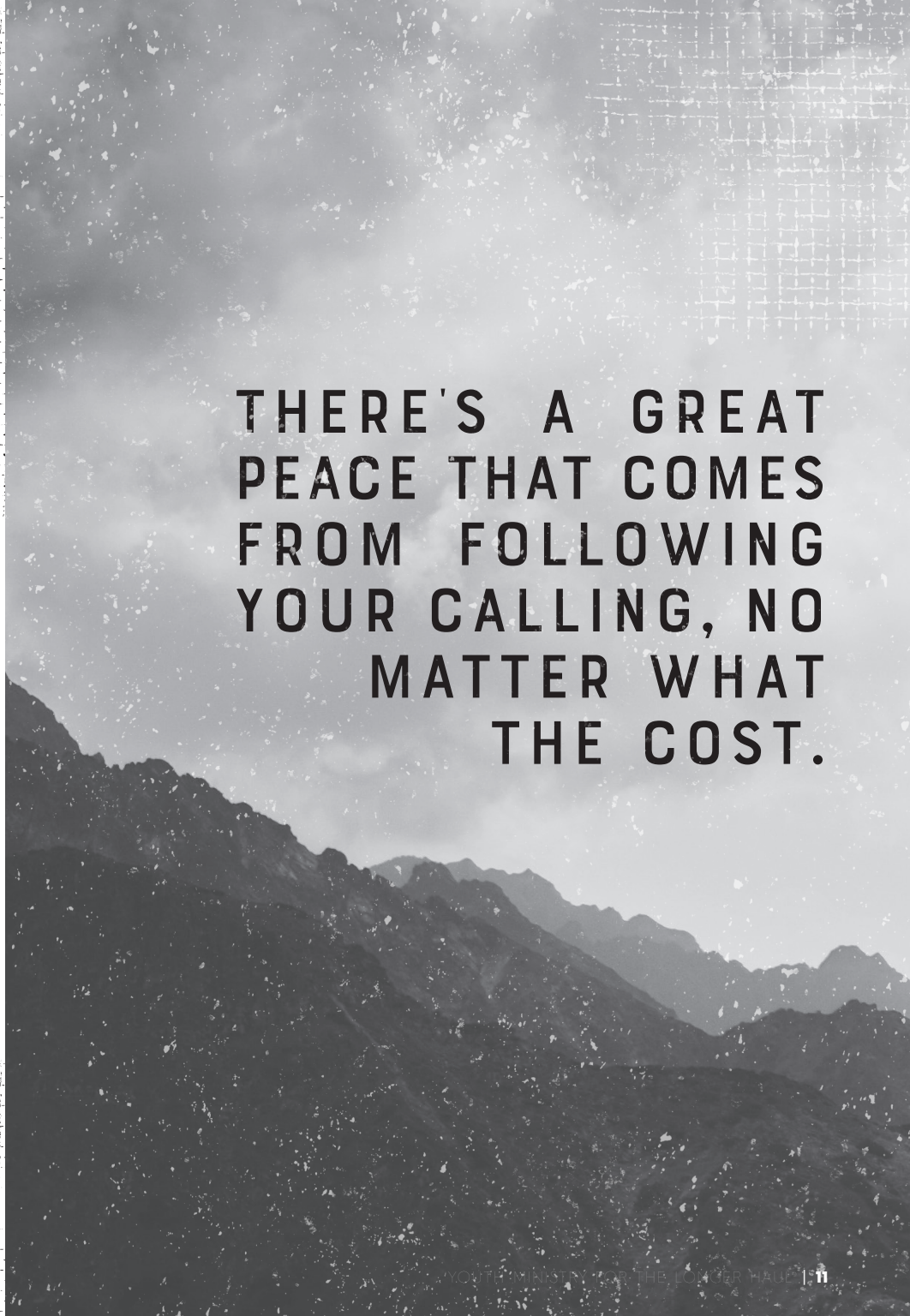
Although there can be some debate about issues related to tithing, like whether it's supposed to be 10% or whether all 10% should be given to just your church (rather than other ministries), there's no good argument for not giving back to God. Having an attitude of submission in this area will be very beneficial to you over the long haul.

In all my years of serving in the church, I've never gone without a meal or slept without a roof over my head. God has been faithful, and I want to be faithful to give back to Him and trust Him to use it how He chooses.

AVOID DEBT

It's amazing how quickly credit card companies are willing to give credit to freshmen in college. They hand out credit cards like candy, it seems. And it's not only credit card companies. Student loan companies, car companies, and other merchants like Target and Kohl's make it incredibly easy to lose track of your spending. After all, don't you want to save 10% right now by applying for a credit card?

Please don't misunderstand me. Some debt early on may be unavoidable.



**THERE'S A GREAT
PEACE THAT COMES
FROM FOLLOWING
YOUR CALLING, NO
MATTER WHAT
THE COST.**

Looking back, I'm not sure how I could have done school without a student loan. But as I mentioned earlier, you can avoid eating out so often. In the long run, living a life of simplicity will be much easier if you decide early on that you'll try to live as debt-free as possible.

AVOID THE COMPARISON GAME

The older you get, the more lifestyle separation you'll likely notice between you and other people your age. I know we all know that the old saying, "keeping up with the Joneses," which leads nowhere. Knowing this doesn't always make it easy when you're serving in a church, and it seems like everyone else has so much.

This will especially hit home when it comes to your spouse and your kids. There will be times when others have nicer, newer things, and you wish you could provide the same for your spouse. There will be times when your kids have friends who seem to always have the newest gizmo, and you wish you could give the same to your kids.

Avoiding the comparison game will lead to a much more enjoyable life of simplicity. Help your family learn early that, as a family, you have all decided to live a little differently than most. I think raising my kids with an understanding that we do things differently has helped them, as they've become teenagers, to not be as concerned with the things they don't have.

THERE WILL BE BLESSINGS

Here's the amazing part of living a life of simplicity. God will provide! Not only will He provide, but I believe He will bless you in ways you can't even anticipate. Over the years, my family and I have been given tickets to ballgames, free nights at a beach condo, a free fishing trip, hand-me-down clothes, free nights at a mountain cabin, meals at a restaurant, gift cards, and sometimes cash. My family is not alone here. I've talked to so many friends in ministry that have also been blessed in similar ways.

The blessings are not going to be the same for everyone, and that's okay. For some families, the blessings come through medical bills being paid unexpectedly, scholarships for grad school, money to cover adoptions, and other amazing God-sized ways.

I'm not saying you'll never face hard times, because I do believe that God allows us to go through trials to shape us. You just need to trust that God will choose to bless when He wants to, and know there will be times when you go without as well. The key is that you're choosing to live simply so that you're ultimately dependent on God.

CONSIDER PRAYING THIS:

Lord, thank you for your provision in my life. Thank you for my calling to work with students. As I seek to fulfill this calling, please help me to trust you for my needs. Allow me the blessing of giving back to your Kingdom from the blessings that you give and entrust to me. I choose to look to you rather looking to others for my strength and fulfillment. Amen.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO GET YOU THINKING.

- What is a purchase you're hoping to make in the near future that you might need to reconsider?
- What's one thing you can change right now regarding your finances?
- Do you have a budget? Take the time to make one and see where you're spending your money.
- Think about your dreams, and see if they match the lifestyle that you'll likely have to live as a youth pastor. If married, have this discussion with your spouse (or soon-to-be spouse if you're engaged).

