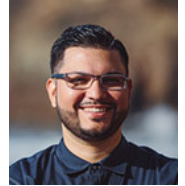


## *Finding the Plot: A Primer for Youth Workers*



*D. A. Horton*

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**Larry Acosta:** Urban youth workers, we want to welcome you back to the conversation. I'm here with D. A. Horton, myself, Larry Acosta, from Urban Youth Workers Institute, and we want to remind you that your role in discipling young people is absolutely critical. Urban youth workers, if we don't do discipleship, we've missed the assignment and that's what this tool kit is all about, and so, as we unpack this series, right here, *The Basics of Our Faith*, we want to give you the content and help the conversations along that will really root and ground kids and create a healthy foundation.

And so, D. A., maybe you can share a little bit of your heart. You were gracious enough to develop the content and deliver it, and maybe you could give some of our youth workers who are listening a little bit of your heart and insight for when you developed this. Because I know it came out of your own personal conviction, but it also came out of countless conversations with kids, and so, share a little bit with our youth workers, you know, where this came from in your own personal journey.

**D. A. Horton:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, just to be honest, you know, I was walking with the Lord for nine years. God saved me when I was fifteen, but it wasn't until I was almost twenty-five years old that I finally started kind of having a desire to grow more in the faith beyond what I was just trying to experience on a day-to-day basis, and so I began to look through that lens when I was twenty-four, twenty-five years old to say, "Man, what do I wish that I would have been taught, or what should I have known when I was new to the faith, that I now know?" And so now I'm thirty-four, I'm "OG" in the game, if you will, and so with that, it's like, man, how can I communicate what God has helped me to learn through community, through training, through conversations, through personal study of the Scriptures, and how can we give that to young people today in a way that they can understand in bite-size pieces.

And so basically the whole theme rises and falls on their understanding that God's truth found in the Scripture is the foundation for our whole faith. And so, youth leaders, what's important to communication is the reality that the Bible is God's love letter to all of His children, but at the same time it's the foundation for what we believe. So when we work through the reality of God's nature—Him existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—we don't just pull that out of the air, it's actually Scripture that communicates these truths. So if we come to the conversation understanding that the Bible is God's authoritative Word, God's Word sets the rhythm for what we believe and how we live our life.

Young people have to hear that because that sets the conversation to say, "Okay, if I can trust the Bible, I can trust what it says about God, that He exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I can trust what it says about sin and salvation, how God has worked to save my soul, how to pay the ransom for my sin debt, exactly what Jesus did, the Scriptures clarify that." But at the same time, it helps us to understand what our role in Christianity is when we share the faith, when we are called to make disciples. Youth leaders, it's important to understand that we must communicate that to the young people: that you're not the only disciple-maker they know. They have to become disciple-makers, so that all culminates then to the reality of the church; and so many times in my life, I didn't even see that the church was a family, man. Like I would think that my boys on the block, that was my family, you know, like whoever I would do things with on the streets, that was my people, that was my folk, that's who I rode with, but then when God saved me and took me out of that environment, here I was transplanted in a youth group with other boys and girls, if you will, like me from the hood that was trying to figure this thing out.

Youth leaders, they loved us. Man, they came and they just embraced us, man! And they allowed us to see this is your family, not those gangs, not those sets, not those cliques, this is the family of God, and then that opened my eyes to the fact that the church is not a building, it's the body of Christ. So everything that we want this to root back to is the Word of God. And we want to see it applied in the student's life, culminating with them understanding that they're called to be disciple-makers, but at the same time, man, the church is family. And I think if they get these truths now, as they develop in their walk, man, they're gonna be rock solid when they hit their twenties and thirties.

**Larry Acosta:** Man, I love it. Man, that foundation is so key to for.

everything. You know, you can imagine the decisions kids are making on a daily basis, in terms of the friends they choose, and if this whole piece right here on the Bible and allowing kids to engage Scripture and to begin to think differently and make choices differently through the lens of Scripture, so, youth workers, that piece is critical and we developed the curriculum and the discussion guide so that you'll be able to get kids in the Word and create a value for talking about *What does this mean?* And *how do I apply it to my life?* Because when they begin to connect those dots, then transformation is fueled and kids are going to be radically different because they're applying the Word of God and engaging the Word of God, and so I love that.

Now one of the things you said, you talked about the church being a family, you know, and if we're honest, most of our youth workers are working with kids who are being raised fatherless in a lot of cases, they sometimes or often come from fractured families. Let's keep it real, right? And so here they come to this local church. This youth worker may be a piece of that and connected to that family, if you will, but kids don't know what family looks like, you know, but what would you tell some of our youth workers out there? Just maybe coach them up a little bit on how they can help kids better connect with some of the other role models and disciple-makers that they're going to need for their journey, even beyond that specific youth worker who is working with them. Maybe talk about connecting so they can experience that as family.

**D. A. Horton:** Absolutely! I think, youth leaders, you're in a very crucial position in the eyes of the young people. You have their trust, and it took you some time to get that because they don't just come in like *here's my heart, you know, take me as I am*. You've got to build up creditability with them. And so I think by you doing that, even this curriculum was set up in such a way that it's fostered by conversation, and so I think what's important for you to understand and be champion to go out and do, is to make sure that when you have the conversations that we're gonna conclude each video with, that you begin to work through that this is a place of vulnerability, this is a safe place, and this is a place where your heart can be exposed and we're not gonna go and tell everyone, we're not gonna tweet it out, we're not gonna put you on blast on Facebook or any other form of social media, and as you establish that trust, when you integrate the young people into a big church, if you will, outside of the youth group, that's gonna give them a natural transition into the main congregation, if you will, or with older saints in the faith, because that's one aspect that I'm seeing

that is . . . that is what we need to work on, man, we need to work on healthy pathways for integration into big church like when they graduate from youth group.

And so I think that's when you can follow and, I'm sorry, you can have them follow you as you navigate through that. When they see you engaged with the other pastors, with the other leaders, with other adults, and you introduce them to other adults, man, that trust level now's gonna become the bridge-building component for them to grow. So as they grow out of your youth group, not go out, grow out of your youth ministry, then they're gonna be acclimated and God may give them a heart to help you now, and that's the beautiful aspect of discipleship, man, the seeds that you're sowing now, there can be a harvest of fruit borne, but the beauty is they may come back and serve alongside you. And now they come with other adults that they've connected with, so now the generational gap has been filled. We see true discipleship taking place because the whole church now is being infused with healthy disciples.

**Larry Acosta:** You know where that happened for me? I was sixteen and I was a kid in the youth group, grew up, up the street from, you know, up the block from the church, you know, and these two ladies had this Bible study in the neighborhood. They led me to Christ, you know, and then years later I kept going to the youth ministry and there were some men that were a part of the men's ministry. And I remember at sixteen, they invited some of the kids from the youth ministry, the guys, to go on this men's retreat, and I remember, man, being on the bus going to this men's retreat, man, and feeling like, you know, it's a form of validation for all these other men to learn and study the Bible to say, "Hey, you're in the club, Dog!" You know, it was that kind of validation for a kid who didn't have a close relationship with my dad, and that really was a critical weekend for me to get bridged into the local church and to have some other healthy male role models from the church who were saying some of the same stuff that the youth workers were saying.

And so, youth workers, man, I'm so encouraged that this next conversation that you're gonna have as you unpack this story, it is gonna be powerful, because you're laying a foundation, you're downloading some valuable content to these kids. It's gonna inform how they think and live and what they do, and so have some great spiritual conversations. *The Basics of our Faith*, man, this is gonna be rich, and so thank you so much for who you are

leading these conversations. Let the transformation continue.