

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



*D. A. Horton*

*Experience: Executive Director of  
Reach Life Ministries*

**Larry Acosta:** Hey, urban youth workers, this is Larry Acosta welcoming you back. I'm here with our good friend D. A. Horton, and we're just excited about the conversations we know you're having out there through the Discipleship Toolkit. We believe that God is transforming kids, and you're part of the conversation with students, and so we're so excited. This next series is called "Living Out Our Faith." Man, this is where it gets so practical in the everyday. As you coach kids up and help them understand that the Lord has a dream for them to fulfill, a destiny, and some daily decisions that need to be lived out as they walk in freedom, this series is going to be key to getting some of your kids freed up so that they can walk in greater freedom and wholeness and break some of those dysfunctional sin patterns that have been ripping off their family tree for far too long. D. A., I know this conversation about practical living and helping kids walk this Christian life out is really important to you. And when you wrote this, maybe you can share a little bit about why you are so passionate as you develop this content.

**D. A. Horton:** Yeah, you know as I travel throughout the country and speak, I'm so blessed to have a lot of conversations with a lot of young people. Larry, they'll just open up, man, you know, like, "I'm wrestling with this or this was done to me." And it's just kind of like oh wow. So I love how they take it to like, you know. "Here I am. This is my junk. What does the Bible say or what does God think? Does He still love me?" The Christian faith is a practical faith. It's something that we apply into our life. It's the rhythm of our life. It's one thing just to dig into the Word and go deep, and we want the students to do that. But we want them to have balance. The balance is what does it look like to pray, to communicate with God the Father? What does that even look like? And youth leaders, that's where I really want you to hone in on the fact that prayer is just direct communication with God. As much as you're talking to the young people and they're talking back with you, let them know prayer is a two-way conversation. It's not just us

throwing words up to the air hoping that you know somebody up there is going to listen, but rather God actually speaks to us. And He wants to engage in our lives, and they need to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God to hear and listen; what is God saying? And then everything that God tells us, it's going to be confirmed in His Word. And I think that once they move beyond just praying, God's going to really say, "Hey, here's some things you're comfortable with, and it's distracting you from all of Me." And the young people really need to be understanding of the fact that, man, I go to friends. I go to music. I go to drugs. I go to whatever it is.

**Larry Acosta:** Comfort food.

**D. A. Horton:** My comfort, man, and that's what as they're growing, as they're learning, we want them to understand, man, God is revealing things in their time of prayer and their time of fasting from the things that make them comfortable. Here's some junk I want to deal with. So God doesn't run from us when we have certain addictions and things. God runs to us, and He says, "No, no, no. That's a good thing. I wanted these things to come to the surface so I can get them out of your life." Larry, that's where the... youth leaders you have such an important role, because it's in those moments when they confess these addictions—I mean down to the root source—that it's going to be a vulnerable environment, that they're really taking a gamble to say this is how jacked up I really am. Here's the things that I'm even scared to even think about that I do. So God is really going to allow youth leaders to have the leverage from the Holy Spirit into the darkness of the students' hearts. And that's where it's important for you to embrace them as they are just like God embraced you, and just like He embraced us. That's where we want the conversation to turn to not only what are they turning to, to be comfortable but, man, you know like you've told me on numerous occasions, you're only as sick as your secrets, man. And that's what we want them to say. How is God speaking to my secrets that He already knows about and how can I confess and how can I get deliverance and freedom from these addictions?

**Larry Acosta:** Oh, that's so key, man. And youth workers, we want you to know that the enemy is going to ramp up the spiritual warfare before this series kicks off, because he does not want students to get freed up to walk in newness of life. So straight up we want to challenge you; you've got to be praying for your kids before this series kicks off, because he does not want them

to get freed up and be transparent with some of those addictions that are holding them back. He doesn't want them to learn the power of prayer or experience prayer or fasting that would starve the flesh and begin to experience God in a new way. This series is absolutely critical, so ramp up your prayer for each of your students specifically, because some stories and some stuff is going to be shared. But D. A., talk for a little bit to our youth workers, because you share very transparently about having to break an addiction in your own life. Obviously when they're having these conversations some kids are going to share some junk, right? So they have to create a culture in their group where it's safe to share that stuff. Maybe you can coach our youth workers a little bit on how they can handle that very sensitive information—how they can guard that, how they can slow it down in the conversation and just let it be and pray over kids. Maybe share your heart a little bit about that.

**D. A. Horton:** Yeah, absolutely. I think that's where what Larry said is so key. You really have to be prayed up. You want to be as sensitive to the leading of the Spirit as possible. At the same time, you also want to practice good discernment because a conversation may go to a position where it may not be best suited for the group environment. And you may want to meet privately, not just by yourself but always have a good accountability partner, another leader, another pastor there in the conversation with you because there may be some sensitive issues that maybe abuse is actually happening in the student's life. Being a pastor, we're mandated reporters in some contexts. You want to protect yourself and protect the church so that when these kinds of things surface you know you're being proactive to listen to the student but at the same time take the proper precautions to protect the student. At the same time, though, we really dive deep into some real things. I mean thoughts of suicide and depression. We've got pornography and sexual sin. But we're also dealing with alcohol abuse and substance abuse.

I get real honest about even my struggle, when I first got saved, with weed, and I think that's what is setting this conversation up. This discipleship toolkit really injects biblical truth to the heart of the urban core. And when you do that, man, you're going to see all these issues that have been hidden surface. And what you're going to see is it takes one. It takes one to have the courage to speak out, and then they all say, "Oh, yeah, that's me. That's me all day. Like, what, it's wrong to smoke weed?" You're going to begin to see where the students really are. All the superficial walls of self-

preservation come tumbling down, and that's where it's important like what you said. That's going to be a very vulnerable and tender moment. If that moment is damaged, these kids could just freeze right back up and write you off. So that's where you want to be sensitive to the Spirit—love on the students, make sure there's a great accountability system in place for them, and let them know you're going to have to learn a life of self-denial. And this may be a struggle that you may wrestle with. If it's homosexuality, or no matter what it is. This may be something that you're delivered from in practicing, but the desire of temptation is going to keep coming your way. So we've got to know how we can leverage them to be strong in their time of prayer, strong in fasting, strong in accountability, confessing and then admitting, quitting, and forgetting the realities of these addictions so that they can walk in the freedom that they already have in Christ. And that's the role that I believe God is going to use you in their life.

**Larry Acosta:** Yeah, so true, so true. Youth workers creating a safe place where kids can have these honest conversations, man, who does that for kids? I tell you I know. Urban youth workers do that for students. And so your role again, your shepherding role, your gift of mercy's going to have to kick in, showing compassion and grace as kids share some pain, some abuse that's happened to them, perhaps, that they've never shared with anyone. But this is so key to helping kids get freed up with the hope of living in freedom. So as we wrap this up, youth workers, you're going to have to lead with some weakness to create an environment where kids will share their junk. You might have to say something pretty vulnerable; and you'll see D. A. will kind of spark that as well. Be encouraged, because as God redeems your story as you're vulnerable, that will trigger other guys being willing and gals willing to be vulnerable. And you're going to see transformation happen. You're going to see the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and His grace come in to some of those deep-rooted, dark places, and the light and the love of Jesus is going to come into those places and free kids up. This series is critical, so we're cheering in your corner. Again, we're so grateful that you're there having these conversations—these life-saving, life-transforming conversations—with students. Thank you so much.