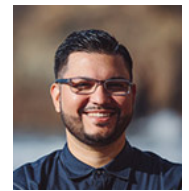


Finding the Plot: A Primer for Youth Workers



D. A. Horton

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Larry Acosta: Hey, urban youth worker. We want to welcome you to a conversation. I'm here with D. A. and myself, Larry Acosta, from Urban Youth Workers Institute, and first of all we want to affirm you because your role as you stand in the gap for urban kids is so vital to the equation, and that's really why we created the discipleship tool kit. We want to give you a practical tool and resource that will help you go deep with kids. Right now we want to talk about the first series, the first story that we've created. It's called "In the Beginning." D. A. and I will go back. We want to invite you into our conversation here, and so, D. A., maybe you can just talk for a moment with our youth workers about the theme to this first story that you've written and developed and unpacked for these videos.

D. A. Horton: Yeah. No doubt, youth workers, as you know more than anybody, our students are regularly asking, "Man, does God really exist?" What I really felt compelled to do, Larry, was try to think through conversations I've had with students. They have great questions about God's existence. They doubted, of course. The world around them is kind of pushing God out of the conversation, so I felt that if we went to the Scriptures, which is God's Word, they'll understand that the Bible doesn't try to prove God's existence. It just assumes that He is existing, but at the same time He's the One who's offered the very words. We start with that thirty-thousand-foot level that, man, God does exist. But then we bring it down to the praxis of the student's understanding that not only does God exist, He wants to be involved in my life. And youth leaders, what's important for you to hit home is the fact that God does exist, but He wants to be involved in the student's life on a day-to-day basis. Larry, that's why we talk about that the student is actually God's masterpiece. He's patiently loving them, constantly transforming their character; and we want that to be reflected in their day-to-day life, not just when they're in youth group.

Larry Acosta: So the title for this overall story is “In the Beginning.” Tell me a little bit about some of the individual stories that you’ve unpacked in this series and, maybe let’s connect the dots for some youth workers so we can help them know how to connect it to the lives of kids.

D. A. Horton: Absolutely. That’s a great point. So what we do “In the Beginning” is start with the existence of God, but then it goes to the reality of God being the great I AM. We reference Moses’ conversation with God in the burning bush and what that looked like to show the students that God is engaged in human life. But at the same time we don’t just leave it there. What we want to also inject is the fact that God has fearfully and wonderfully made every student. They’re not a mistake. You know, the enemy comes against them. You know, the kids at school bully them. All these things make them feel like they’re nothing, that nobody will miss them if they’re gone, that they’re, you know, they’re something. We want them to know—you’re someone, and you’re made in the image of God. So we want them to grab ahold of those truths which then lead them to ask the question, “OK, if God has done all this for me, what is He asking me to do?” And youth leaders, that’s where it’s so important to hit home that God wants us to love Him with all that we’ve got.

Can you imagine, Larry, what it looks like if the young people in our nation just loved God holistically? Imagine how it would turn our world upside down. That’s what we want to see: We want them to know, yes, He exists: yes, He’s involved in my life, but He also wants me to obey the great commandment. God has a great commitment to me as a student as well. He’s committed to me, so I should be committed in showing my love for Him as I love others. Then it concludes with the reality of our brokenness; and we know brokenness is all around us—every single one of us—and that’s why it’s going to connect with the students. It’s going to let them see that God knows that they’re broken. They need to surrender their brokenness to God because He alone is the One who makes it beautiful. That’s how we conclude the story. It starts with this great big God, and it comes to a point where He is involved in my life and what does He want me to do. But at the end of the day they recognize, “I’m broken but He’s going to make me beautiful”

Larry Acosta: Share just for a moment one aspect of your own brokenness and how you’ve seen God redeem that because, really, the purpose of these videos is we want to see youth workers help

kids identify some of their brokenness so that God can help to rewrite their story. And the truth is that God's in the business of redeeming broken lives, broken stories. Right? So maybe you could just share a glimpse into your life.

D. A. Horton: Absolutely. I think one trigger word for a lot of our students is the word *father*. And I did not have a good relationship with my dad growing up, so when people would tell me in the church, "Hey, God is a loving father," those words did not make sense to me. That's not what I felt like I was getting at home. Throughout the theme of all of our stories, I really just unpack current struggles and even past struggles; things from wrestling with depression, insecurities, but specifically honing in on that missing aspect of fatherlessness, if you will. This was a reality in my life, so I really make myself vulnerable and transparent because I believe when we communicate truth and we mix it with transparency, transformation is the end result. With that, I believe that by me showing my brokenness it's going to help the students be like, "He ain't got it altogether. Neither do I. If God's working on a guy like D. A., He can work on a guy like me." Same thing when you speak—it draws us in to hear you share your story and what God's doing, present tense. And that's the key, youth leaders. Make sure that as you're walking in through the conversations, everything is present tense, even in your life, because they can get to a point, if it's past tense, "Oh, you're beyond those struggles, so you can't connect with me." And that couldn't be further from the truth.

Larry Acosta: Well, let's talk for a moment because some of these big God questions, like the existence of God, I mean, for some of us we're real comfortable having that conversation. But the truth is for a lot of our guys those are some big questions that are a little bit intimidating. Talk for a moment to the bivocational youth worker who's out there, who may be intimidated to open this up and have some of those conversations. What would you tell them as they might be intimidated to talk about the big God question?

D. A. Horton: Absolutely. I think our youth leaders have the perfect position to really show their vulnerability, that they're not walking encyclopedias. They're not a walking Bible, but at the same time, admitting something like, "You know, that's a good question, I don't have an answer to it," that invites the student in to study with the leader. That's why it's important for you, youth leader, to say, you know what, I don't have the answer to that.

But that's something we can revisit next week. What it does is allow the dialog to continue because this video series is not going to be the end-all to everything. These relationships are going to grow and cultivate. So the more questions the students have, that's going to allow you, the youth leader, to see they're engaged. These materials are gripping their hearts. God is doing something, so we don't want to quench that. But at the same time don't feel intimidated if you don't have the answer to every question. None of us do. That's what we can learn together with the students and build that relational component which will carry on for years to come.

Larry Acosta: Youth workers, can I just encourage you for a moment. We've created this opportunity—this platform—this discipleship tool kit is designed for you to have a tool to have these God conversations. These are conversations that kids would not otherwise have without you being in the mix and being willing to have, to make time and space, to dialog about these things. I want you to know you're so vital to this discipleship process. Thank you for who you are and what you're going to do. You're going to get the opportunity to see transformation unfold before your eyes, because someone is creating time and space to have these conversations with kids. I really want to encourage you; you're super vital to this whole process.

The other thing I want you to know is that as you're having these conversations, as D. A. said, you don't have to have all the answers. Just be honest with them. But realize some of these kids, they've been raised fatherless. They don't even know what it looks like to connect with their heavenly Father, God, and so you're allowing them to have those conversations, ask those awkward questions they might have, push back a little bit from what they might hear in the Spark video. But that's all good because some of your kids are at different places on the discipleship spectrum. Some already know Jesus and they're just getting some greater understanding about who God is in starting "In the Beginning." Right? Some of your students are in your group or you're meeting one-on-one. They don't even know God the Father. They don't even trust God the Father, maybe because like stories like ours, they don't even trust their earthly dad, so how could they trust God the Father? Allow that conversation to happen. Let them be in process. They don't have to embrace that right away. Let them be on that journey toward finding Jesus. This story is all about allowing people to be in the conversation even before they are belonging in faith. I encourage you on that journey. D. A., do you have any

parting comments as you think about these leaders who are out there? They hang with kids every week. They're trying to root and ground kids in the Word of God. Maybe offer something from your heart as they think about "In the Beginning" and grounding kids in this part of the gospel story.

D. A. Horton: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's essential just to take this process one step at a time. Don't rush it. Trust God the Holy Spirit to do the work in the hearts of the students that you can't do when you're not with them, and really surrender the students. Pray for them, intercede for them, and trust the Holy Spirit to do the work that none of us can do. Only He can do it, and I think you'll see the fruit that is born when your prayers take place.

Larry Acosta: So, youth workers, we're fired up about what God's going to do on this journey, and rest assured, this is only the first story. There's more to come. Be bold, be courageous, have these spiritual conversations, and let's see God change the lives of kids together.