



REACH!

Produced by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Youth Discipleship

A Good Youth Minister Is a Good Listener

by Jerry Kastens

Most of us like to talk, but listening? We-I-I-I that's another story. Listening doesn't come naturally. It is an acquired skill; one that is acquired through effort. Listening is also a skill we Christians want to develop. It enables us to love others. That's something we want to do because God has loved them - and us - enough to forgive all our sins.

Good Listeners Choose Words Carefully

A friend of mine recently lamented, "My mouth and my brain don't work together very well." He was talking about what happens when people engage their mouth before their brain.

Thoughtless words discourage communication. Harsh responses, judgmental reactions, cynical or cute (humorous?) put-downs all indicate that someone is more interested in stating their viewpoint than in listening to what someone else has to say. Poorly chosen words build walls of hostility and shut down communication.

When we communicate, we do well to remember what Paul said to the Ephesians. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only that which is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29). Our brains shift our mouths into gear only to help people by what we say.

Good Listeners are Interested in Others

If you want to get communication flowing, begin by listening to others talk about the things that are important to them.

Several years ago, I took a trip with several people. There was one person, whom I did not particularly like. But I had to spend about seven hours riding in a van with her. She began talking about her life, her interests, and her values. By the end of the trip, I realized I had misjudged her. After I got to know her I found her to be a likable person.

Good Listeners Give Honest Praise

Give others positive, honest feedback. The emphasis is on "positive." But you don't have to lie. And you don't have to compromise your integrity.

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and ideas for future issues can be directed to . . .

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Teens Review

Walk In My World



Walk in My World was by far my favorite Bible study. It was able to make the issues that we talked about more real and important by showing

what happened to actual people. There was so much material to work with that even with only a few people in our Bible study we always went over an hour just talking about it. Sometimes it is hard to put into practice what you learn but by seeing other people doing it in their own ways it is much easier to do it myself.

~ Carina Rahn, high school junior
and member at St. John's, New Ulm, MN

Walk in My World took issues that do come up in real teenagers' lives and illustrated with a real life story. Hearing about these things from someone who has experienced them firsthand is much more effective in getting the point across. Hopefully, most teens will never have to deal with addictions, teenage pregnancy, divorce, and the other things addressed, but the fact is those things happen, and the Bible study guides you to passages that can comfort you or your friends when these things occur. Also, the questions are asked in such a manner that you have to think about your answer, not because you don't know the answer, but because the answer isn't something that you usually need to express in words, it's just something you know. There are so many points to explore that the four-week Bible study took us eight weeks.

~ Renee Pottorff, high school junior
and member at St. John's, New Ulm, MN

You can learn more about *Walk In My World* at www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship. Look in the "Consultation and Resources" collection and then in the "Teen Bible Studies" folder.

("A Good Youth Minister" . . . continued from page 1)

Too often we listen with critical ears. We focus on fault-finding. Perhaps we subconsciously think that our own importance will be improved if we put others down. We resort to name calling, belittling, questioning the intelligence of others, or making derogatory comments about their appearance. We develop an arsenal of negative comments like, "That's the dumbest idea you've ever come up with," or, "You probably hold the world record for stupid ideas."

Good listeners know we all need to be affirmed. When was the last time you praised someone? A good listener breaks the fault-finding habit and substitutes affirmation. One good way to begin this is to invite someone, "Tell me the best thing you've ever done." Then give them your full-body attention. Listen with your eyes, your face, and your posture, as well as your ears.

Good Listeners Listen to God

Paying attention to what others tell us will seem impossible if we're not listening to God. Our motivation to care about people grows the more we realize how much our God cares about us. The more we treasure the Savior who has given us heaven, the more we want to obey his command, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). Listen to God's Word.

Good Listeners Remember to Count

Count when you listen. Count up to one; count up to two. Remember, "God gave us two ears and one mouth."

To me that's another way of saying, if you want to communicate God's type of love and grow closer to others, the best thing you can possibly do is work at becoming a better listener.

The late Jerry Kastens was the Minister of Discipleship at Trinity Lutheran in Watertown, WI when he wrote this article for the LivingBold Web site in 2001. The article's original title was "Good Words for Good Listeners."

Join Volunteer Central

Maximize your volunteers the easy way. Join Church Volunteer Central today, and you'll have access anytime to online resources for volunteer training, recruiting, and managing. You'll get a full database of training ideas and tips; access to background check services; 24/7 online training for your volunteers; ready-to-use forms, applications, policies, handbooks, and ministry descriptions; plus savings on great volunteer management resources.

\$99.99/year. See www.churchvolunteercentral.com.

This site is part of the Group, Inc. family and is not affiliated with WELS. You will find many helpful resources, however. Check it out and/or ask your pastor to.

Resource Review

by Professor David Sellnow, Martin Luther College – New Ulm, MN

The CORE Realities of Youth Ministry:

Nine Biblical Principles that Mark Healthy Youth Ministries

by Mike Yaconelli - El Cajon CA: Youth Specialties, 2003. 141 p. \$10.99.

When I see a book from a nondenominational publisher that has a number in the title, I'm wary: "Seven habits" . . . "ten traits" . . . "twelve steps." I think of a friend who passed along books by John Maxwell that he wanted me to read, like *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. The usual content is law from a Reformed perspective: "Do these things and you will be successful." Seeing *Nine Biblical Principles that Mark Healthy Youth Ministries* as the subtitle to Mike Yaconelli's *The Core Realities of Youth Ministry*, I was understandably skeptical. Then I was pleasantly surprised. This is *not* a book of scripted techniques guaranteed to produce youth group glory. This is more a treatise on the theory of working with youth from a Christ-centered point of view. While notions of an inner call and decision-theology show up from time to time, overall the proclamation of gospel in this little volume is refreshing. A healthy questioning of decision-like tactics even surfaces in comments like this: "I'd much rather measure the number of times I presented the gospel and offered it to teenagers regardless of the responses. If we really believe the Holy Spirit is mysteriously working in the lives of our kids, it's our heart motives that are important, not the measured results."

Mike Yaconelli, who died in 2003, worked with youth for over 40 years and founded Youth Specialties in 1969. The CORE is what the folks at Youth Specialties call their current series of youth ministry training seminars. As a book, *The CORE Realities* serves as Yaconelli's parting thoughts on what is important in youth ministry. Anecdotes and commentaries by a dozen or so of his CORE colleagues are woven throughout the text.

The first focus is on the Bible as foundation for all ministry, in an opening chapter that handles Scripture rather well. Then the "nine core realities" are explained: veracity, authenticity, audacity, humility, diversity, sanctuary, intimacy, mystery and creativity. The best content is in the first two-thirds of the book. Chapters 8 and 9—on intimacy with God and the mystery of the message—slide a bit into Pentecostalism and mysticism.

WELS readers would do well to challenge themselves with *The CORE Realities*. Most challenging to us is the urging to be audacious, rather than staying safe in sameness and tameness. Best about this book is that its lessons are

applicable to any youth ministry, even with just a couple kids in a tiny congregation. An insistence that bigger is not necessarily better permeates the author's perspective. For instance: "We have been called by a Jesus who is not impressed by large, razzle-dazzle ministries, but by a Jesus who celebrates even the small ones."

A small, fledgling youth group might benefit by reading and discussing this book—teens and adult leaders together in conversation. You will not find yourselves agreeing with everything Yaconelli and his team members say, but definitely sparking thoughts about what ministry is and what youth ministry can be in your congregation.

Studying with Shorts!

For years BlueFish TV has been creating TV commercial parodies to use in Bible study. The "Shorts" series (Volumes 1-3) adds to that and offers over 30 short video clips to help your group laugh, think, and listen. They provide great teaching moments for your message. You can download free previews and even purchase whole clips downloadable right to your computer. Go to www.bluefishtv.com and look under "Media Resources for Youth."

Linking You to Us

Did you know you can link WELS Web sites like www.LivingBold.net, www.ParentsCrosslink.net, www.WELSyouthrally.net, www.WhatAboutJesus.com, and others by obtaining the html code snippets and even link buttons from the main WELS Web site? You can! Go to www.wels.net and enter "webcode" in the jumpword box.



Debate Versus Dialog

Any time we consider getting teens to talk, it would be well to ponder what professional mediator, Mark Gerzon (2006) said in a Harvard Business School e-newsletter article entitled, “Moving Beyond Debate: Start a Dialog” (http://hbswk.hbs.edu/tools/print_item.jhtml?id=5351&t=strategy). He advocated for dialog and said it is a superior way of conversing that . . .

- ◆ Enables a wider range of feelings to be expressed than in a debate
- ◆ Inspires more honesty and forthrightness than other methods
- ◆ Avoids superficial, forced compromises
- ◆ Generates new learning, new options, and innovations
- ◆ Increases the likelihood that everyone will be “heard”
- ◆ Seeks the deeper truth in each perspective

Gerzon went on to compare debate and dialogue with the following chart:

DEBATE	DIALOG
Assuming that there always is a right answer and you have it	Assuming that many people have pieces of the right answer
Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong	Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding
About winning	About exploring common ground
Listening to find flaws and make counter-arguments	Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement
Defending our own assumptions as truth	Revealing our assumptions for reevaluation
Seeing two sides to an issue	Seeing all sides of an issue
Defending one’s own views against those of others	Admitting that other’s thinking can improve one’s own
Searching for flaws and weaknesses in others’ positions	Searching for strength and value in others’ positions
By creating a winner and a loser, discouraging further discussion	Keeping the topic open even after the discussion formally ends
Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position	Discovering new options, not seeking closure

If it’s true that only 40% of adults and 45% of teenagers say their church encourages them to ask questions (*Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations, Search Institute, 1990*), practicing a more dialog driven model can help our teens (and others) learn how to express their thoughts, feelings, and questions openly and appropriately. It can also communicate to them that questions are OK, their input matters, and everyone is a life-long learner. And this can be done without fear of changing anything God says in his Word.

Dialog doesn’t change the absolute truth of the Bible, but practicing a more dialog oriented approach can help the youth leader and/or teacher of God’s Word learn better how well teens actually understand what they’ve been taught and what might need to be taught again.

YThink: Youth Leaders Share

The WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) Web Site (www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship) has a discussion board called, “YThink: Youth Leaders Share.” It can be found on the top right hand side of the site. Discussion boards have been set up under the following titles:

Worship and Youth

Education and Youth

Service and Youth

Recreation and Youth

Fellowship and Youth

There is also a place where you can post your review/evaluation of audio, print, video, and web youth ministry resources. If you have a question or something interesting to share, post it today!

Identifying Volunteers' [Teens'] Unique Gifts

by Sue Lennartson

Recently, I was looking at a pencil in my husband's toolbox. It was flat, not round like other pencils. The lead was thick, and I wondered how someone would ever sharpen that pencil. My husband, a building contractor, said it was a roofing pencil—"You know, so it won't roll off the roof." Whoever thought about creating a roofer's pencil designed it for a specific purpose. And God has created each volunteer [teen] for a special purpose, too.

Your volunteers [teens] each have unique talents, gifts, interests, passions, and purposes. They learn in a variety of ways, process things differently, and sense their heart tugging them in many directions. To help volunteers [teens] grow spiritually, emphasize the importance of learning about their special servanthood characteristics.

Talk with your volunteers [teens] one-on-one about their spiritual gifts. To begin, ask: Where do you seem to focus

your attention? How can you learn more about your personality? What life experiences have shaped you?

Volunteers' [teens'] spiritual health is boosted when they're matched in a good position. That doesn't mean every volunteer [teen] experience is filled to the brim with fun and frivolity. And we know that God doesn't always call us to what's easy. Yet when people are serving in a situation where their gifts are used appropriately, then they can more effectively maneuver through tough times or challenges.

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You can take an on-line spiritual gifts inventory at www.livingbold.net. Look in the "Links Lot" under "Bible Study Helps."

Are You Talking About It?

As you may know, WELS Youth Discipleship, using an unbiased, non-WELS research entity, recently conducted a national study on why youth leave WELS. The findings and recommendations were made available on-line. You can find the whole study, a summary, and some additional materials at www.wels.net/jumpword/youthstudy.

Has your teen group talked about the study yet? If not, why not consider it? Would your teens agree with the findings and recommendations? How might the findings compare to what is happening at your church? How might discussion of the study serve as a catalyst for deeper Bible study on the key issues? How might talking about the study provide you with more insights on how young people in your congregation think and feel? How could the teens use discussion of the study to become more active and engaged in the ministry in your setting? Would discussion of the study and solicitation of their views help your teens to feel that their input matters? Might it excite them to get more involved?

Think it over. You may find such an effort just what your teen group was looking for. You might even want to expand the discussion to include parents, church leaders, and teens all sharing, learning, and growing together.

Safety Tips On A Sensitive Subject

Safety Tips On A Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse is a 15-minute look at steps you and your congregation should take to help prevent an incident and how your organization should react if there is an allegation.

Noted attorneys and psychologists who specialize in sexual abuse cases share their knowledge and will help you to learn:

- ◆ Screening steps when recruiting employees and volunteers
- ◆ Physical changes to your facility that discourage abuse
- ◆ Supervisory policies for employees and volunteers, particularly those in direct contact with children
- ◆ Steps to protect your ministry, staff, and volunteers against lawsuits resulting from these crimes.

The video is designed as an aid to worship centers, camps, and schools. It's yours FREE simply for asking.

To request your copy of the *Safety Tips On A Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse* video, please fill out Church Mutual's E-mail Contact Form at www.churchmutual.com. Church Mutual will mail the video to you free of charge.

You also can order the video by phone by calling Doris Neubauer at (800) 554-2642. Select menu Option "4" and then enter her extension, 4205, followed by the # key. If you receive her voicemail, leave your name, the name of your organization, and mailing address.

REACH!

Consider Connecting with Your Community

Eric Swanson in *Ten Paradigm Shifts Toward Community Transformation (NPPN Roundtable, 2003)* writes, “Several years ago Chuck Colson made the observation that when the Communists took over Russia in 1917, they did not make Christianity illegal. Their constitution, in fact, did guarantee freedom of religion. But what they did make illegal was for the church to do any “good works.” No longer could the church fulfill its historic role in feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, housing the orphan, educating children or caring for the sick. What was the result? 70 years later, the church was totally irrelevant to the communities in which it dwelt. What Lenin did by diabolical design, most churches have done by default. But the result is identical. Church is irrelevant to most people. Take away service and you take away the church’s power, influence, and evangelistic effectiveness.”

As you continue to nurture in your teens an outward rather than inward focus, a “service” rather than “serve us” men-

tality, consider connecting with your community. Approach community leaders and organizations with a simple question: “How can we help you?” Then see what develops. As you connect with your communities keep these words in mind from WELS First Vice President, Rev. Wayne Mueller: “Affiliation with a community group is at the discretion of our congregations and individual members. For instance, some of our pastors, teachers and their children belong to the Rotary Club, Jaycees, 4-H, and other legitimate community organizations. [Involvement with community groups] is fine as long as they are truly that and not sectarian in nature. Some so-called community groups are actually religious organizations, such as Scouts, lodges, Amvets, Habitat for Humanity, and the Salvation Army. Generally, if the group is not led by a local religious figure, has no chaplain, creed, prayers, Bible study, or worship, it is legitimately a community group.”

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.