3 EVANGELISM MYTHS

...AND THEIR EFFECTS ON HOW WE DO YOUTH MINISTRY

A Youth Leader eResource
by Greg Stier

DARE 2 SHARE
Greg Stier has been used by God to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of teenagers across America. He combines amazing true-life stories with his own unique brand of humor to communicate Biblical truth in a way that not only inspires, but equips teenagers for action. As founder and president of Dare 2 Share, Greg leads his team toward the single goal of mobilizing teenagers to reach their world with the good news of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). He is the author of fifteen books and numerous resources, including *Life in 6 Words, Dare 2 Share: A Field Guide for Sharing Your Faith and Firing Jesus*.


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Evangelism Myths

“Evangelical, evangelism, evangelistic.” Do these words inspire you or make you cringe? Many youth leaders feel guilty, inadequate or overwhelmed with just the mention of the e-word. And for some, it carries such a negative connotation that they ignore it, tip-toe around it or just sweep it under the rug.

But I say it’s time to take back this lost ground and reclaim this noble, missional word!

Redeeming the e-word

Being Christ’s ambassadors for the life-giving message of the gospel is a privilege and a high calling! Scripture lays it out so eloquently for us. There are some passages that make my heart pound every time I read them:

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Yet, somehow, we’ve come to this place where many of us miss it—we ignore it or have somehow come to a place where we believe that it’s not our role and we don’t really have to do it.

Youth Ministry e-myths

How do we get back on track?

I believe the cringe-factor that “evangelism” sometimes triggers, has left youth ministry with a variety of “e-myth” distortions when it comes to sharing the Good News and training others to do so, as well. Distortions that burden us, distract us and sometimes just plain, trip us up.

So in this e-Resource we’re going to take a look at some of the e-myths that have clouded our view of this emotion-charged aspect of ministry. I challenge you to take a look at the following list and thoughtfully consider whether you agree or disagree with each of these statements.

1. I am the one responsible for leading teenagers to Christ.

2. Preach the gospel. Use words if necessary.
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3. My teens will share the gospel more if they become spiritually mature first.

4. Of course evangelism is a priority. I do a monthly (or quarterly) outreach meeting.

5. My primary responsibility is discipleship, not evangelism.

6. Most of my teenagers are home-schooled so I can't mobilize them for evangelism.

7. The gospel is not a set of propositions.

8. Technology, sports and extracurricular activities are the enemies of evangelism.

9. Because God is in charge of salvation we don't need to go overboard with urgency.

10. Postmodern teenagers aren't interested in conversations about the gospel.

11. We need to adjust the gospel message to make it more appealing to a postmodern generation.

12. Social justice is evangelism.

13. Teenagers don't respond to hellfire and brimstone.

14. Evangelism is useless because postmodern teenagers don't believe in absolute truth.

15. The gospel only works in the context of a relationship.

Then ask yourself perhaps the most challenging question of all: Does the way you're actually doing youth ministry indicate that you've knowingly or unknowingly bought into one or more of these e-myths?

Think about it.

Let's take a closer look at just three of these e-myths. But be forewarned. Addressing these myths may step on some toes and may even make some of you mad. But it's not because I want to be controversial. I just want to see us re-engage with the high calling we have as ambassadors for Christ. I want to see the e-word given its proper due.

**Evangelism Myth #1**

Do you see yourself as the one primarily responsible for presenting the gospel to your students' non-believing friends? Have you cast yourself in the role of “quarterback,”
fostering an invitational evangelism mindset in your students? Does “outreach” in your ministry primarily consist of encouraging your students to bring their unreached friends to youth group so you can lob the quick touchdown pass and nail the “conversion” point? When it comes to evangelism, many youth leaders see their occasional gospel presentations during youth group meetings as their primary channel for spreading Jesus’ salvation message.

They've bought into Evangelism Myth #1: I am the one responsible to lead teenagers to Christ.

Laboring under this e-myth can cripple the effectiveness of a youth ministry.

Maximizing Your Impact

Now hear me. I will be the first to advocate that it’s critically important that you give the gospel each week at your youth group meetings. And you should rejoice over every soul who gets introduced to Jesus through your meetings or outreach events.

But I’m convinced that we would see even more fruit from our evangelism efforts if we shifted our paradigm. Instead of being the quarterback who is primarily focused on delivering the touchdown pass, what if we started seeing ourselves as the team coach?

Coaching and equipping teens to do the work of evangelism

The coach’s job is to train and equip the individual members of the team with the skills they need to get off the bench and into the game themselves. The coach’s job is to explain the strategy, refine the skill sets and techniques and then motivate the team to bring their best to the game.

When you coach your teens with some basic gospel-sharing essentials and then motivate and mobilize them to share their faith with their friends, you’ll maximize your ministry impact on a whole range of levels. Here are just a few of the ways you’ll see your impact deepen and widen:

1. Reaching the Unchurched. Your teenagers can reach into lives you’ll never touch. They have friends who would never darken the doorway of a church, but who just might listen to a peer who knows how to tactfully turn an everyday conversation toward spiritual things and share Jesus’ message of grace.

2. Becoming More Like Jesus. You’re helping them become more like Christ. Jesus’ heart broke for the lost and as a youth leader; the center of your calling is to help your teenagers grow in Christlikeness. And developing His heart for the lost is critical to that process.

3. Multiplying Your Reach. You’re only one person. You can only talk to so many teenagers in any given week. Say you have five unbelievers visit your youth group each
week. You’d reach five students with the gospel. But through your students, you can multiply your impact. The average teenager has more than 100 online and face-to-face friends. You get the picture. If they shared the gospel with even a small fraction of their friends, the numbers grow exponentially.

4. Cultivating a Deeper Faith. By getting your students off the bench and into the game, you’re deepening their faith and helping them become serious Jesus followers who seek to walk in obedience to Him.

5. Nurturing Life-long Leadership Skills. The values cultivated during the formative teen years can last a lifetime. When you help your students consistently engage with others about the gospel, you’re building them into life-long leaders with a holy passion for Jesus and His mission for the Church.

The list could go on and on—because evangelism was key to Jesus’ disciple-making process. And we see in Paul’s writings that it was the centerpiece of the early church, as well. Reread the book of Acts and you’ll get the picture.

It’s time to debunk this Evangelism Myth. Evangelism has to be a mindset we’re cultivating year-round in our students as we coach them week in and week out. Let’s get our teenagers motivated and equipped to initiate spiritual conversations and share their faith one-on-one with their friends.

Multiply your ministry impact. Get your teens off the bench and into the game!

Altering your youth ministry evangelism paradigm from one that is dependent on you to one that is dependent upon your teenagers can be a huge seismic shift.

What do you see as some of the risks and rewards? Of the five benefits listed above, which one did you find most compelling? Which was least?

Evangelism Myth #2

Evangelism Myth #2: Postmodern teenagers aren’t interested in conversations about the gospel.

There’s been plenty of discussion swirling in recent years about how young people today aren’t interested in conversations about the gospel. I couldn’t disagree more. In my experience, today’s teenagers are very spiritually attuned. And it’s not just me.

A 2010 Barna poll reported that 71% of teenagers pray. The National Study of Youth and Religion reported that 60% of teenagers say religious faith is important in their lives.
So it should be no surprise to us that teenagers have their spiritual antennae up. They're open to considering various spiritual viewpoints and discussing the big questions of life: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Why do bad things happen?

They're interested in spiritual conversations – and an open, honest, give and take dialogue about Jesus’ gospel message is the ultimate spiritual conversation!

**Postmodern Longings**

When you think about it, the theology of the gospel message addresses the two most basic longings of postmodern teenagers: security (Am I loved?) and significance (Why am I here?). Both are answered in the gospel.

Here’s a list of some of the other struggles that understanding and embracing the gospel solves:

- **Bad self image** - Why? Because we have been declared a new creation! 2 Corinthians 5:17

- **Guilt** - How? Jesus paid the price for all of our sins! Colossians 2:13

- **Sin’s power** - How? The power of sin was crushed when Jesus rose again! Romans 6:6

- **Unforgiveness** - How? We can forgive others because Jesus forgave us! Ephesians 4:32

- **Spiritual apathy** - Why? We offer ourselves to Him in light of His sacrifice! Romans 12:1

Postmodern teenagers are very open to spiritual conversations that are focused on a relationship with God. And that’s exactly what Jesus offers them in the following passages: *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent* (John 17:3).

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (John 10:10).

**Preparing Your Teens to Talk About the Gospel with Their Friends**

What does this mean for your youth ministry? That it’s essential you prepare your students to have these kinds of open, honest conversations about the gospel with their unreached friends. Dare 2 Share is here to come alongside you and help you with this!
Here are some practical how-to ideas to consider:

• Do a quick assessment to determine whether your teens are equipped to share the gospel with others. This will give you a sense of where you’re starting point should be.

• Show the Life in 6 Words: The GOSPEL video at youth group (found on www.lifein6words.com). Discuss it. Then challenge each of your students to share it and discuss it with at least one of their unreached friends.

• If you connect with your students via social media texting or email, regularly pass along D2S’s free weekly devotional Soul Fuel. This engaging resource uses popular movies, songs, topics or trends to challenge teenagers with spiritual truth. It will help your students learn how to turn everyday conversations toward the gospel message.

• Check out Dare 2 Share’s youth group curriculum offerings. Each of the following do a fantastic job preparing your teens to engage others in open, honest dialogue about the gospel: SALT...Creating Thirst, Life in 6 Words: The GOSPEL Explored; GOSPEL Journey Adventure; Reach Out, Don’t Freak Out.

Don’t buy the myth that teenagers aren’t interested in talking about the gospel. Engage with them yourself. And even better, prepare your students to initiate spiritual discussion about the best news on the planet.

**Evangelism Myth #3**

**Evangelism Myth #3:** Of course evangelism is a priority. I do a monthly (or quarterly, or yearly) outreach meeting.

Should you “program” evangelism into your youth ministry? Absolutely! We all know the old adage—you program your priorities.

But a deceptive myth has grown up around the traditional “outreach meeting” approach to youth ministry evangelism. There is a widely held misconception that if you do a monthly (or quarterly) outreach meeting, you can put a check mark by “Evangelism” on your to do list and leave it at that.

And nothing could be further from the truth. Evangelism is not a line item on your programming checklist, it’s a lifestyle.

It’s a Jesus-driven lifestyle.
Becoming Like Jesus

In Luke 19:10 Jesus lays out His mission: “For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

So if we want to be like Jesus, then we, too, must be on a constant search and rescue mission for the lost. His mission and message stand at the very center of His plan and purposes for us.

Again and again in the Scripture, we see Jesus telling his followers to go spread the word about God’s outrageous love and amazing grace. Here are just a few examples:

• “Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19)

• “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (John 20:21, NLT)

• “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19)

• “And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere...” (Acts 1:8, NLT)

There’s no denying it—He’s describing a lifestyle for us here, not a monthly meeting.

Three Steps to Cultivating an Evangelistic Lifestyle

But maybe you think I’m preaching to the choir here. You already know all the “ought to’s” when it comes to evangelism. But it’s just not happening in your ministry.

So here are three foundational steps that will help you set this mindset in motion in your own life and in your ministry:

• **See people with Jesus’ eyes.** “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, NLT). Begin by cultivating a heart for the lost—a heart like Jesus. This starts with prayer and comes only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

• **Pray for the lost.** “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:38). As you pray for the lost and for workers to reach the lost, I have no doubt God will call to mind that you and your students are well-positioned to be just such workers on high school and middle school campuses all across the country.

• **Reach out to people passionately.** “Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn’t preach the Good News” (1 Corinthians 9:16, NLT). Notice the phrase “compelled by God.” Compelled is a beautiful word here. It evokes the sense that there’s really no other option.
If you begin to see people with Jesus’ eyes and start praying for the lost and for workers to reach the lost, then the Spirit of Jesus will sweep you along to become part of His search and rescue mission.

Programming for an Evangelist Lifestyle

Sure, programming will be a part of helping your students live an evangelist lifestyle. In fact, as you strive to debunk the “silo-effect” of e-myth #3 in your ministry, I highly recommend you check out *3 Keys That Will Unleash Your Teens for Christ’s Cause*. It’s packed with hands on ideas for how to program evangelism into your ministry week in and week out.

I’d also encourage you to check out *Lead THE Cause University*, Dare 2 Share’s intensive evangelism training week for students and youth leaders. This is a dynamic, fast-paced, life-changing week of serious evangelism training, and will definitely help you and your teens move into an evangelism lifestyle mindset.

Debunk e-Myth #3 by remembering that the heart of effective evangelism is a Christ-like, prayerful, daily pursuit of the lost. Start thinking of life as a missions trip. When this is real in us, it will begin to become real in our teenagers, as well.